

Vicente Blanco

Los cuerpos inesperados

14.09 - 11.11.2023

"Aquil neno
pincháballe os ollos
ós paxaros;
e gustáballe ver saír
esa gotiña
de aire e de lus,
ise rocío limpo
de mañanciñas frescas
.....
Logo botábaos
a voar
e ríase de velos
topar contra o valado
da súa casa,
con un ruído
moi triste
.....
Crecéu e foi de aquiles."¹

My neighbor Emilio carefully takes a letter out of an envelope, he opens it, and he reads:

"Dear Emilio,

When I look at your beautiful book several times, I can't see the pictures properly because my eyes fill with tears! I wipe them away and I only think of thanking you.

In solidarity - John".²

These are John Berger's words for Emilio Araújo, poet, photographer, ethnographer, and translator; attentive observer of the death throes of the self-sufficient life of the Galician countryside; witness and narrator of the last wills of a now dystopian reality. Berger thanks Araújo for sending the *O libro das mans* (The Book of Hands) for which many protagonists accompanied by Emilio for decades at the end of the cycle raise their hands and say hello, but also goodbye.

Just ten kilometres from the centre of Lugo, where the chores of rural life do not allow us to suspect the immediate existence of shopping centres with multiplex cinemas and American diners, we find Vicente Blanco's house-studio. His home is also an attentive analysis of an environment whose administrative neglect has led to a gradual dismemberment of the basic entities that once governed a life in harmony with the natural environment.

Seeding, mowing, baling, netting, silage, sowing and harvesting potatoes, in some areas harvesting grapes and making wine and brandy; hunting, slaughtering and the patron saint's festival, sometimes two: one in summer and one in winter. In autumn the "magostos" (to eat chestnuts outdoor). In winter the "antroido" (Carnival). In spring the "mallos" (popular festival). In summer the mowing and the long-awaited party, recreation and drying out. A friend of mine said that she heard her father say that in her village the arrival of television signed the death sentence of a Carnival that lasted up to four weeks. Life was then organized around work and celebrations, all in community.

"After the usurpation of the mountains from the neighbors by the local councils and the consequent impoverishment of the rural economy, the forest became in each parish a thing alien to its inhabitants, from which only prejudice came: the appearance of wolves, fires affecting houses and crops, the felling of the forest for which the peasants received nothing, etc. The peasant became afraid of the forest".³

As with the mountains, life in the countryside has been a permanent encroachment, both under dictatorship and democracy. As the grandson of farmers, since I was a child, I have heard the stories of a world that is no longer the same. I have seen cousins and neighbors succumb to the siren songs, leave village life to settle a few kilometres away in cold flats and clock every morning in textile factories that collapsed during the 2008 crisis. If I tell you this, it is because it is a concern that has surfaced through conversations I have had in recent months with Vicente Blanco, and because in each of his latest paintings I rediscover that life which the stories of my relatives bring back to me when we meet and talk together. Vicente Blanco speaks of bodies that enter into a complex consonance with a nature that is sometimes latticed and sometimes fabulous. Circular architectures that dilute hierarchies and establish a harmonious coexistence. On the other hand, we find labyrinths, which bring with them the allusion to a daily life that becomes a struggle to try to understand and awaken the conscience of an environment given over to neoliberal policies, which blow by blow have been breaking the social link that was its greatest treasure.

"The forest is a being made up of many beings (aren't our cells also beings?). That vague emotion, that eagerness to turn our heads, that temptation - so often obeyed - to stop and listen to we know not what, when we cross between its greenish light, are born from the fact that the soul of the forge has enveloped us and touches our soul, as gently, as lightly as smoke can brush the air as it rises, and what in us is primitive, linked to a forgotten ancestral life, what there is of bent animal, what there is of tree root, what there is of branch and flower and fruit, and of spider that lurks and insect that escapes the monstrous enemy by stumbling on the earth, what there is of earth itself, so old, so hidden, it stirs and peeps out because it hears a language he once spoke and feels that it is the call of the fraternal, of an essence common to all lives."⁴

Los cuerpos inesperados renews Vicente Blanco's interest in drawing and, if more than twenty years ago he was already appealing to the vibration of the format and *the relationship between the landscape as a medium and the power that this medium contains*,⁵ it is curious to discover now the persistence, not only of the message, but also of the way in which it takes shape, however diverse the techniques applied. Vicente Blanco's work also incorporates many of the concerns of his work as an art theorist and educator, and the result of this is a constant presence of the hands in his work, which has been manifested since his first works, through the way he composes, both in his digital animations and in his collages, or in the paintings that are now presented. Blanco appeals to the hand not only as an executing tool, which fills the space by means of a mechanical gesture, but also as a thinking extremity, which composes and solves through practice. These are the same hands that take up these scenes, that grasp, worry, embrace, and unfold. They are hands of work, but also hands of affection that run through the bodies and seal the human link with a nature that is fluid, fertile, sometimes affective -perhaps in its dream phase- and sometimes threatening -perhaps in wakefulness-. They are, I guess, hands that say hello as well as goodbye.

Ángel Calvo Ulloa

¹ Luis Pimentel, *Xogo ruín, en Sombra do aire na herba*, Galaxia, Galicia, 1959. *Aquel niño / le pinchaba los ojos / a los pájaros; / y le gustaba ver salir / esa gotita / de aire y de luz, / ese rocío limpio / de mañanitas frescas. / Luego los echaba a volar / y se reía al verlos / chocar contra el muro / de su casa, / con un ruido muy triste. / Creció y fue de aquéllos.*

² Unpublished quote, from Emilio Araújo's correspondence archive.

³ Simón Molinero, *Os montes: un conflicto social en aumento*, en *O monte é noso*, Galaxia, Vigo, 1979.

⁴ Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, *El bosque animado*, Austral, Barcelona, 2010.

⁵ Vicente Blanco, *Alguna vez pasa cuando estáis dormidos*, MNCARS, Madrid, 2004.