

Ramiro Tapia: fascination for myth

The continuous underlying theme, the fundamental basis that defines the works of Ramiro Tapia, is a continual metamorphosis. An untiring inventor of forms, an artist of great imaginative power and an extraordinary capacity for work who is always experiencing change, he returns again and again to recurring, familiar themes incorporating new images and discoveries to his already prodigious production. In his painting, the search for magical themes, the construction of unusual and surprising worlds of intriguing fantasy are unceasing and unfailing. Dreams, and all that may be imagined, continue to be the reality of the artist. True to his universe of magic and mystery, his works reflect the visionary, mystical, and intranquil other-worldliness of the painter, a mythical undercurrent ever joined to illusion and phantasmagoria.

The new *Impossible Architecture* and *Myths and Phantasmagoria* are the motifs included in this exposition of the latest works of Ramiro Tapia, representing the most recent contributions to his unique evolution. It consists, first, of a series of fantasied towers and second, of those strange phantasmagoric creations of a unique, disquieting zoology so characteristic of the artist. It is mystical painting which rises up, the conception of which becomes more and more personal and demanding. It is a creative work which affirms the same magical esoteric component, but which becomes, if possible, even more suggestive, led to its most profound consummation. The drawings, oils, watercolors, and gauches hanging on these walls today are the fruit of eight long years of work and unceasing creativity. The painter offers us an ardently constructed world of artistic creation, the result of detailed laboratory work and of the difficult process of experimentation, as the end result of this latest and indeed passionate phase of his artistic endeavor.

Despite the novelty and originality of the exhibition, the artist does not depart from his earlier thematic apperception but instead delves deeper with respect to his proceeding experiments. In each new stage in his work Ramiro Tapia absorbs his former achievements with no loss of the continuity of his nearly thirty years of artistic production.

Apart from the imagery presented, which clearly connects with his earlier configurations, it is an enthusiasm for research and the re-invention of materials which form the common denominator in these latest works of the painter. More than ever he displays a continual concern for discovering new forms of expression in oils and mixed techniques and an ever-increasing interest in both the qualities of the materials and in the potency of the colors employed. In his *Mythical Configurations* above all, the artist, through the suggestion of archaeological symbolism, achieves a rich variety of textures, often of fossilizing design. Whether utilizing soil, sand, or shavings—in every case submitted to a process of oxidation—or improving textures by making use of special combinations in graining and earth effects, or even creating unexpected limits in the backgrounds of his paintings, Tapia continually surprises and intrigues the viewer, who himself becomes a participant in the works as never before. The artist has totally established a creative process peculiar to that mystical and magical universe, and has, in a great many of the works displayed, incorporated suggestive mysterious phantasms of faces and images—especially of “spectres”—which seem to emerge from a haunted wall or from some remote past.

On the other hand, the monumental character of these canvases and watercolors is not due only to their size, but also to their great impact, to the strength of their conception, and to the vigorous treatment in their realization. Through the use of sure, compact strokes, of dense layers of paint and grain, Tapia easily leads the viewer into the esoteric airs of his dreams and premonitions.

At the same time, another principal vehicle for the conveyance of his special message is color, which vigorously and triumphantly takes over his works through the bravest contrasts

and the most ardent chromatic aberrations. The artist, inspired by that incessant, unending disquiet, thus brings to us paintings rich in subtleties of brilliant, lavish tonality, works of courageous execution and fluid, though difficult and elaborate technique.

With respect to his new *Impossible Architecture*, it is obvious that he is continuing his earlier series, begun around 1976 and characteristic of the first half of the decade of the '80s. At that time an unforgettable series of fantastic compositions, in which vegetation appeared combined with unusual architecture emerged in his works. In these paintings, remains of ancient cultures –almost always oriental cultures– were mixed with invasions of flowers which, like ivy, overpowered the whole, allowing vestiges of architectural elements to be seen as nostalgic, evocative homages to vanished mythical civilizations.

Thus emerged those botanical cities, conceived like a great «Tree of Babel», as impossible towers which reached up like looming castles, great awesome structures covered with vines and branches. Frequently they were lakeside cities, with pools and lakes that flourished by the vegetation-invaded structures.

In any case, those phantasmagoric, unreal cities, only found in a dream-world, always consisted of fantastical purposeless architecture which evoked the impossible project of the construction of the mythical Tower of Babel. Its proud presence was made manifest through its ascending structures, which for their part, emerged and stood out from a dreamlike Babylonia populated by the most extravagant and picturesque constructions. Conceived, then, as «tree-cities» or «petrified trees», those high towers of vegetation in Babel-like form were presented to us –thanks to the vibrant creative imagination of their maker– like astonishing and fascinating landscapes in the interpretation of dreams, offering for our contemplation such wonderful ziggurats of a fantastic, surreal world.

Those enchanted castles, which rise in the center of these compositions, cloven over the blue of an infinite sky, and separated from ancient Babylonia by the yawning Euphrates. The imposing vastness of those impossible towers furrowed by labyrinth-like channels and strange structures, stand out from the distant metropolis, a city populated everywhere by temples and palaces crowned with fantastic domes and ziggurats. One would say that we were standing before the giant watchtowers of a whimsical Babel, before powerful, disquieting constructions that intertwine, absurdly defying all logic, throwing themselves up against the silent, impressive emptiness of a sleeping city.

The Other Shore, the shore to which the title of this painting makes reference, is none other than that of the impossible and marvellous, the shore of the fantastic and magical, made possible only through the nostalgic evocation of ancient cultures and vanished civilizations.

But when such an unexpected series of dreamy, impossible landscapes seems to have exhausted itself, when through his series *Hecatomb*, those same cities were pastures of fire and apocalyptic destruction, when it seemed that the theme no longer interested the artist; in our times –specifically from the beginning of the decade of the '90s–, this fascinating theme of towers and dreamlike architecture emerges again with greater power and originality, if that be possible. Delving in a futuristic, cosmic direction, he has transformed those leafy labyrinth-like constructions into ascending, defiant, galactic, science fiction towers, structures of a celestial paradise in the air belonging to an interplanetary world of mysterious constellations. The fabulous archaic architecture of his earlier production gives way to these disquieting, futuristic images, to those towers rising from a never-never land, towers that float in space and burst out with arrogance and menace, futuristic constructions that perturb and unnerve us like the premonition of an extraterrestrial world, at once fearful and fascinating. We are before a varied series of lunatic structures, before dreams of a not-too-distant tomorrow, completely dehumanized and removed from reality. The painter shows

again his anguish and uncertainty before an imagined future, forever mutant and enigmatic. A halo of magic and mystery surrounds those fantastic mechanical cities, those spatial towers composed of elements that float and ascend, and which emerge as creations of a visionary, disquieting world.

To these works of new *Impossible Architecture*, Ramiro Tapia adds in this exhibition a selection of his most characteristic works of *Mythical Configurations*, his imposing series titled *Myths and Phantasmagoria*, including all manner of chimeric characters, giants, and legendary creations of fable, as well as a suggestive, varied bestiary.

Having abandoned for a time that extremely interesting series of *Impossible Architecture* which occupied the painter obsessively during the '80s, Ramiro Tapia, possessed of a pessimistic, tragic will, began a new phase around 1986, characterized by the incorporation of mutant beings and giants in all his works. After the hecatomb and the ecological explosion that extinguished the human race, victim of its own civilization and progress, after the destruction of those impossible, geometric cities, incinerated and disintegrated like an apocalyptic premonition, after that convulsion was consumed among the vestiges and ruins of that which once was culture, mutant creatures of a new species emerge as elements of strange faunae that boldly guard the delirium of a new age. Beneath the title *Myths and Phantasmagoria*, a whole world of apocalyptic cyclopes, ogres, giant sauries, and other monstrous creatures materialize from a remote past to take over the earth.

The threat of danger and of nuclear contamination, of war and hunger push his painting down paths of clear symbolization cited in desperation, loneliness, and devastation. From there we find those disquieting beings and nightmarish burdens that seem to carry us back to mythical ages at the beginning of time, malignant beings which join the absurd to the sarcastic, creatures that sow chaos and destruction. A strongly aggressive component dominates all this production, manifesting itself through a fluid, vigorous execution, as well as through the use of intense, dazzling colors.

It is in this series –through profiles and fantasized, re-created forms– that is best appreciated the special evolution of the artist toward more fossilizing textures and symbolizations more and more archaeological. Because, in the final analysis, the theme is a pretext. What really matters is the abstract, philosophical component of these paintings, transformed into a fascinating, profound reflection on myth, and into an exercise in pure symbolic, legendary creation, which intertwines with the best tradition of Fantastical Art.

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