

PASSAGE OF MIRRORS

Olga Pastor Alvarado

‘The Spirit of Painting’ series of 37 works on paper by Pedro Paricio presented at Halcyon Gallery, is the end of a passage that connects us to the past. A passage filled with colour, canvas, brushes, characters, love stories, with struggles, wars and revolutions, filled with sumptuous dresses, music and philosophy. Filled with life... and also with mirrors facing each other, where everything is projected into infinity.

‘We’re in the agony of Postmodernism and everything is at our disposal’. Pedro Paricio¹

In this series, the artist brings together two very personal components of his artistic practice. The first is a re-reading of the artists and artworks he most admires. The second is the masking of the figures he creates, with strong opaque colours.

Replacing the hands and faces in certain artworks from the Renaissance and the Baroque with his recognisable patches of lines and colours, Paricio has the whole of art history at his disposal.² He has always engaged with the art of the past, sourcing his subject matter from museum collections worldwide. This reinterpretation of artworks and artists, ingrained in his work, has in ‘The Spirit of Painting’ a new focus – he is painting over reproductions of the artworks themselves.

In *Untitled XI*, the angel that holds the mirror in Diego Velázquez’s *The Toilet of Venus*³ is completely covered in Paricio’s melted colours. In *Untitled XVI*, the face and hands of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo’s *The Immaculate Conception of the Venerable One*,⁴ shine with an opaque red that completely obscures them. And so it goes on, with the works of the most revered masters of Western Art. The author claims the importance and weight of



Pedro Paricio, *Untitled XI*, 2013
Mixed media on paper, 54.3 x 38.6 cm



Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus*
(*The Rokeby Venus*), 1647–1651
Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 177 cm
National Gallery, London



Pedro Paricio, *Untitled XVI*, 2013
Mixed media on paper, 55.7 x 37.6 cm



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo,
The Immaculate Conception of the Venerable One, 1678
Oil on canvas, 274 x 190 cm
Prado Museum, Madrid

traditional painting by appropriating it through his own personal imprint. It is the hand of the future touching the past, reinterpreting it; the hand of an artist saluting his admired masters.

Paricio has a real passion for books. His personal library houses around 3000 titles, most of them on history and art. In 'The Spirit of Painting', Paricio responds intuitively to the titles, tearing out the pages containing pictures that most move him. By subtly selecting which parts to cover, he imprints his own personal stamp on each with his characteristic lines and colours.

These works make us re-engage with the two-dimensionality of the original works. When Paricio applies the dripping paint to the faces and hands, he is forcing us to remember the raw materials on the canvas, the skill of the Old Masters who created the work, and the transience of all flesh. Paricio also targets images of authority – monarchs, princesses, generals, saints. They will decompose like the rest of us, and return to the mass of humanity. It is hard to say whether Paricio's actions are loving or violent when he literally de-faces a Velázquez or a Goya. His use of book illustrations is also a comment on the ubiquity of reproduced images, and the culture that no longer cares for copyright. How can artists make a living if their works circulate and are appropriated freely? Here Paricio turns a copy (from a book) back into an original.

'The Spirit of Painting' is an enigmatic series that invites contemplation. The viewer, holding in his memory his own vision of each of these artworks, understands the transformation the artist exerts over the pieces in a completely individual and subjective way. The faces of these Renaissance and Baroque paintings, now

anonymous, lose their importance. Colour, its status elevated, becomes a fundamental part of the artwork. Its strength comes from the contrast between Paricio's bright colours and the darker tones of the original. In the case of the biblical passages, so familiar in Western Catholic culture, the patches of colour change the perception of the form we keep in our subconscious; and it does this without decontextualising the original work. *Untitled XXV* of *Saint Sebastian* by Jusepe de Ribera,⁵ recognisable by his coiled posture and by the arrows in his body, is still Saint Sebastian, even if his face is covered in tones of opaque blue.

It is a nudge, a wink, a license which the artist allows himself so that we can join him on a trip through time; exploring history and the sensations and emotions it arouses within us.

The passage that joins 1400 with 2014 is infinite due to its mirrors. Like the history of art, it is a solid chain in which no piece is expendable. Without the first, there would not be a second nor a third, nor a millionth link. To Paricio, this chain is an amalgam. Everyone and everything is a part of it. For that reason, it is not about reinventing the past, but about bringing it to our new perspective and shaping it for the eyes of Postmodernism.⁶

'I think of myself as an intuitive painter ... I work in dialogue with the piece ... in some ways it could be understood as a reflection of the two most important ways of painting: abstract and figurative ... my paint is a question and not an answer.'⁷ Pedro Paricio



Olga Pastor Alvarado is a Spanish writer specialising in British and Spanish art and culture.



Pedro Paricio, *Untitled XXV*, 2013
Mixed media on paper, 55.6 x 37.7 cm



Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Sebastian*, 1617.
Oil on canvas, 179 x 139 cm
Colegiata de Santa Maria Church, Osuna, Spain

- 1 Pedro Paricio, *The Theatre of Painting*, MIRADAS 2, 2 June 2012, © RTVE 2012.
 - 2 The Renaissance was a cultural and artistic revolution that originated in the Northern Italian city-states of the fourteenth century, inspired by the study of the artists and writers of classical antiquity; the term Baroque is applied to European architecture and painting of the period approximately 1600 to 1750 which relied on the use of exaggerated movement and colour to create drama and tension.
 - 3 Spanish artist Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) is revered for his portraiture and his powerful representations of daily life, injecting a profound sense of humanity into his works. Like Titian, Velázquez was concerned with the representation of movement, favouring the visual impression over static figures.
 - 4 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618–1682) was a Spanish artist and contemporary of Velázquez who is best known for his popular genre paintings and sentimental biblical themed works.
 - 5 Jusepe de Ribera (1590–1652) was a Spanish painter and etcher associated with the Spanish Baroque. Heavily influenced by Caravaggio, his paintings are renowned for their violent subject matter, expressive modelling and dramatic lighting.
 - 6 Postmodernism emerged in the mid-1970s aiming to establish a return to ultimate freedom in artistic output, encouraging a departure from the utopian vision of ‘modernism’ – a movement based on clarity and simplicity in art.
 - 7 Pedro Paricio, private correspondence with Dr Suzanne Fagence Cooper, March 2014.
-

Túnel de espejos

Estamos en la agonía de la postmodernidad y todo está a nuestra disposición.

PEDRO PARICIO¹

Vivimos en estado de alerta, sintiéndonos parte de todo lo que acontece, aunque sea como minúsculos actores en la trama de la historia y aun en la trama de la vida de todos los hombres. No es el destino, sino simplemente comunidad –la convivencia– lo que sabemos nos envuelve: sabemos que convivimos con todos los que aquí viven y aun con los que vivieron. El planeta entero en nuestra casa.

MARÍA ZAMBRANO, 1958²

THE SPIRIT OF PAINTING, SERIE DE TREINTA Y SIETE OBRAS sobre papel, son el final de un túnel que nos comunica con el pasado. Un túnel lleno de color, personajes, pinceles, telas, historias de amor, de lucha, guerras y revoluciones, lleno de vestidos, de filosofía, de instrumentos musicales y de música, a la manera de espejos enfrentados que se proyectan hacia el infinito.

Despojando de rostro y de otras partes del cuerpo a algunos de los personajes de obras escogidas del Renacimiento y del Barroco, y substituyéndolos por sus ya reconocibles trazos y colores, Pedro Paricio dispone de la Historia del Arte para crear. El artista hace confluír, aquí, dos prácticas habituales en su quehacer artístico. Una, la relectura de sus autores –sus *Masters Painters*– y obras más admiradas; otra, la de cubrir, alterar, marcar e intervenir la imagen de algunos de los protagonistas de esas pinturas clásicas con la mancha o la huella de colores vivos que caracteriza su pintura más reciente.

Dentro de la reinterpretación que hace el artista de diversas obras icónicas de la tradición de la pintura europea, la serie *The Spirit of Painting* posee un nuevo enfoque, ya que la pintura, ahora, se proyecta de forma selectiva sobre láminas de papel que conservan la reproducción de la imagen del modelo de partida. Así, el ángel que sostiene el espejo de la *Venus* de Velázquez, queda completamente velado por los colores derretidos de Pedro Paricio. En *Sin título 16* el rostro y las manos de la *Inmaculada Concepción de los Venerables, o de Soult*, de Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, lucen también un rojo que resbala y los oculta por completo. Y

continúa de este modo, con obras de los más señalados maestros del arte de la era moderna. El autor reivindica, así, la importancia y el peso de la tradición de la pintura adueñándose de ella. Es la mano del futuro que toca el pasado y lo reinterpreta. La mano de un artista que saluda a sus admirados maestros.

Paricio siente verdadera pasión por los libros. Su biblioteca personal contiene cerca de tres mil títulos, la mayor parte sobre historia del arte. Para realizar la serie *The Spirit of Painting* se dejó llevar por su intuición y por su mirada selectiva. Abrió algunos de sus libros de arte moderno y arrancó las páginas con las imágenes que más lo conmovieron, pintando directamente sobre ellos con sus características líneas y colores. Seleccionando sutilmente la parte del cuerpo que se propone ocultar bajo su pintura, Pedro Paricio ha estampado en estas imágenes su sello personal.

The Spirit of Painting es una serie enigmática que invita a la contemplación. El espectador, que guarda en su memoria su propia visión de cada una de esas obras, percibe la manipulación que Pedro Paricio ha ejercido en ella. Los rostros, ahora anónimos, de los retratos barrocos pierden importancia para hacer del color el elemento central de la composición, en contraste con los tonos oscuros propios del original. En el caso de los pasajes bíblicos, por ejemplo, tan familiares en la cultura católica occidental, los parches de color cambian la percepción de la plasticidad que guardamos en el subconsciente. Sin embargo, esto no significa que se descontextualice la obra: San Sebastián, reconocible por su postura enroscada y las saetas clavadas en su cuerpo, seguirá siendo San Sebastián a pesar de que su semblante ha sido tapado por distintos tonos de azul. Es un toque, un guiño o incluso una licencia que el artista se permite para que hagamos en su compañía un viaje de ida y vuelta en el tiempo, explorando la Historia, las sensaciones y los sentimientos que nos produce.

El túnel que une el 1400 con el 2014 es infinito gracias a sus espejos. Como la Historia del Arte. Es una cadena sólida en la que ninguna pieza es prescindible. Sin la primera no existiría la segunda, ni la tercera, ni la número un millón. Para Paricio, esa cadena es una amalgama. Todo y todos formamos parte de ella. Por

eso, no se trata de reinventar el pasado, sino de atraerlo a nuestro prisma actual y moldearlo en nuestro presente.

OLGA PASTOR ALVARADO. Crítica de arte y comisaria independiente de exposiciones.

Texto editado del catálogo de la exposición de PEDRO PARICIO, *Shaman*, Halcyon Gallery, Londres, 2014.

¹ PEDRO PARICIO. *El teatro de la pintura*, MIRADAS 2, 2 de junio de 2012, ©RTVE 2012.

² MARÍA ZAMBRANO: *Persona y democracia: la historia sacrificial*, Madrid, Siruela, 1996. María Zambrano (1904-1991) fue una filósofa española discípula de JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET. Formó parte de la generación que se vieron obligados a dejar España después de la guerra civil (1936-1939). Recibió el Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Humanidades en 1981 y el premio Cervantes en 1988.