

## Smells like Dry Blood, Omar Pascual

Text written for the exhibition "Smells like Dry Blood", Galería Arcaute Contemporanea, Monterrey, México (2006).

(...a few notes for a criminal investigation)

1.-

'Nothing can be taken for granted' in the prolific work of the artist Enrique Marty (Salamanca, Spain, 1969), in spite of being seemingly marked from the very beginning by his quick executive efficiency, by his ability to question the practice of Painting through the use of a definite, very specific photographic image taken from his tangible surroundings, as well as by some gloating sarcasm and an almost melodramatic humour; mechanisms through which he presents everything that happens around him in absurd and uncanny situations, as if he was passing his everyday life through a filter of grotesque post-gore uncanniness. This is, at least, what one has more or less clear when seeing any of his works for the first time. This is, at least, what they seem to be at first sight. However (as we have already said) in art—as in life itself—nothing is what it seems to be, and not everything is what you see. Therefore, it is better not to take anything for granted.

2.-

This determining duality of visual impact and narrative sordidness (or solidness) provides his production—which ranges from watercolours, sculptures made of latex, textile material and plaster; paintings, pictorial mosaic-murals and video installations or environments—with an always 'familiar', always 'recognisable' signature style. And it is maybe there, in its familiarity, in its identifiable sense of non-alienness where its potential danger lies, that is: it is maybe in its proximity where his explosive mystery resides. The kind of mystery that can blow-up in our hands and faces without us being really aware of its presence, because it had already become usual, everyday, natural in our environment.

3.-

And talking about natural things, from the perspective of our reading, the true nature of Enrique Marty's artistic work is... actually conceptual. Even though the techniques he uses are fully traditional, namely: painting, sculpture or scenographic environments, his work has a rather philosophical, inquisitive/inquisitorial, reflective character. In fact, his pieces speak, rather than of a physical state, of the mental state of the reality surrounding him, of the psycho-social state of perversion and putrefaction which deteriorates and corrodes everything around him. But, mind you, the artist does not—really—plunge into that state, since, after all, what is Art but a mere fictional version of what happens to us?

4.-

From this juncture, Marty reminds us that everything, absolutely everything around us has, deep inside, a slight smell of dry blood smeared onto his entrails, lying concealed beneath the surface. It might be the result of the hidden violence that has survived along the centuries as an instrument to maintain a hierarchical power structure or a consequence of the abundant bloodshed that has taken place in the history of our civilization; blood belonging even to our homes, domestic and domesticated blood. The blood of our ancestors.

5.-

Thus... after every smile, every orgasm, every sleepless night, every dream, there is a trail of blood, ours or our ancestors', and even that of our neighbours, our adjoining contemporaries, our heroes and our victims. It does not matter that these later two come from television, the media, films, narrative fiction or comic stories; it doesn't matter that they are immediate, close or not to our contextualised personal history.

6.-

In the year 2003, when Enrique Marty presented the project Loudun, which Espacio Mínimo Gallery exhibited at Scope New York 2003, the following story, written by the artist, was included in the press release:

In January of the year 2000 I was in Italy working on a scenography. One morning, while I was having breakfast at the hotel, an ancient and elegant family-run place, I cut my finger pretty deep by accident. That night, when I was sleeping in my bed, I woke up with a start noticing that my finger was bleeding onto the sheets. I stood up in the dark, and, my hands groping along the wall until I reached the bathroom, I knocked down a porcelain lamp. Once in the bathroom I was finally able to switch on the light and stop the bleeding. When I looked around the now lit room I could see that there were blood prints on the wall, the lamp was broken on the floor and the sheets were stained with blood.

The following day, the hotel manager asked me impatiently when I was planning to leave...

Talking about the absurdity of reality, of accidents, of the unconsciousness of pain, of its imagery, of its legendary narrative universe, may be—precisely—what Enrique Marty's work sometimes does: courageously talking about it all as a therapeutic exercise, as an exorcism.

7.-

Even though his work simulates—as a 'B movie' simulates, poorly, a catastrophe, a monstrosity, an accident, a murder—a passionate interest in the atrocious universe of the grotesque, I think the grotesque only appears in Marty's pieces as a failed act of destruction, from which, later on, 'something'—of an undefined nature—will be born. In other words: it appears as the ruins on which 'something' will be built.

8.-

From my point of view, many art critics and historians, especially if they are Spanish, when referring to Marty's work, are excessively auto-referential in their attempt to establish ideological and aesthetic links between his pieces and the grotesque universe of Goya and Gutierrez Solana. I find that is an all too easy shortcut, since nothing is more obvious than comparing obscurantism, tenebrosity, carnival and apparent horror, or simply visual ugliness, with that dark side of Spanish Visual Culture, rooted in a Goyaesque tradition. On the contrary, I think the visual material of which Marty makes use... like that, as a mere epistemological theft, with no modesty whatsoever... has more to do with a radically German pragmatism.

9.-

Instead of German, maybe I should say European, or 'post-hispanic', because everytime I think, analyse or mentally enjoy Enrique Marty's work I visualise it in connection with the standpoint of 'apparent cruel veracity', much closer to the revisionist aesthetics proposed by international contemporary artists as famous as Jake & Dinos Chapman, Tony Matelli or Jonathan Messe than to Spanish historical heritage. Undoubtedly, there is a certain air of Post-utopian decadent Neo-romanticism surrounding all of these artists, which is very much in tune with these times of general crisis of values we find ourselves in. Somehow, these artists, as Marty himself, are hooked on a degenerate and affected gloating over the bad creative gesture, aka: Post-modern Neo-expressionism. Besides, now pointing in another direction, I find Marty is visibly close to their proposals from the epistemic point of view since he follows a methodological system of visual recycling that acts as a way of exorcising social ills, ills of individual nature, which have been brought to light. In this exorcism it is clear that the artists serve as catalysts, in spite of the fact that their aesthetics simulates a more opportune cynicism, or tricks the eye into perceiving it, hidden behind sensationalism and excess, rather than a genuine civic endeavour.

10.-

In other words, I believe—from my personal point of view and after deliberately avoiding to discuss it with the author—that the artist to whom Enrique Marty is really akin to, I mean, the artist Marty's work is openly indebted to, is the German Gerhard Richter.

And why do I say this? Is it because of Marty's appropriation of Richter's signature blurring of images and pictorial narrative? ...No, it's not. I say this because I have the feeling, or the intuition, that, of this German artist, more than learning to paint in a kind of deconstructionist tachistic style, Marty gained a 'structuralist knowledge' that deprived the photographic image itself of its essential meaning to turn it into pure fetish.

11.-

Let us think, for instance, of Atlas, Richter's piece, and of any of Enrique Marty's surrounding mosaics of paintings; although it may not be apparent, there are certain parallels between the two.

Even though in the above mentioned piece by the German artist his attention is focused on the idea of the photographic archive, the notion that only a painter and no one else but a painter could create such an accumulation of referents through the 'unprejudiced use of the photographic material and of photograph itself' is tacitly present. A 'use' in which the photographic material is almost a ready-made of the photographed things. A 'use' that Enrique Marty—who like Richter, is excessively skilful, as well as being prone to accumulating pieces, a compiler, an usurper of images which, at the same time, aren't his but are close to him—puts at the center of his creative machine. Both artists have the speed of the taxonomist who prefers to re-name things to thoroughly investigate the existence of a possible novelty, since, according to them, it is more interesting to create from the conceptual re-reading of the support and the context, in order to obtain a new narrative. Or simply to create it in the measure that it is re-created, cumulatively, like an statistical study where what has real impact and does the 'renaming' is the whole, not the fragment.

12.-

However, on the one hand, Marty alters the photograph—while 'using' it as a document to be painted—not in its capacity as archival document of reality that, as a document for reflection, acts on language, but as an archival document of our ghosts.

And when I say ghosts, I am not talking of 'etnoplasmic entities' swarming around our reality, but of panic, terror, fear of ridicule, shame for our corrupt imaginative dreams of disturbed eroticism (maybe yes! maybe not?), I am talking of our terror of the destruction of our youth, or of the putrefaction of our innocence, I am talking of disease, of the always irritating indolence of madness.

13.-

This transmutation (as Duchamp and master Lezama would say) takes place, as Víctor del Río so accurately describes, when the artist clarifies how there are '...situations we are not able to decipher correctly, [where] the image appears corrupted by a strange version of the events which is imposed to us from the back room of the visions. The point is that these forgeries of the imagery are consciously dramatised and vulgarised in their condition of fictions, not only in Enrique Marty's work but also in our own subconscious mind'.

And that attitude distances him from Richter, inasmuch as it brings him nearer to him.

Let us explain this: He distances himself from Richter inasmuch as the document gets colder, and it brings him nearer inasmuch as he heats it by representing the photographic document from the traditionalism of Painting. The same as Richter, but different... similar but not identical. One of the most distinctive features of *The Difference*.

14.-

In another direction, I firmly believe that Richter opened Pandora's box when he stripped the communicative archive—the signs and/or signifiers implied in a photograph—of documentary value, and deconstructed it with his out-of-focusing and blurring pictorial gesture, almost a smudge, an insinuation, a hazy nostalgic abstraction; a path of aesthetic research down which creators such as the South African artist Marlene Dumas, the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans, the Cuban artists Raúl Cordero and José Ángel Toirac, and/or Marty himself have gone.

Except that here Enrique distances himself again from those artists who have practised Richter's blurred aesthetic shift (or contemporary Mannerism) in his incorporating of humour, sarcasm, and irony. Why? Because, as in the example of the above mentioned cases, many of them articulate their discourse on the base of the revision of History, or of an anthropological vision of the subject and the document, or they investigate how the photographic document as such writes a history parallel to the Autonomous Writing of History. There is a somehow essentialist and metadiscursive path.

Well, quite the opposite of this solemnity is what Marty does.

Or at least that's what I think.

15.-

Let us consider yet another perspective.

Another aspect of the artist's work, which, in my opinion, has been scarcely explored from the discursive or critical point of view, is the tendency to remind the viewer of the hand-crafted and artisanal media through his production. Indeed, in spite of the fact that much of the referents that articulate and ground his work are close or derive from those supports presented or self-proclaimed as New Media, read: Photography and Video Art, Enrique Marty has insisted in supporting his videographic production and his occasional purely photographic work in apparently supportive, derivative pieces—or vice versa—using media such as watercolour, painting and sculpture. That is to say, he makes a turn from the analytic revision of the Post-pop Avantgarde environment to that of Tradition. Most of his production is purely pictorial and reinforces or completes the Video Art, Photography or Installation pieces.

16.-

That is how, from our perspective, his whole work justifies itself, and may indulge in an excess—before naïve eyes—of repetition, monotony, redundancy and tiresomeness. But that is precisely the key: the work is telling us how tiring, tedious, degrading and pleasurable Gloating is.

Because nothing is more pleasurable than gloating in the pictorial gesture.

Gloating lies at the very roots of the Trade of Painting, which has become an Art in the course of around five centuries. As if it was a virus, Painting attacks reality in order to transform it, to flatten it, to abduct it and take it to an inside that is only its own, that is only pictorial. An abduction, or rather a rape, is always erotic, violent and sensual (or should I say sensory?).

As for Sculpture, it may carve a grimace of heartwrenching pain when it paralyzes a figure, when it square-brackets it in a new stage of space-time, when it resizes it, making it larger or smaller, when it presents it as an eternal mime of a static drama.

17.-

In all modesty, I suspect that the discrepancies between my vision of Enrique Marty's work and that of many colleagues around us (artists, critics, curators and art historians) lies in the fact that I believe that Enrique sees in that 'Rape perpetrated by Painting and Sculpture' an act of evil, an ode to our own vanity. That is why, with the ease and self-assurance of one who knows he is engaging in sacrilege, he attacks it. He charges unashamedly against our narcissistic conscience, torpedoes it. And in doing that he finds peace. A peace that is beyond any kind of possible pseudo-catholic reading, a peace that lies in the pleasure of creative freedom, a freedom that distorts truth itself. Thus, he 'uses' Painting and Sculpture as weapons of critical rewriting in order to elucidate our most hidden nature, because in this almost liturgical, ritualistic act he banishes all possible evil from the story, since the act of doing the pieces is already damned. Therefore, he cures us preventively, as if he was vaccinating us against those evils that affect us so intimately. This is why he insists in looking for that peace... even though he finds it smells slightly like dry blood. But what does that matter anyway.

18.-

What matters is the freedom provided by the knowledge of a truth. And this is his truth. If we are all 'photographable material'—so to speak—because that is what our 'egos' demand from us, maybe we will all be happily burned in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

Let us recognise it, then, as soon as possible. Let us get rid of all the prudishness and the hypocritical attitudes and look at the mirror of our ghosts, but with dignity. Let us act consistently in relation to those tiny little monsters we all carry inside us.

Come on, let us pose, let us put ourselves in front of the artist's Polaroid camera and go with the flow: we will most certainly succumb to temptation. But mind you... The temptation we choose will be each one's responsibility. We should not make the artist responsible for it. He is just making a portrait of us. Maybe in a way we would never have wanted him to portray us, but that is his only sin: to be harshly honest. Or maybe not, since, as is well known, we cannot take anything for granted. Remember that.

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