

Enrique Collar, space and time concerns

Enrique Collar was in Chicago a few years ago. He came to present his first feature film, *Miramenometokéi*, in the Latin Festival Festival that is held in this city every year. Collar's concern for film-making seemed to be a logical continuation of his spatial approach to painting. It is not possible to contemplate Collar's current works without bringing back memories of those paintings which he used to make there in Paraguay before his initiation as a film-maker. The evolution of Collar's creative process should be followed from that starting point in order to understand his present work in full.

In his first painting, Collar generally tried to create a visual discourse articulating a series of spatial planes joined by a tight sense of composition where each level seemed to define parts that belong to different spatial categories. If in one area of his painting the image revealed a daily or countryside scene, with a perspective vanishing point at the level of the observer, in another area of the same painting he superimposed an epic scene situated in a spatial perspective disconnected from the first scene. The significance or symbolic forms of representation were also dissimilar. His painting, however, did not lack unity in spite of the variety of spatial approaches within the same piece of work.

I have used the concept of "superimposition" above with overt intention. When claiming that each painting joined levels of a different spatial category, I did not mean that the paintings consisted basically on an articulation of fragments, but rather that they were scenes organised around a variety of images painted on different and transparent virtual planes that the artist regarded as superimposed to one another. This is a trick which painters have frequently resorted to in order to organise their compositions and which comes from the theatre fiction that regards a painting as a virtual "scenic cube", where the surface of the canvas is equivalent to the front of the stage that opens to the audience in the actual theatre location. From this assumption come the locutions *foreground* and *background* or *backcloth*. The surface of the canvas is seen as the "mouth" of the stage through which you observe an organised world of likely pictorial/theatrical tricks; such pretension looks on the opposite direction of that conception that regarded a picture a window opening to a daily-bound reality and to a perspective of space connected with nature, as suggested by Alberti in his treaty on painting

The innovation introduced by Collar on those theatrical paintings was to give each plane a different iconic and temporal category, another perspective and sometimes even a different technique. The ancient Greek theatre had already resorted to a similar approach to let the mortals have a conversation with the gods of the Olimpo, mixing and composing in the same play the mythical space where the choir stood and the actual space where the actors represented the mortals. Collar's work assumes the theatrical space, this time with stern lucidity which does not lack a touch of humour. In October 1996, in Alberto Elía's Art Gallery in Buenos Aires, Collar launches, together with Victor Quiroga and Carlos Gómez Centurión, the so-called *Manifest of the Real Myth Group* as part of the exhibition titled *Three Written Projects for One Painted Manifest*. From that brief manifest I quote a few lines that will prove sufficient to lead our thoughts: "I think that painting is capable of releasing its narrative potential depicting situations of our daily life that express universal thoughts, doubts, fears and certainties. In order to reach them, I use the popular myths, those which provide a sacred dimension to the ordinary events and express the most genuine imagination and desires of every human group. Myths and art are the most primitive means of communication and they share the same structure of expression".

Our world has changed a great deal since the times of the Greek theatre and the Renaissance creation of the scenic cube, since the years of Brunelleschi and Alberti. Perhaps such a change at a cosmic scale is almost insignificant: in the end we are born, we live and we die in ways that have changed very little. It is in the technological development that has extended and influenced our natural faculties – among them the vision that sustains the art of painting and other visual arts – where this change has been radical. The scenic cube that belongs to the theatre has entered our homes in the shape of a television set and the computer monitor. After incorporating the theatre, the cinema has developed its own artistic form. The main innovation of the cinema when compared with the theatre has been its ability to combine different temporal planes and levels of significance within a single story line. Technology has also enabled ordinary people to make films through the video and the small digital cameras. This deposited in Enrique Collar's hands the perfect means to carry on and continuing his pictorial approach. Real time and image movement have allowed his visual thought to evolve into new stages of significance. Sound has let him show the bilingual nature of Paraguayan culture. In Collar's film reality talked to us in Spanish, while myth did it in Guarani.

The Enrique Collar/artist manages to survive the success attained by the Enrique Collar/film-maker. Life has its own story line and, due to circumstances that might not be thought as casual, Collar got married and started a family in Rotterdam, Holland. There, after the great expectations arose by his film debut, he resumed the quiet work of painting. His painting had relieved many of his concerns through the cinema. Now, Collar rethinks the space and initiates a new phase. The scenic cube is still at hand, but this time it has been transformed by technology. As it had happened before, it becomes the dark chamber that fascinated both Caravaggio and Vermeer. For the writer, the world is a story. For the painter, the world is an image. There are writers and there are painters for whom the world is both a story and an image; Collar is one of them. He focuses his artistic vision on the daily life within the micro universe we call home. Though maybe not on purpose, Collar's realism has led him to live in a painting genre, and once inside it, he paints. The Dutch interior belongs to this genre.

Collar renders his admiration and dedicates his study to the absolute summits of this genre, to those masters that established the final iconography that made up the intimate micro universe of the bourgeois. Collar enrolls in this cosmos bringing in the Latin-American chaos. The stereotyped theme of the Dutch interior, with the visual order of painting-reading smoothly conducted by the light and its moralizing intention, become a virtual movement of the vision within an intimate home space where the privacy of the artist's home life, his daily untidiness, is exhibited with no barriers. In this way Collar restores something that seemed to have gone astray, whereas as a victim of virtuosity or the tedious repetition: the ability to make the observer feel the uncomfortable but exciting sensation that he is watching a scene where he has not been invited.

Perhaps the big issue of the Dutch interior is its praise of domestic life, family virtues, children's education, the home cuisine and the myriad of daily events from which Collar will extract the mythical vision they undoubtedly belong to, incorporating the magic vision of South American realism. As Collar had already said in the manifest mentioned above, "I believe magic words and in magic thoughts are reliable systems to understand the world. I'd like to make people aware of the mystery that survives in our daily life".

The world of art can relax and have a rest. Enrique Collar has migrated and integrated himself into a new culture but he is still the same artist. The works at this exhibition tell us so.

Hector Giuffre
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