

SANTIAGO YDÁÑEZ

Las caricias del coloso

In *Las caricias del coloso* (*The Caresses of the Colossus*), a solo exhibition by Santiago Ydáñez (b. Puente de Génave, Jaén, 1967), the artist presents a selection of works produced mainly over the last two years, in which we recognise essential themes and aesthetic concerns that have guided the artist in his reflection on traditional genres of painting such as portraiture, landscape, the nude, still life, religious scenes, history painting, the representation of animals and of traditional customs.

Ydáñez is open in his admiration for the great masters of the past, and art history itself is one of his main sources of iconography. Sometimes he is inspired by existing images, to which he gives a new reading from the present, paying homage to painters such as Henri Fantin-Latour, yet his version of the French artist's vase of flowers refers at the same time to a familiar element from his own life—his mother's flower arrangements are part of the everyday home environment he observes. Unlike the Fantin-Latour, whose still-life paintings of flowers are in small formats, Santiago Ydáñez gives them greater presence by changing the scale, which influences how the viewer perceives the subject; they are no longer a realistic, intimist representation, but rather a pictorial exploration of the nature of the gaze.

Another of the great masters reinterpreted in this project is Goya, whose *Los fusilamientos del 3 de mayo* (*The Executions of the Third of May 1808 in Madrid*) he adapts, again at a slightly larger scale than the original; this is an image etched in our memories by the power of its expression, and here the faceless soldiers remain only sketched, becoming even more timeless and universal. And Ydáñez reworks Goya's *La riña a garrotazos* (*Fight with Cudgels*) into a duel between residents of his hometown. It is a fratricidal struggle that speaks of the confrontation between irreconcilable positions that lies at the root of the wars and conflicts that have marked the twentieth century, as well as of current violence, and which interests Ydáñez from a socio-cultural rather than a historical-political point of view. The exhibition's title alludes to another famous image by Goya, *The Colossus* (also known as *The Panic*), and the name applies to this painting on account of its monumentality—it is more than five metres wide—but replaces the cudgel blows with caresses, inverting the image. These three paintings by Goya are in the Prado Museum, and Ydáñez, through these reinterpretations, gives a nod to Madrid in his first exhibition here since that at the Lázaro Galdiano Museum in 2016.

Ydáñez's work is particularly focused on the human condition, on the passions and drives that move us, especially on the instincts of Eros and Thanatos, which he explores through forms that range from self-portraiture to Baroque imagery by way of the anthropological portrait, as well as photographs, some that he has taken himself and others found by chance. He appropriates motifs that attract him to make a re-reading of our visual culture and follows different, complementary lines of inquiry with an underlying idea: our contingency, the consciousness of finitude, since he has had a close and direct relationship with death since childhood. With the act of painting he tries to stop the passage of time; his works are like captured instants, which speak of concepts such as memory and nostalgia, the loss of innocence, and defeating the civilisation that is sometimes associated with the notion of paradise lost.

In the exhibition, the presence of the portrait stands out, monumental, not only because of the large format of many of the works, but also because of the dignity the paintings confer on the sitters—generally in a frontal pose, often in the foreground—and because of the depth of their gazes and the intensity of their expressions. Ydáñez considers the face to be a powerful synthesis of the whole body and with a few elements he can create a wide range of primary emotions, elemental feelings like pain and sadness. His models are usually people from his immediate environment, neighbours from Puente de Génave, who appear recurrently, such as José el Gitano, Tito, Gregorio, and Julio, as well as the artist's mother. Also on large canvases, he portrays animals he has lived with since he was a child and which he humanizes in his treatment, since he retains a close bond with nature.

Although he understands the face as a landscape of human emotions, landscape too can similarly convey feelings, in a way that harks back to Romanticism and the sublime. Ydáñez depicts places that are well known and close to him, views of the Sierra de Segura and the Sierra Nevada—the snow-capped peaks he paints evoke other latitudes and bring the Mediterranean into relation with Central Europe. This link highlights a spirit that runs across Europe from north to south, with local peculiarities but also with echoes in distant places and times, and it is among the concerns that have marked his discourse over the last decade, since moving to Berlin, with periods staying in Paris and Rome.

He moves continually between extremes: while he declares his preference for very large canvases, he challenges himself to create very small paintings, incorporating some of them into found objects. Through his additions, these acquire an artistic aura, so that from that moment on they possess a new history, establishing a dialogue between the pre-existing material and the accompanying image, which comes from a completely separate context. The everyday becomes disturbingly strange, even unbearable, playing with the sinister and the grotesque by the rawness with which he presents the themes, and by his expressionist brushwork combined with a reduced palette of colors.

Santiago Ydáñez works between Berlin, Jaén, and Madrid. He is currently one of the Spanish artists with the greatest international recognition, a leading figure in the renewal of painting in our country, with a distinctive figurative language that has given him great visibility on the contemporary scene. He has received important honours, including the BMW Painting Prize (2018), a fellowship at the Academia de España in Rome (2016), the ABC Painting Prize (2002), the Generación 2002 Prize from Caja Madrid, and he was awarded grants by the Colegio de España in Paris (2001) and the Marcelino Botín Foundation (1998). Places where his work has been exhibited include Villa di Livia (Rome), Whitebox Art Center (Beijing), CAC Málaga, CAAM Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the Chirivella Soriano Foundation (Valencia), ICAS Seville, the Instituto Cervantes (Palermo, Stockholm), the Goethe Institute, and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin). His works are part of a number of permanent collections, including those of the Botín Foundation (Santander), the Reina Sofía Museum, the DKV Collection, CAC Málaga, the Sofía Imber Museum (Caracas), the ABC Collection (Madrid), CAAM Las Palmas, the L'Oréal Collection.

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