



Journey of a painter

by Roberto Godoy Arcaya

"It is necessary that the eye becomes one with the object in order to contemplate it"

(Plotino, *Enneads*, V)

Behind the visible, the invisible

The eyes and the spatial imagination of the artist when faced with the world that seduces him or her, drag the other senses to merge into a single and unique passion, which directs his or her hands and brushes on the canvas until culminating in the pictorial work. The painter is no longer only himself but on a journey of figurations that penetrate other spaces, times, landscapes and events that he paints as if they had happened within himself, in the instance of a glance. The spectator in front of the finished work is attracted by the immediate visual certainty, the forms and extensions belong to a recognizable reality and have their own aspect, these actions and space resonate in the viewer's daily life.

And something else can be discovered....

The scenes the painter has chosen in his act of becoming one with the painting produce other meanings that radiate from the lines and colours. This time it is invisible to the senses but his mind captures them, to the point of wanting to unravel them. It is the hidden spirit of the work of art which reveals a mystery to the spectator that links to their own being and to that of the creator and his work, prolonging the existence of the image beyond their physical limits. Born from the omens of the gaze, the painting and its pictorial impetus –in front of the spectator– opens the path towards its own revelation.

This is how Guillermo Muñoz Vera, who inhabits his work when painting, generates from a strict realism, sensations that lead to unpredictable thoughts and images. The spectator in front of his work is thus encouraged to go towards invisible presences which do not have a single direction and when the viewer receives these unprecedented contributions in forms and meanings, he returns enriched to the actual painting and from here once again is pushed towards the imaginary. The spirit of this pendulum-like gaze, endless in its interaction, gives Muñoz Vera's realism its full visual value and confirms the presence of the invisible.

A journey through the exhibition

This exhibition is a complex succession of images that define the creative world of Guillermo Muñoz Vera. The text below represents the possible beginnings, a first look at his paintings showing what is not seen, the invisible. Each spectator will be able to enter into the pictorial and poetic adventure being led by their own contemplative spirit.



Two different hues of blue, one that rises from the abyss of the sea and the other that descends from the universe they invade the surface of the ocean, the air and even into a territory that was believed to be the end of the world— towards the tip of South America. On its course, travelling through the continent, the blues begin to change from archipelagos, to rivers, to mountains, to seas, to clouds and to disappearing glaciers. And so this blue space, naked and solitary, abandons its icy purity, mixing with other colors, cold and warm, that tint the green landscape tones of brown, yellow, gray, ocher and purple, without losing its basic essence of the sky and the sea. In this journey, the land begins to be occupied and a habitable world is founded, towns and cities appear.

The menacing elusive waters of the deep dark southern sea invoke both fascination and fear. Even more, this sea produces terror when the furious blowing of the wind lifts the waves to smash onto

the cliffs, reefs, islets and craggy rocks, as if they were possessed of an absorbing desire to swallow, pierce, or destroy the rocky continental limits to transform it into a new extension of the ocean.

And once the waters are calm again, it is the mere presence of the stone fortresses that produce a menacing threat to the calm mirror like water. These immobile black cliffs, towering above, disturb the soul. An overwhelming restlessness comes from being in front of these unyielding verticals that rise to the sky, announcing the unexpected and the terrible, arriving at any moment like the violence of the volatile sea anchored in the dark turbulent abyss. These Fears are born on the journey that our eyes take through these disturbing sea and landscapes.

At the top of one of these cliffs is the “Evangelistas” lighthouse; its intermittent glow indicates land and warns of dangers at night when the sea rages biting violently into the coast. The sea is fiercer when approaching the final tip of South America, the Diego Ramírez archipelago in the Drake Sea, whose lighthouse is today recognized as the Lighthouse at the End of the World where the wind is incessantly violent.

The subtle beam of light from the lighthouses in that area is the only invincible defence that noiselessly, intangibly pierces the immensity of the night, shining through the giant waves, furious wind and thundery sky, protecting the ships and their anxious sailors. The lighthouse’s effective use at night is comparable to various geographic forms, such as Mount Sarmiento, whose resplendent mass in its snowy whiteness is a referential landmark for sailors during sunlight. Silent light from the lighthouse and silent glow from the mountain; one controlled by the solitary and isolated lighthouse keepers, the other, by nature conspiring in a single body; both amaze and guide walkers or sailors, during the day or at night, on the earth or on the sea.

As well as the lighthouse the people living on the shores or on boats have another form of protection. They pray and throw reproductions of saints, crucifixes, deities and mythological beings into the water, which sink to the depths of the fathomless dark sea. In Guillermo Muñoz Vera paintings of the *Moa* of Easter Island and *the Mazara Satyr* the images burst into our vision, thanks to the divers’ lamps, bringing to life the deep blue sea by draping these mythological sculptures with a diffusion of eerie

underwater light. They are fleeting illuminations that when the torch goes out, the darkness will return, the divinities will not rise, will not respond, causing the same hopelessness and fear the sailors feel when the lighthouse stops its flashing light or no longer exists.

There is another look out that warns of an attack from the deep waters of the ocean close to the coast. The sea lions, the penguins, the birds of the sea, all have a psychic instinct, a natural inborn sensory gift that can sense the approaching storms, the furious winds, lightning and torrential rain. In their fear they begin to roar, scream, fly in circles, leaving the coast they sound the alarm for the animals of the forests and mountains that after hearing their cries, they too begin to emit their own cautionary signals. These are the animal sounds in the air that warn the indigenous people that their usual enemy, the enraged and unbeatable sea, is about to go to battle once more.

Muñoz Vera has painted the tree called “Coigüe” (*Nothofagus betuloides*), the last specimen that exists in the southernmost tip of Tierra del Fuego. It is a dramatic image that symbolizes the force of the weather that causes the angry stormy rush of the sea. Thanks to the hardness of its wood and its strong roots no storm has been able to uproot it, but it is constantly crippled by the roar of the winds, little by little its natural span and branches have been deformed, preventing it from rising up to the sky. Bent and hunched over, it has turned into a stiff horizontal tangle of branches that still continue to grow. It is a clear symbol of the fight between natural aggressive forces and those of the earth's resistance, irremediably altered in the landscapes, a beacon in the disappearing flora, fauna and inhabitants.

II

Forging routes through the oceans was the only way for explorers to discover unknown corners of the planet so they could expand their kingdoms, very crucial preparations were necessary, knowledge of navigation with all procedures and instruments with a profound understanding of how to face the rigors of the ocean.

Wise men, scholars, geographers, cartographers and navigators have spent centuries studying the globe, especially everything to do with maritime routes to unknown places and continents. Our painter in his work shows us various aspects of this long analytical research, such as his painting of the astrolabe which was invented by Azarquiel from Toledo, who in 1078 definitively located all the latitudes. Or the painting of the world's first atlas, the "*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*" which was created by Abraham Ortelius and published in 1570, it is where the Pacific Ocean appears for the first time. Muñoz Vera also paints characters such as Fra Mauro in front of his famous 15th century map of the world where America has yet to be discovered. Another one is of two young cosmographers on the deck of a ship, sailing on a crystal clear night they gaze at the Southern Cross and plan their route according to the stars. And finally to the painting of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in his office examining maps, preparing his trip through the Straits of Magellan. Even with these inventions and research most of these navigators will be defeated by the disputing winds and the destructive ocean.

Sarmiento de Gamboa has to reach the Strait of the Madre de Dios, or Strait of Magellan to establish forts and cities. The voyage from Spain was catastrophic and the ships had to face the same fury of the sea suffered by Sebastián Elcano's ship "*Victoria*", the same gigantic onslaughts of waves; Muñoz Vera has masterfully painted Sarmiento de Gamboa's trip, there are two albatrosses flying in the foreground, a sign of good luck at the time, sailors believed that the Albatross carried the souls of dead marines the sighting of one indicated the proximity of unknown lands, the logic being both sailors and birds need dry land on which to rest.

Perhaps thanks to the good luck from the albatrosses Sarmiento finally arrived in a natural harbour nestled between mountains: our painter paints the ship anchored in calm water, at a prudent distance there is a small primitive canoe full of natives who are awe struck by this huge, strange, complex ship from unknown lands able to cross the storm ridden seas. Meanwhile, on the other hand the conquerors inside the ship contemplate with amazement not only the natives in their canoe but the immobile, monumental, mountainous landscape unalterable like those telluric, stony, woody configurations stamped immutably on the faces of the natives like the indigenous woman from insular Patagonia, *Rosa Kauxia*, who has also been immortalized by our painter.

In his painting *"Women in the new world"* Muñoz Vera does not this time paint the faces of the sailors observing the natives and their mountains, but instead the women who have sailed with them. They stand in a group with varying expressions, from pleasure and doubt to prayer, there is a curiosity to see what they see, but it is outside the picture plane. This gives a sensation that anything can happen to them in this unknown land; they must just wait patiently for what may come, maybe something momentous with no limits.

A poet of that time is sitting in profile on a window ledge half his head is facing inside the other is facing into a dark room. He is eloquently describing what he has seen and experienced during his voyage to the shores of America. This action the Greeks called *Ekphrasis*, the verbal description of a visual adventure. Two microphones record the poet as if it were happening today. In this painting, Muñoz Vera reflects simultaneously on two eras and their radically different ways of communication: the ancient and natural and the modern and technological. And so when the poet, sitting in that window, begins to tell his tales, his very same words will be perceived differently by the listener depending whether they are physically inside or outside: in the open air, outside the window, his descriptions will come across as containing more visible imagery, more sensuality, more realism, –while inside the dim room with muffled sound– the perception of his words will become more poetic touching on the invisible.

However, this difference between the outside and the inside disappears when you place two modern microphones in the image. Today, when making a recording of a poet there is no nuance to whether he is inside or outside; it can only be understood as a linear narrative through the waves of communications.



The same sea

In the painting *"Stones of Colmenar"* in deepest Castilla a woman stands motionless, full of plans and dreams she contemplates this extensive arid plain that she sees transformed into a mirror of water until it culminates joining the sky. It is the horizon of an illusory sea that enraptures the woman, filling

her with hope; a mirage of the desert of the soul of one who only wishes to leave her land to go anywhere to fill her own emptiness. Meanwhile, another protagonist –“*Immigrant*”– crosses the Ocean leaving his native land, not in this case for personal spiritual needs, but to find a better life for himself and his family. He is an immigrant on his own adventure –like thousands of others– it is a lonely beach on the other side of the sea that receives him; he hopes to wake from his elusive dream, covered by a blanket, with his face barely visible, hardly able to breathe the air of the earth that will save him.

The woman within her mirage will continue to go to the magical quarry since she already believes that she lives in other distant nations. In “*The woman from Manzanares river*” our painter brings our attention to the sculpture of a woman’s head whose hair is jumbled metallic circles, like gyrations in orbit that cannot depart. She never realised she is beside a real river whose waters flow into a real sea, it’s too late for her to sail away. In another sculpture of another head, the bust of the Roman emperor *Aulus Vitellius*, we see him humiliated with a mop instead of hair, a metaphor of a corrupt man who would not give up his throne until a crowd dragged him through the streets on slaughter hooks to the Tiber River, here they threw him in to be carried out to the sea to rot. Meanwhile, the immigrant who arrived by sea is already in a city, and begs from one Street corner to another, from one church to another; As nightfalls he makes himself a shelter built using cardboard boxes, containers and packaging discarded from shops; inside his makeshift home he sleeps, leaving a small hole to breathe air from the street; every night he dreams of crossing the ocean again to return to his distant land.

They are not seen nor do they come to the surface of the waters, but exist only along the sea bed. In 1956, the first underwater telephone cable was installed across the Atlantic and since then the oceans and seas have been colonised with varying pipelines, tubes, fiber optics and other such things that connect hemispheres, continents, and nations. Muñoz Vera does not paint these hidden installations but just those that emerge out of the sea into the air, such as his pieces “*Wind Farm*” and “*Tierra del Fuego*”: these are industrial structures whose foundations are fixed on the seabed taking natural resources that will be piped to the mainland.

The turbines anchored to the bottom of the ocean rise to its surface, ascending until they culminate in gigantic blades that rotate slowly or quickly depending on the intensity of the wind. When the wind

is fierce it causes ferocious waves and lightning that strikes mercilessly from the sky, the wind roars between the crashing waves circling violently the spinning blades, so violently it seems the wind's energy field will extend beyond the sky. And now to the middle of the sea, the oil platforms in Tierra del Fuego, their immovable chimneys expel into the air the fire of burning gases extracted from oil. When the recurrent furious storms arrive the solitary rig crew must be overwhelmed by the sound and sight of the stormy sea and fiery outbursts from the chimneys but bravely, whatever the weather they never abandon their posts. And now back to the land, the earth from its depths also expels fiery compounds that erupt from craters in a fury suddenly, repeatedly and uncontrollably. Our painter shows us the "*Llaima*" volcano in full outburst, spewing burning rocks, fire, lava, ashes and gases that devastate everything around them, destroying towns, farms and crops.

The Sky

In the painting "*Electronic Fog*" it is twilight, a resident from a building has no mobile phone but only a satellite dish on his window. He remains hidden inside the apartment searching on his computer for ways to communicate with the world and the universe. Outside, a full moon watches over the sky, filled with electronic waves that come and go, invisibly flooding all the space around it, creating an electromagnetic fog and a new technological atmosphere around the planet. Next to this window, in the spire of the church one can see a cross, a wind vane, a protective lightning rod and a sphere that contains the relic of a saint from the 16th century they believed this would drive away the demons that roamed the sky. And so the resident, who may be an old man or a child, is unwittingly protected in his building while still trying to talk to the world and the universe.

Other dangers lurk in the sky, energy is transformed and processed by human hands to destroy and kill. Our painter expresses this in the terrible scene of a missile – "*The BM-21-Grand*" – that is fired rapidly towards an already burning city that will soon be completely raised to the ground. And now our painter takes us to a museum with his painting "*Hollow Men*"; we see armor that is now empty of the soldiers who fought hand to hand combat on the battlefields of the past. Over the years new forms of war have been invented today armored missiles diligently fulfil their missions piercing the night sky burning it with fire and blood.

There are different fiery bodies that pierce the sky and come directly from an unknown place in the universe. They are meteorites that could destroy the Earth if they are not pulverized by earth's atmosphere, a cosmic accident or by direct human intervention to divert their linear approach. These are real and possible defenses that reassures earth's inhabitants, similar to what this statue of the Angel represents, with its wings spread and downward serene gaze, it is as if the Angel is protecting life on our world.

Final

The meteorites that reach Earth, although always a possible threat, also provide us with knowledge about the universe and sidereal time, information that scientists are always searching for to gain a greater understanding of matter and energy.

According to the latest theories and research gathered using those enormous telescopes at observatories, the universe could be composed of 95% dark matter and 5% matter and energy, the portion intelligible to human sense and reason. However, at the same time that attempts are being made to reveal, define and clarify concepts about the universe, all understanding seems to be moving away from human conception, hiding behind a horizon in permanent movement.

And so today we find that the universe is made up of, on the one hand, dark matter and energy (the existence of which is solely approximated by complex mathematical formulas) and on the other hand, visible matter and energy, antimatter, black holes and other subatomic particles that are difficult to understand since they can transform their matter into electromagnetic waves, and vice versa. This is the reason the definitions and concepts of matter and energy continue to baffle scientists to this day

In the realism of Guillermo Muñoz Vera all these mysteries are glimpsed through the materiality of his work that radiates a powerful energy. Paintings that portray rough or calm seas and violent winds, mountains and volcanoes, flora and fauna, impossible journeys and encounters between cultures and their people: these images lead the viewer to wonder and question everything they hide.

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