

Title: Archaisms from Synthesis

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Strong and archaic. This is how Julio Alpuy's painting has been defined. But although this definition perhaps most closely approximates the strange, utterly singular universe of these works, which admit neither comparison nor any relationship with trends or schools, it does not convey their full magnitude, their surprising richness—paradoxically resting on an ascetic, almost harsh visual language—their utter materiality, their character, which is almost aggressively structural, or their simultaneous lyricism: a lyricism of men and women reduced to their primal state, a lyricism of elemental rivers, of trees in whose branches celestial birds seem to flourish, of rocks from which a spring is born, of animals grazing in what without a doubt must have been the first days after the creation.

Because this is the main theme that runs through the works on exhibit: Genesis. The Creation. The origin that enables the creator to push aside the tenacious legacy of the past and once again imagine and create in a state of purity.

“This is an era of decisions,” Alpuy says. “Either we take action, or our souls will die. This also happens periodically throughout history, as individuals react to established precedent. How, as sensitive beings, can we allow our feelings, our intuitions, our creative wealth of emotions, to die? If our personalities are strong, our art will be strong as well. If we think in a way that is profound and sincere, what we create will be true.”

Alpuy does not accept so-called contemporary art, “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,” because this kind of art 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,” he says. “And the more change, the less depth. Art made in this way implies the artist’s acceptance of a path toward a practical world and an easy life. In other words, thought and emotion become attenuated, and the psyche is weakened.”

Based on this concept of the creative act, Alpuy rejects assertions that “art is fleeting in nature, an expression of the mind without the intervention of the complexity that the human being represents.”

Since Alpuy is, after all, Uruguayan, it was inevitable that he would meet Joaquín Torres-García. This occurred in 1940, and Alpuy entered Torres-García’s workshop in 1943.

However, after a time he understood that he had to be himself. “This one is getting away,” the people who surrounded Torres-García began saying. And Alpuy decided that it would be best to leave.

In 1961, Alpuy settled in New York. He had stopped painting but was drawing and carving wood. The carvings had distinct planes and were painted, because even when working with wood Alpuy felt a need for color. On the other hand, he never stopped drawing. Everything eventually resolved itself through drawing. Latent in his drawings and wood pieces was the future world of painting: he was also working in watercolors and tempera.

Alpuy had students, but he sometimes found it difficult to explain certain things. He began explaining as he painted. And this is how it all began, in 1975.

He had painted seventeen temperas about Genesis, which had become an obsession: the days of Creation, the elements, the creation of man and woman.... “and I still have twenty-five paintings of Genesis in my head.”

Now, at last, the universe that had lain dormant for years was born. Drawing, for Alpuy, is not representation but construction; it is like a gesture one makes without knowing why, it is what brings life to the idea of structure, of belonging to a unique universe. For Alpuy, then, to create is to transform the heterogeneous into the homogenous.

His palette is highly selective and concise, made up of grayish whites and shades of blue, green, ochre-red, and gray. A flat, barely modulated background brings together isolated areas: clouds, birds, human creatures that emerge from bluish rock formations to contemplate the miracle of a magical vegetation. Trees contracted like the stumps of human limbs point toward the sky. Paradise lost and longed for, enveloped in sweeping, circular rhythms. Rivers whose waters churn toward the vertical plane, as in maps from the days when humanity still preserved traces of innocence.

What stands out in all of Alpuy’s paintings is a classical sense of organization—because form, he believes, has a decisive value.

The form that is always abstraction: “The feeling of abstraction that comes to us from Cézanne by way of the Cubists, which in my case I inherited from Torres-García,” Alpuy says. “This concept of abstraction is the true legacy of our era, and I believe that it is there that we must affirm our foundations. We can say that the idea of abstraction was not discovered, but rather rediscovered by the modern masters. This rediscovery placed art within the true tradition, and made it possible to feel connected with it.”

Alpuy attributes the tremendous disorientation in modern painting to the loss of tradition. Tradition that provides the artist with solid fundamentals, a secure point of departure from which to evolve while seeking one’s own mode of expression. But

tradition is not something that can be invented; it is the sum of cultures, and for this reason gives a sense of security and consistency to those who return to its basic principles.

One of the drawings being shown (number 21) exemplifies, perhaps with greatest force, the vigorous creative ability of this original artist. In the lower two-thirds of the work is an enveloping structure with elements perhaps reminiscent of Poussin's *Arcadia*. In the upper third, a section at the right with birds and another at the left with clouds complete the composition's balance, creating an encompassing rhythm that draws the viewer's eye upward from the figures in the lower section, and from there—as in the never-ending cycle of heavenly bodies—back down again. The great harmonizing element in this work is the tree in the lower section, which leads the viewer to look toward a “depth” that never ends (the infinity of Life and Death), by means of spiraling broken lines. The basic characteristics of this drawing, as in all the works on display, are the freshness and organic quality of a distinctive and unique cosmos. At the same time, it reveals a subtle use of the endless shades of gray that can be achieved by drawing lines with a pen.

Alpuy believes that devoting too much thought to technique weakens the idea's core. Its visual energy will lose freshness and identity, gradually giving way to a cloyingly sweet interpretation of the pictorial challenge.

“The search for tradition and remaining firm within it should not be confused with a sentimental act of clinging to the past,” he says. “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.”