

Title: Julio Uruguay Alpuy: Alpuy Prints in the Galería Losada.

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Newspaper: Marcha

Date: Friday, October 8, 1971

Everyone who passed through the Taller Torres-García in the 1950s and studied drawing with Julio Alpuy remembers, with unconditional gratitude and feeling, the impeccable skill with which he taught them to draw. The utter seriousness, the ironclad, convent-style discipline that had to be thoroughly mastered to the point of exhaustion, the hundreds of pots, old bottles, rags, cardboard boxes, and other opaque, secondhand objects used as models. Measuring proportions, height, width, relating one size to another. Squinting in order to capture the fundamental values and lines, sketching imaginary horizontals and verticals, not getting caught up in the details, capturing the structure, and diagramming, for hours and hours. Alpuy would go from one student to another like a bulldog, marking each important point with a cross: "Erase this and measure it again! Compare this with this! Erase this and start over! Look at the model again! How many times does the apple fit in the top part of the bottle?"

Over and over ad infinitum—there was no one who could not have learned from Alpuy, given his passion, his seriousness, and the flawless logic of his methodology. If to Alpuy's mastery of teaching we add his ten years of direct apprenticeship with Joaquín Torres-García (Alpuy likes to put "Studied at the Taller Torres-García from 1939 to 1950" on his résumé), the young reader unfamiliar with the rigors of that heroic era may get an idea of how well Alpuy and most of the older members of the Taller can draw. When looking at Alpuy's prints (sent from New York after a long silence), when contemplating the fundamental simplicity of his primitive drawings, one recalls the anecdote about Picasso in which a woman asks him, "How long did it take you to make those lines?" and Picasso tells her, "Fifty years." This is what happens with Alpuy, and with Torres's best students. They hide everything they know; they are ascetic and stripped down in their drawings, their use of color, the way they abstract descriptive details in order to get at the essence of each object, the structure that holds the objects together, the qualities that are abiding and immutable.

This ethical stance of providing a maximum visual effect with a minimum of resources appeared to meet our needs, took on echoes of Americanism, and worked well for Don Joaquín because it dovetailed with the structure of his mind. However, many of his disciples took it as an aesthetic; it became a cookbook of forms and colors that they failed to breathe life into. Only those who understood the ethical essence of the master's message adapted it to their own sensibilities and emotions and succeeded in moving forward, as was the case with Alpuy.

The prints in the exhibition are primitive in character, as though from a stone age. A man and a woman—the couple—who appear in most of Alpuy's prints are none other

than Adam and Eve. But they are also human beings of today: they could be any couple. One incontrovertible contribution of the Taller Torres-García is the broad-shouldered man with schematic features and limbs, a man of geometry and life, at once capable of symbolizing Adam and rational twentieth-century man, primitive and modern, American and universal, flesh and blood yet also abstract.

The brilliant drawing teacher records a landscape with mountains in the background that all look alike; farther below, as though in a vertically cut space, are fish—ovals with eyes—roaming frontally. Birds whose wings seem cut from cardboard blend into the foliage of a tree whose trunk is almost as thick as its top. The trees look like children's drawings, rising up from the stream's linear edge. The sun is formed of crude concentric circles. A few strange plants, with stone-like leaves, add to the dreamily archaeological atmosphere. The composition is serene, static, and balanced, the old Taller mastery still present—but the drawing and color become sensuous at times, libidinous; perhaps the exceptional technical working conditions in New York are an influence here.

In fact, as we noted recently with the three traveling printmakers Solari, Pavlotsky, and Caubios, with respect to technical quality as learned in New York, this is a rule that Alpy cannot escape either.¹ It seems to be the extraordinarily absorbent paper, or the ink, or the presses, or who knows what (especially in the etchings), that gives the strokes volume and makes them dense, mellow, and velvety. Alpy's violet print number 7 is as dense and imposing as metal; our printmakers, it seems, cannot achieve such qualities here, raising once again the old polemic of whether we must make do with what we have or go abroad to learn all we can from those who have more resources.

It is a source of continuing interest that for the Fray Bentos werewolf tales of a Solari or the primitive symbols of the Tacuarembó native Alpy to flourish brilliantly and be disseminated with the quality termed "international" in the biennials, they must be produced or printed amid the skyscrapers and slot machines of New York.