

CARLOS AQUILINO OR THE CRAFT OF AN INEXHAUSTIBLE PAINTER

by Ramón de Marcos Sanz, July 2022

I met Carlos and his partner, Blanca, more than forty-five years ago. By chance, we were introduced by Daryl Kahn an excellent American photographer with whom I became friends after an exhibition she had at the United States Cultural Center in Madrid. At that time Carlos was a young painter and I collaborated as an art critic in the leisure and culture magazine *Guía del Ocio*.

Daryl invited us both to lunch at her house. She was a great photography artist but a poor cook: for lunch she presented us with some kind of inedible yogurt with cucumber, so after a chat with her for a while, Carlos, Blanca and I looked at each other and decided to escape to nourish ourselves with something decent.

Carlos had returned from his stay in Rome holding a scholarship awarded by the Spanish Academy in Italy, and I was impressed by his large-format oil paintings for their originality, freshness and colorfulness.

From that moment on, we maintain a steadily subsisting friendship that has allowed me to follow the professional career of this great painter from Madrid, a Spanish man who, at the same time, is Greek-Latin, central European, North American and global, because his professional career has led him to explore several of the cultural worlds that encompasses the old Gaia.

When I think of Carlos and his life itinerary, I can only imagine him as a creator, with a great craft, who has dedicated himself devotedly to the religion of painting, and in certain aspects I compare him to Picasso's trajectory, another great practitioner of this religion, and from whom I believe he has taken the strength and faith, the theology of creativity and the passion for the exercise of this belief. But unlike the former, Carlos, a painter straddling two centuries, embodies, at the same time, the consistency of the 20th century and the transparency and fluidity of Bauman's liquid world, typical of the 21st century.

When I visit Carlos, I always find him working, like his master of reference, and in that inexhaustible work the muses find him. He does drawings and sculpture; he daubs the white surface with oil that challenges him every day and forces him to get the best of himself and to communicate the dreams, landscapes, peasants and figures that circulate through his enormous imagination.

The fact that he was born in Madrid and grew up in San Sebastián has smudged his look with the sky blue color of the city of Guadarrama and the color of Igueldo's humid blues, which range, depending on the time of day, from watery clarity to navy blue, and this palette of blues has become, without him being aware of it, his easily recognizable chromatic signature, already tamed by destiny.

Sometimes, from the distance that physically separates us – he lives in Madrid and I in Budapest – I feel nostalgia for the youth we were when we shared

shortage and paper tablecloth in a ruinous tavern in San Pedro Street, where our salary only allowed us to eat fried eggs with potatoes, and little else.

This sobriety, austerity, almost Carthusian, is another of the features that characterize this painter from Madrid, because it is not easy to make a living from this profession, and he always prioritizes the materials and tubes for an expense, rather than the expenses for one's own well-being.

His unwavering fidelity to his love for Blanca (behind every genius there is always an intelligent woman), a professional physicist and an expert in meteorology whose lecture books are part of the academic curriculum for pilots, has at least ensured for him a network of private protection derived from love, which economically has saved him, more than once, from crashing into the ground that every painter, dedicated body and soul to his painting, can suffer at any given moment, and has provided him with an exceptional manager who safeguards, like gold, the secret of the international projection that his work enjoys.

Carlos is a restless man interested in what is happening in the world and this restlessness and immense curiosity that he possesses has led him to live in Rome, Paris, the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, the lakes of Budapest, the desert of New Mexico or the megalopolis of New York, to name a few places on his long journey. And this interaction with so diverse cultural and linguistic environments constitutes a vital necessity for a classic and modern autodidact, as he is, and thanks to it he has generated, in his vision of the world, a perspective of panoptic, aesthetic and ethical precursor of the current globalization that already inevitably reaches us and in which we are immersed, whether we like it or not.

As a prophet of the arts, his painting, ahead of its time, has reflected, years ago, the importance that the theme of refugees would have, or the nature at risk, recognized last year with the Nature/Nurture award in New York, in a world that is demographically overwhelmed and globalized.

He adopts his philosophy of life from Nietzsche who affirms that *"we have art so as not to perish at the hands of truth"*, and that *"art must above all beautify life and also make ourselves bearable for others, or if possible, even attractive"*.

During his time as a painting seminarian, Carlos Aquilino took as teachers Velázquez, Goya, Picasso, Juan Gris, Zóbel, Saura and Sempere, and in sculpture his teachers were Alberto Sánchez and Calder. He studied European master with Michelangelo, Raphael and Gustav Klimt, and did his doctorate with impressionists such as Pissarro and Monet and furthered his studies with Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe in North America. With the amalgam of all of them he forges a recognizable pictorial personality where he combines the strength and delicacy that characterize him.

As a priest of this religion, with his paintings Aquilino intends to escape and make it easier for us to escape from a reality that is too harsh to bear, introducing bonfires into our homes that warm our spirits and relax our souls, filling them with colors and warmth that make us dream, that take us to a dreamlike and Homeric

world that makes us rest, comforts us and prepares us to face the harsh reality again.

There have been several stages in which we can synthesize Aquilino's more than fifty years dedicated to painting. The stage that now occupies us and that he presents us under the name *Traveling in the wind*, corresponds to his state of mind when he is already advancing, with a firm step, to a singular senescence in clandestine, softness in the colors, and begins the journey that abandons, transcends, leaves any contact with the earth and ascends in flight or levitates towards the sky.

That Velazquez sky of Madrid's sunsets to which he ascends, as his last resting place, bears shreds of Kassák Lajos' constructivist deconstruction in his last period and of the abstract disfigurement of Mattis Teusch in his *flowers of the soul*, sweetened by a sensitivity typical of impressionism.

Once again Carlos Aquilino announces to us, with his prophetic character, the ultimate goal of human existence, when he extinguishes and makes the figure of the bodies disappear, which he turns into colors, into thoughts, into fleeting clouds that move through the chromatic space like illuminated reflections of those who once were, like shadows of the transcendent, of that vital energy that escapes death and that is directed, for those believers to paradise, and for agnostics, to a universe that lacks finitude.

In some way, his painting preaches to us and symbolically proposes the transience of the last beauty, of the last ray of sun and daylight wrapped in warm colors extracted from the soft green of the forests, the soft blue of the sea, the filtered ocher of the deserts, the purest white of snow and the golden yellow solar in its stellar spin, dynamics of the last movement, in which he sums up and exudes his wisdom of the importance of the aesthetic sense of life and the time already consumed. He wishes this legacy to penetrate our eyes, like that small and simple flame that crackles, flickers in the sand, and draws our attention because it brings mystery, clarity, peace and joy, and which we contemplate and follow in rapture until its extinction.

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TRANSLATION: Nora Szigeti. Hungarian lawyer and translator. Budapest.