

Todo lo que fue tocado*(All that was touched)***Vicente Blanco**

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Drawing brings us to our knees

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Drawing has always been central to Vicente Blanco's work. To give two examples separated in time and appearance, both those succinct animations with which he carved himself out a place in the panorama of his generation from the second half of the nineties, as well as his recent reliefs—which could be seen in this same gallery a couple of years ago—, show that for the artist, the action of synthesising the image of the real by graphic means, where the analysis of the form and the most immediate concretion of the appearance are a priority, inevitably passes through the domains of drawing as a tool of thought. A certain desire for schematic representation, or the refined but somewhat austere manner of its syntax, and even the tendency to keep the motor idea open to possible new forms a posteriori, can be detected in all his work: from his collages, cut-outs, superimpositions and object pieces, to his murals and installations, and the works on paper and canvas that I present here, in which sometimes the drawing tactically confuses its characteristic materials, processes and strategies, with those of painting. It is not, therefore, a mere question of technique but a genuinely disciplinary one: of how to subdue the many possibilities offered by any mental scene to the will of a subjective, authorial decision; how to dominate it.

"We seek authenticity in drawings, not power"

Vicente Blanco



In this, the predominance of the conceptual and linguistic aspects of the drawing, its nature close to the world of Ideas—to put it in the classical way—is exploited by him with full awareness. Vicente Blanco's scenes want to be narrated over and over again, so insistently that it can be almost unsettling for the spectator, since they are never offered to him completely. They leave him dissatisfied with the order of the story that he can probably put together with the fragmentary elements that the images themselves offer him. On the other hand, the slow motion effects (that contemporary form of tragedy) to which the author resorts are fundamental to achieve such a suspension of meaning: the meaning is kept hanging by a thread, flowing very slowly by means of a minimal current that does not lead into the dénouement of the plot.



This sort of capitulation of the spectre of language and desire is undoubtedly also related to the allegorical component that unquestionably emanates from his recent works. From fables where the animal takes on human faculties or vice versa; tales and legends in whose development we can see elements typical of folklore, to rites of passage, pagan liturgies and ceremonials in the midst of nature populated by spirits... These are eminently contemporary situations, as we can see from the way the characters dress, the design of the objects and the characteristics of the spaces that surround them; their hairstyles, and even their gestures, but which in parallel follow an archetypal world of ancient knowledge, ancestral relationships, hidden hierarchies and impulses, which as a whole drive the meanings to the universe of myth and ritual.

The first time I saw this clearly was when I noticed the artist's WhatsApp photo, in which he appeared on his knees in front of a drawing —we assume working at the bottom of it—, surrounded by the usual studio clutter, with his papers and clippings all over the place, his dog lying nonchalantly beside him, indifferent as if nothing was happening.... He looks barefoot; vulnerable. There is Vicente; with his back to us while three male characters stand above him and surround him from the paper level. Two of them wear suits; the third is naked. In this snapshot, Vincent seems to be surrendered, punished, and submissive; surrendered to the phantasmagoric authority of the drawing, but also to the uncertain, almost imaginary presence of these archetypal men who stand above him as if it was a subtly sado-masochistic scene. The artist as a *boy-toy* in a meeting of latent eroticism, of ambiguous capitulations and submission.... As the artwork has only just begun, the whole background is for the moment a flat color, an empty space without coordinates of depth from which emerge these three individuals who, moreover, are not yet leaning or settling anywhere. They are but are not there for us, in a curious stroboscopic effect; they do not *belong* to the world, but there is no doubt that there is nothing else for the artist at that precise moment when the camera has surprised him at his feet. The hands of the three men, which as the work progresses we will see resting on the armrests of sofas or leaning on hammocks, for the moment are stretched out into the air (the central void that Vicente occupies), as if they wanted to reach the artist himself... The desire becomes suspense and intangibility, as it is characteristic of the drawing. As you can see for yourselves, it is a very rare and disturbing picture, a *significant* image, and I would even dare to say an eloquent one, which he himself chose, highlighting it I suppose because it contains an allegorical potential to unravel those same relationships of *power and discipline* that I have pointed out before in his work. I propose it here as an emblem of his recent work; an emblem whose legend would be, without a doubt: "love brings us to our knees".



Once Vicente's path in relation to his drawings is *fulfilled*, those drawings make us abruptly divert to another level. It is true that the latent homoeroticism runs through them in their final state, and also that the material culture they reflect feels more like an affirmation of one's own taste than a challenge to the erudition of the beholder. Because when our eyes stumble upon design objects and generic forms that elliptically allude to the cultured memory of the applied arts (with an abundance of the avant-garde and the late-modern peri-

od) or of architecture, these fragments of the History of Art do not seem to question us in a referential manner, but rather define a certain sensibility for the figures and products that surround the body, integrating themselves a parallel narration, a background murmur that allows itself to be interpreted in the context of sensibility.

But beyond these nuances that weave a specific environment or an idea of habitability (in the framework of home or nature, so present in these recent works), the general approach of the recent artwork turns towards another level —where I also believe it is acting with greater intensity—, concerned about establishing an imaginary bond between the archaic, primitive or rural life, linked in any case to nature and the preservation of traditional knowledge, and the contemporary sphere of production and consumption. These are, of course, the two spheres in which the artist necessarily settles himself, his reality and desire. Between the Edenic vision of the origin (the nature stage) and technological capitulation, we are witnessing the paradox that disdain for the natural environment has already been firmly internalised by the system we inhabit, which surround and devours us, unable to recognise itself as a subject, seeing itself only as an object; while the initiatives for its conservation, not only more lucid, but more viable, are already irremediably artifices of metropolitan culture.

A tension between nature and culture, between birth and production that Vicente presents throughout these works for his new exhibition in Madrid. They are full of layers and superimpositions, of cut-outs and masks, of collage variations where the organic unity of the figure-scene-image-story decomposes and fragments, moves away from the embryonic state to become richer and more complicated. For example, look at what happens to plants and animals; look at how men act in a world that, without being paradisiacal, is crossed by magic and wonder, but also by pain and cruelty. Such tension, could be displayed as an open question, a simple one: what can we say about the world that is meaningful and fragile at the same time?, how can we preserve its essence even if we say it from *the outside*? Well, it does not seem a question easy to answer, and Vicente has also tried to do so from the title: "Todo lo que fue tocado" (Everything that was touched). But to finish, I just want to point out that, in the proximity, in the company of the drawings that make up this exhibition, as enigmatic in their narrative intention as they are determined in their refusal to produce an apprehensible meaning, perhaps a silent waiting is already part of the answer. And as the artist undoubtedly knows, in such reluctance to articulate yet another superficial proposition, a new statement in this world saturated with empty signifiers, what is traced is a certain ethical positioning with the past and the passage of time; because, as Gustav Mahler said, "tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire".