

Almudena Fernández Ortega _ El Bautizo Monstruo

A pictorial baptism

In an exercise which is almost par for the course for a visual medium, Almudena Fernández Ortega brings us to the present an event happened in 1936. It was then, on June 14th of that year, that "The Monster Baptism" - for which the exhibition is named - was celebrated. It was a civil baptism, deliberately anticlerical, that mobilized the entire community of La Nava, in the Sierra de Aracena (Huelva) and named six infants into the Múrtiga River. They were Lenin, Libertario, Líंबर, Pasión, Redención and Sipenia.

It was a mass collective party in which participated even people of surrounding villages. An event that was in line with the general feeling of the triumph of the political Left in that zone. But it was a short-lived celebration because only two weeks after, on August 27th 1936, Franco's troops took control of La Nava and they forced the families to change the names of the baptized children.

Nevertheless, the event itself, which has been little recognized by the current Historiography, is brought to the present by Fernández, who - through her works- goes over the places where the festive procession might have passed by. The woods, animals and houses that the participants might have contemplated, they all are recalled here through a direct bond with the present lived by Almudena Fernández, who grew up in this area. This is a parallelism that drinks from the personal spatial experience of the artist but giving special prominence to those possible scenes which have been currently forgotten.

Using a sober palette, where dark colors stand out in contrast to the pale and radiant colours, the artist attempts to recreate phantasmagorical places, full of legends of the past and current history. It is not a chance chromatic gamut, but it's the result of a pictorial slumber where Fernández's childhood memories in La Nava are reflected. For instance, her memory of the early-rising hunters who walked towards the countryside in the twilight is reflected on this range of electric blue colours which surround the animals in one of her paintings.

Small details, such as wagtail nests, bushes..., recreated by the artist in this series, they have something supernatural but beautiful, without being too overworldly but opening the doors to those possible scenes for the celebration, sifted out by the artist's vision and experiences.

Biography as a framework for the research and plastic work is a recurrent issue in this artist's creations, since she is closely linked to the rural context and, especially, to the nature-based activities and the mining, works that run in the family. She draws an analogy between her history, her memories and how she imagines the anticlerical celebration. An analogy that could be seen in the poster reproduced by Almudena Fernández - which has just been reissued recently -, where people were called to take part in the baptism. This poster appears accompanied by minerals and a fossil clypeaster, a direct allusion to La Nava and its idiosyncrasy.

Thus, the choice of the subject is no accident and for that very reason this homage acquires a special significance. Furthermore, the artist has investigated and includes interviews with those who took part in the celebration and, through her paintings, she goes round the hills trying to map out the possible way that the

romeria followed. It is a combination of memories, memory and historical recognition, which has been created with a magnificent pictorial proficiency.

"The Monster Baptism" created by Fernández is an homage to those who ventured to celebrate life in a political context where the flowering of secularism and freedom was in the air. It also makes reference to those places of memory that we have inhabited in our childhood and where our mind has been filled with images full of pleasant memories.

Both the party celebrated in 1936 and the current exhibition are a hymn to life, a radical defense of the possibility of celebrating. Despite the fact that, 82 years ago, the pagan baptism was followed by fierce repression, the act in itself is a demonstration of rebelliousness in favor of happiness. The very presence of the bodies of neighbours taking up the streets and the main square in a free celebration is in itself a radical action. For that reason, Fernández's paintings, brought to the present, connect with the magic which remains after the party. Feeling that what has taken place has been unique and that, despite the attempts to erase it from history, it is increasingly present. Here, those paths followed by others in the past become images that recall the history of the artist itself. Through her stroll and her palette, she brings us to the present the magic and celebration from the past. As Machado said, "by walking the way is done" but "having turned the sight behind" is what allows us to see "the footpath that is never going to be walked again".

Semíramis González

Almudena Fernández Ortega

Seville, 1984

She lives and works in Seville.

Almudena Fernández Ortega (Sevilla, 1984) is an artist graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Seville, specializing in Painting. In 2017, she received the Málaga Crea Visual Arts Award (Málaga). She was also an artist in residence at La Térmica in Málaga (2017), thanks to the scholarship given by this institution.

Among her most recent exhibitions, the most notable include: Creadores 2017, curated by Paloma González, La Térmica, Málaga (2017); MálagaCrea Artes Visuales 2017, CAC Málaga, Málaga (2017); Bienal de Arte Contemporáneo Fundación Rafael Botí, Córdoba -group ex.- (2017); XVII Andalusian Contemporary Painting Contest, Centro Cultural Pablo Ruiz Picasso, Torremolinos -group ex.- (2016); MálagaCrea 2016 Artes Visuales, CAC Málaga, Málaga -group ex.- (2016); Contemporary Art "Ciudad de Utrera" Contest, Utrera -group ex.- (2016); Villa Vista / Una visión propia, curated by Crótalo & Triángulo, Seville -group ex.- (2016); We are fair!, 3 Curators / 3 Artists, selected by Sema D'Acosta. 3K ART, Madrid (2016); Made in Spain. MAD Antequera, Antequera -group ex.- (2016); Neighbours III. Curated by Fernando Francés. CAC Málaga, Málaga -group ex.- (2015); Map of the new art. Imago Mundi, Benetton Collection. Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice -group ex.- (2015); Encapsulados. Art Boutique Hotel Chamarel, Denia -group ex.- (2015); El escondite. Okupart, MAUS Málaga, Málaga -solo ex.- (2015); Cantos rodados. MAD Antequera, Antequera -group ex.- (2015); Made in Spain. CAC Málaga, Málaga -group ex.- (2015); Restos de humanidad. El Viaducto, Córdoba -solo ex.- (2014); El cielo dentro del volcán. La Importadora Shop & Gallery, Sevilla -solo ex.- (2014).