ALMINE RECH

Pintura liberada

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Some thirty works by more than twenty artists make up this diverse and colourful mosaic of the figurative painting that became a symbol of the new modernity ushered in by Spain's transition to democracy in the 1980s. The tour begins with Eduardo Arroyo and Luis Gordillo, examples of the narrative painting from the previous decade that, especially in the case of Gordillo, served as a point of reference and harbinger of the painting of the 1980s: colourful, dreamlike and tremendously subjective.

The figurative art of the 1980s was also largely the consequence of that produced a decade earlier by the so-called Madrid Schizos, the radical modernity of the young Carlos Alcolea, Chema Cobo, Carlos Franco, Herminio Molero, Guillermo Pérez Villalta and Manolo Quejido, who raised unusual questions in the contemporary figurative sphere, such as the intellectualization of the artistic act or the assertion of painting as part of high culture.

So, a key figure in the development of art in the 1980s was Pérez Villalta, who produced the most extraordinary paintings, characterised by a nuanced light, a calm rhythm and the importance of architectural elements, narration and optical devices.

Another prominent place was occupied by the more passionate and ironic colourists such as Alcolea, a master of composing illusionistic spaces and clever ambiguity; Carlos Franco, who had a particular taste for deformation and allegory; and Chema Cobo, who was interested in effects of perspective and distortion. Brilliant colours and painting as enjoyment were the hallmarks of Aguirre, Albacete and Navarro Baldeweg, also represented in the exhibition.

Miguel Ángel Campano was a special case: a Madrid-born practitioner of Art Informel (a follower of José Guerrero) who lived in Paris in the 1970s and was also part of the figurative rebellion in the 1980s. His work was essential and restrained, mixing classical French references with contemporary gestural painting, severity and charm.

Alfredo Alcaín exemplifies the group's most ironically Pop side. He is represented in the exhibition by one of his characteristic homages to Cézanne's still lifes, based on acid, saturated and vibrant colours. In his case, the reference is not to the original work by the French artist but to a popular version embroidered in petit point. In a similar vein, but less scathing, is the colourful Pop Art of María Luisa Sanz, very Madrilenian with allusions to a typically American comic-strip visual universe reminiscent of Roy Lichtenstein.

Almost all these paintings were produced in Madrid, which acted as a magnet for peripheral art expressions, though, as can be seen in the selection of works, their Andalusian background was fundamental. From Tarifa came the 'mannerist' figurative works of Chema Cobo and Pérez Villalta, marked by the Pop Art of Hockney, Hamilton and Katz in the 1970s. From Málaga, Joaquín de Molina, a cultural agitator and militant Neo-expressionist after his stint in Germany, and Alfonso Albacete, a Mediterranean painter with a style rooted in abstraction. From Seville, in addition to Manolo Quejido, came Alfonso Fraile and Luis Gordillo, explorers of the subconscious and of a figurative art bordering on abstraction. Also Pepe Espaliú, who settled in the Andalusian capital after returning from Paris, contributing to the magazine *Figura* and the activities of the gallery La Máquina Española; and Fernández Lacomba, who was linked to Juana de Aizpuru's gallery.

Catalonia, where abstraction and the painting-painting proposed by the Trama group were most prevalent, gave rise to a new expressionist figurative art through two Mallorcans who are fundamental to this story: Ferrán García Sevilla and Miquel Barceló. The former, who hailed from Barcelona's conceptual scene, expressed himself through a radical style of painting by composing images and signs as in a collage. Barceló officialised his image as a young prodigy when he was selected to take part in Documenta in Kassel in 1982. The artist, who mastered the primitivist side of figurative painting, made a name for himself in 1985 with his solo exhibition at the Palacio de Velázquez in the Retiro.

The Galicians Antón Patiño and Menchu Lamas were also very young members of Atlántica in the early 1980s. They were painters who brought together their expressionist and conceptual sides in their works through intense colours, schematic figures and a powerful blend of local and foreign. They are as impetuous as the hybrid and postmodern images of Patricia Gadea and Juan Ugalde.

In conclusion, the exhibition sets out to address in an unprejudiced way the abovementioned artists' vindication of painterly painting, establishing a dialogue that is highly illustrative for spectators as it reveals affinities and dissonances between the different figurative trends of the time. Young and not so young artists, possessed by the gods of painting, by the pleasure of painting.