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Figuration in the Work of Starsky Brines

Bélgica Rodríguez · 2008

English translation for the artist's website. Original text in Spanish.

Beings with faces that reveal their exterior and interior, children playing with a bicycle, animal-men or plant-men: contained within the space of nothing and everything, they remain in the silence of the stone that allows them to identify themselves stealthily. Wishing to be the beginning of something about to happen in the present, they inhabit a magical time, appearing in a painting rooted in the world, rooted in a reality both actual and imagined. It is the violence of a body seeking to join the person who approaches it expectantly, to stir an existence charged with the warrior's torches; a warrior who one day decided to leave his parents' home in a provincial city and settle in the chaos of the great capital. Caracas, in its pursuit of modernity, has burned its footsteps into concrete, yet continues to flourish in the greenery of its trees and the marvellous atmosphere of the Magic Mountain that protects a generous people. Surrounded by this urban architecture, which struggles against the great trees concealing its façades, Starsky Brines began his path as a painter.

In explaining his painting, Starsky Brines says that it expresses images he has stored in his memory, images from several childhood worlds that he wishes to reconcile with the world he has encountered as an adult determined to express himself through painting. Looking at it, one finds a strange joy enveloped in cries and sinister atmospheres that, paradoxically, address a dramatic question to the universe. In his study of the recent history of painting, the young Starsky discovers the extravagances of the transavantgarde of the eighties, which in turn drew upon the violence of European neo-expressionism, New York graffiti and the urban murals of so many cities that often seem so distant, but also upon Latin American New Figuration, exemplified by the painting of Jacobo Borges in Venezuela, or Luis Felipe Noé and Ernesto Deira in Argentina, to name only a few. As he declares, he makes painting, and his love of painting for its own sake, into a visual expression subject to the laws of human growth and to a certain non-rational poetics governed by artistic and human laws. His need is to establish a relationship between the human being and the universe, without the mediation of an external object.

It is evident that this painting does not call into question the relationship between image and reality. His personal figuration, dismembered by forceful marks and patches of aggressive colour, creates a violent realism, ultimately determined by the way the artist selects and transposes his vision to occupy a re-presentational space of that same image. On the support, whether paper or canvas, its destiny clearly intersects with others. Colour with a life of its own, re-energized by the figurative impulse, sometimes modulated through transparency and at other times emphasized by long, thick strokes, leads him, in artistic

terms, toward freedom in execution and toward a form that he ultimately sublimates through chromatic stridency, dynamic and elastic, until these elements transform themselves across the plane. The artist's skill lies in making them move and presenting them as tangible through the reconstruction of reality, whether in a portrait, as in the paintings *La niña de película* and *mi jeva mixta*, for example, or in children's play, as in *Yo que estuve esperando, mirando*.

One subject to address in Brines's painting is the concept of beauty, a rather ambiguous one, since his images generate tenderness and aggression simultaneously, as in other tendencies where figuration falls outside traditional canons of beauty. It is also governed by the artist's sensibility and his desire to approach art through a love of painting, as though it were the childhood game he had always wished to play and can now realize with a universal and collective character. In this sense, what is defined here as figurative carries a meaning grounded in personal experiences, memories and concerns about the surrounding environment and its influence on individuals. The gestural act of constructing this image through colour alone, with its expressive as well as symbolic force, and the thick, nervous, vibrant, even violent mark, carries the considerable weight of meaning communicated to the viewer through its visual impact and the complex compositional planes on which it is expressed.

Starsky Brines sets down in writing what he feels emotionally and seeks conceptually through his painting:

... My painting is nourished primarily by my love of the act of painting. I involve resources such as the stain, the line and immediacy, turning everything into the act of making and perceiving matter as a muscle that generates movement in synchrony with my body, my hands, my feet, my skin and my mind. Each part of me, together with matter, becomes a bridge conducting energy that flows onto the support to make way for the pictorial event ...

This statement places him in an essentially gestural-expressionist direction. Furthermore, the active visual qualities assimilate the temporal dimension of lived experience within a framework of duration, combining almost obsessive dreams with violent inflections in the structuring of the image. This emerges from the artist's surrender to the creative act, with the active participation of his arm, his body and his heart, commanded in battle by the orders sent by the brain.

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