

**Title: Situating Oneself****Author: Julio Alpuy****Date: August 1980, Galería Sarmiento**

One of the most difficult tasks today is to situate oneself as an artist. Nonetheless, I think artists can find their way if they have a conscientious, sincere attitude. Situating oneself, in this context, means being in the right place and in the time one lives in.

Still, the time we live in is a spectacular race toward utter dehumanization; its goal is symbolic of a materialistic civilization whose values have overpowered everything, relegating the values of the spirit to the penumbra of technology and comfort.

To invent is not to create; the two have very different meanings for me. In the invention of any object or thing, intelligence plays a part. Creation, however, is an all-embracing, complex phenomenon in which the creator's every ability makes an intelligent contribution to fashioning and executing a work that reflects the artist's emotions and personality in a true synthesis.

Contemporary art—and by that I mean art that is led along by the “wide world” that defines an era's ideas, movements, and expression, and lets the whole world know what to say at every point in history—is based more on invention than on creation. It is more of a game than an act of affirmation, and for that very reason, it is lacking in depth and devoid of humanism. The game is one of values that do not involve commitment and can easily be exchanged for others. Its only values often consist of ingenuity and playing tricks, with no further exploration of the human world. These are the only works that can change over time, losing relevance in the way that fashion does. And the more change, the less depth. When art is made in this way, it means the artist has accepted a path toward a practical world and an easy life. In other words, thought and emotion become attenuated, and the psyche is weakened.

This, I think, is the historical moment at which to take an accounting. We must make decisions: weigh, measure, compare, and choose; take sides; transform ourselves and learn to walk on our own two feet. Be more natural. Depend less on the artifice that we have become accustomed to. Discover the microcosmos within every one of us and extend it outward in order to give more of a human quality to the societies that carry us in their hearts.

We live to serve material values, absorbing a “culture” focused on concrete ends, in which a standardized form of thought replaces the richness of a culture supported by the work of individual thought—which is authentic precisely because it is individual. A culture is the synthesis of the sum of the countless forms of thought of all its members.

All of this makes me think that the goal cannot be to choose the easy path; it never was for artists, at any point in human history. Artists must abandon the easy propositions offered by contemporary culture and take the time to probe their inner world and question themselves. We must devote time to our meditation—the mother of our future actions: actions that, when done well, will enrich our personalities and also our era's culture.

If we have strong personalities, our art will also be strong. If our thoughts are profound and sincere, what we create will be true.

If I believe this, it is clear that I would not be able to commit myself to conventional solutions and to such concepts as the following:

- 1) Art is fleeting.
- 2) Art is an expression of the mind, with no participation on the part of the complexity that is the human being.
- 3) Technique is an artwork's goal, and it causes artists to concentrate on the work's exterior rather than what lies deep within it and within themselves.
- 4) The purely physical vision of a hyperrealist and/or pop work of art merely imitates nature and is devoid of all spirituality.
- 5) An artwork cannot be replaced by a concept, or it must be explained in order to be understood.

Art is a synthesis, which means that it is expressed through the viewer, because synthesis is not descriptive: it expresses the tremendous complexity of human nature. And, like the artist, the viewer needs to concentrate in order to discover meaning.

We know that the art of an era should reflect that era. Clearly, contemporary art both represents and serves our era. How, then, can we succeed in going deeply into ourselves and extracting the truest part of a work that opposes this standardized culture? How can we respond in this way to the reflection of our era in our art?

Well, as we've already said, this is an era of decisions. We don't have many options: either we take action, or our souls will die. The reaction of what is individual against established precedent also happens periodically throughout history. Here individual thought must bring life and originality to our future culture.

This is an era of change, of comparisons and definitions. How, as sensitive beings, can we allow our feelings, our intuition, our creative wealth of emotions, to die? Is it important to support only physical life? I believe this would more likely be suicide.

These reactions are absolutely normal; we have infinite examples in the history of humanity—and not just in art. That is why I believe that this is a time not to accept the established situation and direction, but to change our position or, in this case, to await

the future with an act of faith every day, in every work we create. We will build patiently, waiting to join with the voices of other individuals who contribute their new ideas to the efforts of those who believe that the spirituality of this world must change.

This is a truly quixotic idea, given the dimensions of such statements relative to the overwhelming force of material power. But we know that those who defend the spirit were never in the majority. The position I want to affirm is the one I have believed in all my life. I believe it contributes something to the positive evolution of culture. This is nothing new. It is healthy because it is true, because it doesn't falsify the conscience and proceeds with sincerity.

When we say that there is nothing new under the sun, that everything has been said albeit in different ways, we have not spoken in error. I am fully aware that the originality or contribution of this moment is not in ideas that are pedantically different but in something that has to do with fresh air and the health of the soul.

On what, then, shall we lean in a practical sense in order to be in the logical position of the artist who must situate himself? The first step is to take up once again the contribution that the masters have made in modern times, giving force and spirituality to art. These discoveries changed the vision of art, pulling it out of the sentimental expression into which it had fallen and that was increasingly dragging it toward an imitative approach. When artists make this feeling of abstraction their own—when they move from mental comprehension to a true feeling for those abstract values—they place it on the path of the true language that they will use to express what is going on within themselves.

This concept of the abstract is the true legacy of our era, and it is there, I believe, where we must shore up our foundations. This is where I have focused my work; every theme or idea suggested by my imagination must be seen in the context of this concept, which at this stage of life represents true feeling. We can say that the idea of abstraction was not discovered but rediscovered by the modern masters; this rediscovery placed art within the true tradition, which is why we feel connected to it.

Most artists feel tremendously confused—a confusion whose roots lie in the loss of tradition. Tradition gives the artist a solid base from which to develop, because its principles are truly concrete. Without it, an artist would have to invent another solidly principled base in order to discern a goal. However, tradition cannot be invented. It is the sum of cultures, and for that reason it gives us security. This is the great point of departure, and I have adopted it for that reason. We cannot create from nothing; and if by chance we do, the result will be sterile and limited.

The concept of abstraction presupposes construction. To my understanding, construction is what the artist aims to do. But the artist is a person who feels, who becomes excited, who suffers, who gets depressed or quivers with enthusiasm. Artists

join together with other people and delight in being with them—and they are also often capable of hate.

Still, artists construct and arrange their feelings, their ideas, their thoughts and perceptions, and they sense worlds of all kinds. Then they must incorporate this full intensity of life into their various works, into the constructions called works of art.

In reality and in nature we learn to rediscover all these concepts at the outset. And it is reality and nature that are our foundation and our teacher, as long as we learn to see. From the relationships of things to each another is born the concept of relationships among forms, rhythm, and structure. From the light that shines on things we learn to recognize the scale of intensity and the feeling of tone.

When we paint, then, reality or nature—once we understand all this—becomes a vision more alive than reality itself, because one is conditioned and the other concrete, resolved with values that have a life of their own. This life is essential, because painting has its own reality and acts independently of the model: it has its own laws.

Reality is transformed into an equivalent visual object: an abstraction. What is heterogeneous becomes homogenous. The qualities of things are replaced by the visual quality of the colors in the palette. And thus reality and nature shift from their world to the world of painterly creation. At the same time, however, the artist tries to capture the ambience, the spirit of things, and in that sense they move increasingly toward a just solution, coming closer to reality without making concessions or straying from their visual principles.

By continuing this discipline and delving deeper and deeper into the challenges that face them, artists create their own technique. They find their own way of speaking and making art, a style of their own. This is the only valid technique.

I did not stray from the path, I think, when I moved away from the challenge of situating myself and from the challenge posed by the elements of painting. If I want to situate myself, I must think about the origins of my artistic point of view. In opposition to the character of contemporary art, I must clarify the concept I am advocating as concretely as possible, and therefore I must analyze it.

If we devote too much thought to technique, the core of the idea grows weak. Its visual strength will lose freshness and identity, gradually giving way to a cloyingly sweet interpretation of the pictorial challenge.

As with every cycle, the beginning is vital; it is then balanced and ultimately refined. We should not lose sight of this fact; we must stay alert. The life of the painting, its freshness, are what is most important, and they must be protected like a treasure. This is why the trend toward technique—toward learning technique so as later to “express

oneself,” which is so typical of our time—is for me the death of art and its entire sense of spirituality.

Nothing begins from the outside, and technique is not an end; we could say that it is the result of the experience of painting every day. In this way your technique will be yours, it will have your character, your way of being, and even your expressiveness.

I prefer the “errors” in my work to the excesses of technique. I prefer the initial vision with all the imperfection of the first brushstrokes, as long as the unity of the work is maintained, because I believe that in that first impulse—if my intuition hasn’t failed me—is the idea that lies in my subconscious.

Because it develops in an ideal space and has a timeless character, I think that my painting situates itself very well in this era. The feeling of the abstract that I tried to explain earlier gives it a place on a universal plane. Nor can we deny that art created in these terms fits into an era of universality such as this, in which the values of knowledge were never more widespread.

I try to situate myself in my time as an individual being who contributes to the search for spirituality. I said earlier that this is an occasion for reflection and change, and I believe that this attitude is sound. Although my goal is far-reaching, I dream of being among those who begin a cycle, a grain of sand in a sea of individuals whose contribution at least points in a positive direction.

The search for tradition and remaining firm within it should not be confused with a sentimental act of clinging to the past. This is about recovering certain principles, not recovering the past. Building art that is solid and vital is not a matter of eras or style, but of getting back onto an unswerving path. Each era, with its spirit, its people, and its ideas, will provide a vision for its time. The type or style of art doesn’t matter; what matters is that it have a solid base.