

Title: To Be Profoundly Human
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Galería Sarmiento, Buenos Aires
Date: August 1980

My recollection of visiting Julio Alpuy's studio in New York more than ten years ago is vague. What it does arouse in my memory is the feeling of going into a tunnel, or finding oneself in the heart of a cavern.

Alpuy's works corresponded to this sensation, drawing heavily on the pictographs created by primitive peoples. Instead of New York, I could have been in Altamira or Lascaux.

Today, I am more familiar with and have a better understanding of Alpuy's work, as well as his thinking, which is revealed between the lines of his interviewer's journalistic style in the catalogue for his exhibition at the Center for Inter American Relations on Park Avenue, in 1972. Now, perhaps, I am in a better position to discuss his work.

Just as Alpuy had to devote many years to roaming different continents on the earthly plane—and even more time to the cosmic plane and its relationship with his inner state of being—so this particular critic has had to let a vast amount of time pass in order to arrive at a true understanding of the work of this Uruguayan contemporary.

First and foremost in an exploration of Alpuy's work should be a discussion of his spiritual link with his teacher, Joaquín Torres-García. By "spiritual," we mean everything Alpuy learned from this older sage, from the profound lesson of the relationship that unites human beings with the universe to the mastery of key aspects of frontality in orthogonal composition and the materials Alpuy used to clarify his own image. One would have to be quite ignorant to believe that any of these ingredients has escaped the breath of air by which the inanimate enters the human dimension through the spirit, which we translate as "soul" but that still means something that moves, something that gives life. Great teachers are necessary and important to the degree that their students are no less so. Otherwise, a teacher may be overwhelming, in which case no one benefits.

When the necessary relationship exists, the process of absorbing its teachings grows in proportion to their importance. Thus it is not alarming to think that Alpuy went through a long gestation process before establishing the validity of his own world, just as Torres-García did before him.

Indeed, the Torres-García phenomenon is particularly interesting. Without minimizing the importance of Neoplasticism in the development of their style, it is clear that the American tradition—also understood to include pre-Columbian cultures—had a strong influence on those institutions.

Torres-García was fully conscious of what being “American” implied. “We prefer to be the primitive peoples of this culture,” he said, “rather than to insert ourselves into the rhythm of another culture that is not specifically ours.”

It matters little whether this “reality” has penetrated Alpy’s consciousness or not. One does not need to journey to the umbilical core of pre-Columbian culture in order to be a citizen in good standing of this continent.

The spirit of the Río de la Plata is in the air, it is present on the horizon and in the very color—like a lion’s mane—of the river’s waters. Once absorbed, it can be transported to any part of the planet where one may choose to dwell.

Alpy is profoundly Uruguayan, which also makes him profoundly American and therefore profoundly universal. And all this is a result of his being profoundly human.

The forms he recovers from the depths of his inner self carry the seal of authenticity and are therefore related to the great collective unconscious of which Jung speaks.

Without meaning to, his abstract images of nature, trees, men, women, and fish take on a symbolic meaning, not because they contain heraldic keys, but because by penetrating the depths they produce a logical repercussion in the viewer, whatever his native latitude.

The natural forms that fill Alpy’s eyes catalyze and are catalyzed by the pure forms of geometry.

This is not about figuring out which came first, the chicken or the egg.

What matters is the result—that Alpy’s art is one of significant, powerful forms capable of evoking the magnitude of the viewer’s own sense of transcendence.

These are images that reconcile us with the tragic nature of our fate as mortal beings who yearn for immortality.

In its intimate identification with the materials employed—both wood and paint—this reconciliation maintains a tone of joyful simplicity, making of Alpy’s works a sure talisman with which we can successfully make our way through the challenges of our harsh existence.