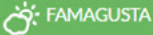








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Antonio López, lessons of the teacher: "Art is an Esperanto that does not need translation"

"Don Antonio, can you pose here?" a cameraman asks the painter, pointing to some Ifema windows from which you can see the pavilion that hosts ArcoMadrid 2023.


 Oliver Thansan

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"Don **Antonio**, can you pose here?" a cameraman asks the painter, pointing to some Ifema windows from which you can see the pavilion that hosts ArcoMadrid 2023. And he adds between laughs: "It looks like God!" Antonio **López** is wearing paint-stained honey-colored thick corduroy pants and an elegant blue mottled jacket with too-long sleeves. As he poses, he looks at the fair with his eyes that are set like nails. "It gives the feeling that gallery owners are alone," he says. Delicate, humble despite his greatness, bearer of a charisma macerated throughout a life devoted to art, he has always defined himself as "a worker in painting."

His look has not lost its shine and there is no wear and tear on his ability to absorb reality. Her voice is also young, sometimes sing-song, and her accent has a hint of La Mancha. In the last edition of the Madrid fair, she presented an artist book, Paisajes (Artika), which includes a numbered giclée print, Rosas, painted during the pandemic. Anecdotes, reflections and various paintings make up a case that recreates the window from which the artist captured the painting Gran Vía, August 1, 7:30 a.m., 2009-2015, which is reproduced on canvas as its cover.

All copies -of a limited edition of 2,998- are signed by the author. Throughout the interview, the words he repeats the most are "of course" and "we", referring to the so-called Madrid School -of which he is the only survivor- among which are his life partner, María Moreno, Amalia Avia, Julio and Francisco López Hernández or Isabel Quintanilla.

With great international projection since the late 1960s, López received the Prince of Asturias Award for the arts in 1985 and dedicated 20 years to the royal family. When Ana Nance photographs him for Lifestyle Magazine, she imitates the bullfighter's pose that he sometimes asked of King Emeritus Juan Carlos. We asked him about his situation: "What a pity!" he mutters her.

Paisajes is a memory book, a diary?

Yes. In our painting, figurative art, we work by chosen themes. It is very biographical, like poetry or auteur cinema, because one talks about oneself all the time. The theme is you and your look. Like in this book. I am very satisfied with the result. It has taken a long time... Before the pandemic we had already planned it.

Several important figures appear in the book for you. One is that of his uncle, the painter Antonio López Torres. What did he teach you?

Well, the most important thing is that it convinces my family to let me study painting. If he hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened. My destiny was marked: he had prepared me to work as an administrator in Tomelloso.

And you didn't resist?

I didn't like it, no, but then you couldn't resist... In the summer of 1949 I worked with my uncle, and he, who didn't seem to look at me, took care of me. He thought it was good for painting. Deciding if a boy is worth or not is very risky. It arose providentially. He would come home to talk to my father, and I would think: "They are talking about me!" My uncle was very generous and he had enormous powers of persuasion. And finally they told me to come to Madrid to prepare to enter Fine Arts. I listened to them, nothing more.

Painting awakens feelings, beyond beauty. What is the importance of kindness in art?

The truth is linked to the authenticity and validity of the work, but goodness is an addition that is not always given. Velázquez has kindness; **Goya**, on the other hand, is not as kind as Caravaggio, but he does have something. Mari's [his wife, María Moreno]'s work has a lot of goodness... Goodness is something precious when it arises, but it doesn't always happen. Neither in the cinema. Buñuel's is not kind...

But his painting does transmit it...

No, no [lowers her voice a lot], I haven't thought about it, but I don't think so. What there is is an interest in the world. Yes indeed. But I don't call that kindness.

He has captured the spirit of the times without artifice, and, at the same time, a feeling of recollection emerges from his work.

I think that not only in mine, Spanish art, in general terms, is an art of observation. It is the noble material from the starting point. The interesting thing happens close to you, and you just have to know how to look at it. That is very present in Velázquez's painting. And, in literature, in Don Quixote, Lazarillo de Tormes, La Celestina... If you compare it with Italian art, for example, there is a closer approach to the truth, not a dazzling, majestic truth, but the pure truth, to things as they are. Sometimes very bare; seemingly insignificant. Everything deserves to be taken into account. The truth is what we have to work with.

And today, on the other hand, reality is despised and we are immersed in a virtual bubble.

Well yes. Without leaving Spain, from a certain moment on our art has skin, surface attractions, enormously sparkling, brilliant, and I think that the artist has relied too much on that. From a certain period on, art seems to have liked its appearance, rather than its content. That has been a bit of a downfall. But it has happened since the time of Michelangelo, Raphael or Leonardo. When the artist has a good technical command, he relies heavily on it, and society considers it an enormous value. It was thought that the more detail the paintings had, the more value they had. And that poorer, more modest space of truth was abandoned.

It seems that reality is insufficient for us...

Sure, no imagination! To read the truth in what is close to you requires imagination. There are some powerful misunderstandings that have lasted until now. Good modern art, if it has great value, is because it has always sought the truth. The impressionists already faced this misunderstanding and said: "No, no, an ironer is more important than Venus".

Michelangelo belonged to the goldsmiths' guild. Before, artists were instruments to capture periods.

Michelangelo was important in Italy, his was a very attractive personality for society; the Popes disputed it. He is an example. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Do you recognize the influence of other artists?

Many! There are very few people who don't have influences... Mari hasn't had any, and neither has my uncle. Speaking of the book, Landscapes, the two artists who accompany me have not had any influence. It is very interesting...

Didn't you influence your wife, María Moreno?

No. I helped her, and she helped me. In fact, she influenced me more than I influenced her. Because she was not influenced: it was not in her will to incorporate anything.

What happens when a love as deep as yours leaves?

Well, you know, Mari's process was terrible, very long and painful. Her company was essential for me, but of course you can live without that person. Work gives a lot of company, if you have chosen it well. It's almost my whole life. My life is work.

Your daughter has told me that you are now working on a sculpture of Mari.

Yes Yes. With eyes closed. She is inside of me. She has no wear. What happens is that life leads you to fulfill your obligations.

Has life gone dark?

A lot. The art of our time is very dark – although we, our group, are not. But you look at Bacon and he's gloomy, like Dostoyevsky. Do you think that Paradise Lost or the Divine Comedy refer to very dark topics... Human beings have always lived with this, with despair. But never as now has so much work been done. Today it seems an obligation to refer to that dark part.

How does the passage of time affect your work?

Man has lost some pillars that science has replaced. We are very supported by it and that helps us a lot. A century ago he would not have reached this age. At six months I had an infection that almost killed me, but the serum was there... there were no antibiotics yet. But then man was close to God.

You believe in God?

Yes, of course, how can I not believe in him? It shows in art.

Does painting make us better?

Good art helps us a lot. The music, the dance... Art comes from the noblest part of the human being and is a precise means of communication. It is an Esperanto. A sculpture does not need translation. You see the Egyptian sculptures and you don't know who their author was, nor the model, and yet time has not passed over them.

How have you experienced the transformation of Madrid, which has gone from a provincial city to a wealthy capital?

I don't believe much in it. What happens is that we are still here, in Madrid. Making these giant cities is a mistake. And I'm not just saying this for Madrid, but also for Paris, New York, Tokyo... They're not good. Undesirable things happen in them.

Do you think that cities are increasingly dehumanized?

It's just that... they force us to lead a life that is not what a person should lead. They send people to a fifth floor, isolated. The child and the old man cannot communicate with the outside world if they are not accompanied. And all of this is making life very difficult. Everything is in favor of money.

Has money been important to you?

Of course. The painter has to live from his work, the same as the doctor and even the prostitute. We have to live from our work. But... that dream doesn't always come true.

Is painting a form of asceticism, of elevation?

If you are going in the right direction, you are building muscles, strengthening your best side. We all have a worse part and a better part, and there are professions that favor you, like art. The art is good.