On Inherited Images and the Mask

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María Elena Ramos / Starsky Brines · 2009

Interview excerpt, 2009. Descriptive title for this edition; the question and answer are preserved. English translation for this website.

María Elena Ramos: Two of the works you sent me have a completely different existence: En el patio de las apariciones and La mirona insistente. Their only affinity with the characters in other works lies in their red, clown-like noses, but here these seem more like a superimposed disguise, even with a visible little thread suggesting a ‘mask’. Two things stand out: interpreting works and canons of the past, with their mixture of still life and portraiture, a certain realistic iconography and a symbolic ordering of space; and intervening in those canons, somewhat mocking old ideals of beauty. Are these two isolated works or part of a larger series? Please expand a little on these points.

Starsky Brines: I did not set out to mock the canons of beauty of the period in which the work was made; it has been an encounter. I have related to classical works in a way other than passive contemplation, seeking a form of action that allows a practical approach to the original creator’s vision. In any case, I do not reject the freedom that contemporaneity allows me. I welcome these readings: they speak of the vitality of images. I seek to create other readings from images that belong to us.

The idea of intervening, of taking possession of an image, has always captivated me. With Vermeer’s Girl with a Pearl Earring, I think the opposite happened: she took possession of me. One day I could no longer resist and painted her in an attempt to discover some of her mystery. I was already working with red dots and zoomorphic images. Once I had finished the image, I had no choice but to intervene in it. This was the beginning of a series, still not very extensive, in which I shape and disrupt that apparent beauty through resources from the world I have been developing.

I would like to go further into the idea of the mask you mention. Like much of what I do, neither the mask nor the clown-like noses were intentional at first. They result from a great curiosity to see what happens if one does this or that. The point is to make it tangible, and this is how these codes begin to appear. First I painted animals, which gradually stood upright until becoming those ambiguous beings, somewhere between comics, clowns and beasts. From them I take elements that I lend to these old images as a kind of collage, disrupting their identity and creating a metaphor for our contemporary world—or, frankly, for human beings, who have always hidden behind appearances.