

EDGAR INSUASTY: A JOURNEY TOWARDS THE VISCERAL
BY CARLOS FAJARDO*.

A symbol is an object from the known world, suggesting something unknown; it is the known expressing the life and meaning of the inexpressible.

Edgar Insuasty (Pasto, Colombia, 1972) moves towards the spiritual matter, and his work traces a mysterious threshold between symbolic figuration and geometric abstractionism. He places a rhythmic, anthropological iconography, whose roots can be found in the cultural hybridisation from where he comes from. The work with diverse materials, organic (wood, coffee, etc.) and inorganic (metal, wires, clay, latex, fabric, etc.), creates a symbolism full of provocation and contrast that dialogues with conceptual art which traverses surreal spaces and abstract and figurative expressionism.

In his installations and sculptures, Insuasty projects an image of death represented in the earthly, the sinkhole, the tomb (see, for example, "Socavón y Conteo" -2000- "Cadáver"- 1999-, "Claustrophobia" -1999-). They are isomorphic isotopies where the theme of the burial, of the sepulchre, as a maternal womb and sarcophagus, closed and circular, is frequent, which creates a claustrophobic atmosphere in the paintings. As an ancestral indigenous space, the tomb is both annihilation and maternal protection, an erotic feminine symbol, a nuptial abode. Thus we find a relationship with the house, a place that provides security from the outside, a paradise or place of rest, peace, and tranquillity.

The work of this artist places us in atmospheres of the terrible and the grotesque. Where the visceral, the sanguine, is revealed as a permanent event. He deconstructs anecdotal art, proceeds to establish the invention of the emblematic, which more than recreating, provokes, invokes, subverts the eye with the horror of beauty. The ferocious petrifies us when we observe the installation ADDIS (2000). The figure of a child, with its stitched lips, moves us with its heartbreaking tenderness. In the artist's own words, "Addis is the name of a child from Sarajevo whose body was hit by a butterfly bomb specialised for children. Addis's face, partially disfigured, was reconstructed in Italy. By overlapping layers of latex on the image of the child printed on acetate, I make the marks of misfortune disappear until the blurred idea of an anonymous face remains, and so on, until the same image is produced twelve times, which is finally arranged in the form of a cubicle illuminated from the inside. You can read on the lower part of the piece: 'Innocence does not imply protection'". (See, Museo Virtual de Arte- Universidad de Nariño-, web page). There is no space for placid reverie; there is no silence for tranquillity and false happiness; only a projection towards the abyss exposed as a heartbreaking emptiness. An organic and metaphysical work at the same time, full of shuddering, raising awareness on a condition of suffering.

Apparently, Insuasty works from contrasts, ambivalences, perhaps carnivalising death, the splendour of the earth and its fire. He fuses tenderness and violence, aggressiveness and caress, skin and stone. The union of these opposites provokes repulsion and attraction. Diverse objects form a living, flowing, and ambiguous aesthetic organism. Between being and being, his work shows us the inner flows: blood, plasma, water, semen, hearts exposed like hanging flames, weightless (see Exodus, installation, 1999). Eros and Thanatos were singing in a unison chorus, inventing the rites of birth

and destruction. The beautiful and the sinister, horror and beauty. Such is the case of the installation "The closed circle of the seamstress" (2002), in which the figure of a beautiful naked woman, exposed on a weaver's drum, seduces us on the first impact, but when we dwell on its details, we realise that it is a corpse that has undergone a sinister autopsy. Rilke's terrible angel could not be more accurate and insinuating here.

footnotes: The artist comments on this work: "There are bodies that never stop beating - they remain - and there are also those that stop - they emigrate. Apparently, the difference between life and death is the constant movement that mediates and makes action possible; what seems eternal becomes fragile over time, even in its palpitation. The fragility of the body is the constant of a society in crisis. Two illuminated hearts are the prototype of the illusion - escape - ironically disfigured. Fleeing from barbarism or from ourselves makes us fragile despite our resistance. This elementary piece evokes the irony of illusion; here, the suture is the fallacy of oblivion". (Museo Virtual de Arte-Universidad de Nariño-, web page).

As a projection of this range of ambiguous forms and figures, Insuasty reveals migrants-immigrants, dark and tragic side. In his project entitled "Pateras," the obsession with showing the tragic adventure of a journey of no return becomes pathetic. Beyond painting the anecdote of the nomadic African immigrant to Spanish lands, Insuasty tackles the symbol of emptiness in its nakedness, the boat on the shocking cartography of the sea, a sign of death and failed utopia; an emblem of a journey of no return. Once again, the beautiful and the terrible made horrific. These paintings, painted with warm, aquatic colours: green, pink, and matt tones, hint nevertheless, of an atmosphere of decay represented by the flies that surround these boats heading towards nothingness. In the immensity of the ocean, in a topography

of the abyss, Insuasty situates his dead boats, with a wandering solitude, without any horizon. His geometric figuration merges with the plasticity of marine colours. The infinitude of the sublime becomes the delirium of death. And water is the isotopy that marks the icons of the ships. His "Pateras" are coffins that transport the hearts of the dead. A certain "Charon Complex," according to Gaston Bachelard's words, navigates these paintings where the boat symbolises both the cradle and the grave, the womb and nothingness, maternity and mortality, inclusion and expulsion, the vaginal and phallic power. The dream of the immigrant is revealed as ambiguous, chaotic. A journey of no return is proposed in a boat of birth and mortality, fecundity, and exile.

Between 2001 and 2003, the painter worked on a series of drawings with mixed techniques of oil and graphite on paper. His insistent concern with the anthropological ancestral is striking. Zoomorphic, phallic and vaginal figures establish a mythical-mystical dialogue (Sketch I, II, III). Anthropophagous representations that engage in a frank battle with matter and flesh. Teeth that evoke death; teeth that can manifest laughter or tearing, joy or pain. The opposites leap out once again in front of the astonished spectator. In his paintings "Laugh" I, II (2002), the face of a child becomes the face of fear or joy. In most of his works, the irregular linearity of these jagged teeth manifests the imagery of the toothed devouring vagina, metaphorising the most primal passions of eroticism, the subterranean secrets of female extermination and procreation. It is a foundation of a sexual and erotic rite drawn in ochre, earthy, tubercular colours. This approach to the anthropophagous devouring rite is one of the obsessions in his work: it is a way of expressing human intimacy and its sufferings.

His environments of the biting, of the animalistic, that express aggressiveness, cruelty and hostility. While his devouring and terrible jaws, build an iconography of disturbing cannibalism linked to the bite of destructive time, an anthropophagous time, a devastating evil. In his series "Dentellada" (2003), the imaginary places us in a terrifying vision linked to the bestial. The isomorphic relations are marked in this insinuating painting. Connections are glimpsed between the sexual womb and the digestive womb, between the erotic and the chewing, Eros and Cronos, the sensation of jaws that transmute into sex.

In this way, the artist makes us aware of the perpetual destruction-creation of our body; he presents us with a metaphor of existence; he seduces us with his insinuating anthropological symbolism. Nothing here is petrified. Everything flows; it is mobility, a sign that debates in a volatile rhythm like life. The painting thus takes up again its original way of provoking and insinuating a problem from its interiority. Abstract figuration disenthrones the superficial and demands a symbolic hermeneutic, which opens up spaces for poetic reverie. In itself, this painting is the intimate sister of poetry; it makes the invisible visible, deciphers the indecipherable, communicates the incommunicable, and dives into a mundane immanence, finding there with a profound metaphorical drive, the marvellous and the grace in the misfortune of the real. The eye sees not only presences but also something hidden behind insinuating veils. These are the spaces that the artist offers to the spectator to construct his own misdirection or an encounter with himself.

His art establishes an enchanted and disenchanting visual universe, realistic and imaginative, where matter is spiritualised, finding the sacred, an aura in the secular reality. This artist could well enunciate the phrase of the Argentinian poet Enrique Molina: "divinity is in things"; or, in the words of

Chagall, he shows us "the ghostly aspect of things that only a few people see." To the terrestrial, he gives aesthetic dignity, extracting from inanimate objects a metaphorical anima (See the installation "Pueblo Feroz - 2002, and his action-work "Last Dead Butterflies"- 2000).

footnote: About the action-work "Last Dead Butterflies," Edgar Insuasty states: "Five per minute is the figure that statistically corresponds to the number of people who fall dead under the syndrome of violence in Colombia. Now I am on the other side, in another country, and this distant situation, like for many others, sounds exaggerated to me. The fallen "dolls" are like butterflies hunted for insectaries, the insectary that is this country. I cook thousands of butterflies in coffee, coffee filters that, when opened, suggest winged forms.

On the final terrace of a five-storey building in Palos de la Frontera Street, I place piles of cooked filters that dry in the wind and the sun and spread all over the floor, playing at fighting to get out of the barriers that are the cement walls that separate us from the abyss.

Some manage to get out, and they emigrate. Those who stay behind are captured and placed on a styrofoam board in the manner of an enormous cemetery, the holy field that nations tend to become. This action-work wants to reflect these aspects. The delicacy of the butterfly wings suggests the innate fragility of human beings and their relationship with the harshness of the chaos that increases as uncontrolled overpopulations increase" (Museo Virtual de Arte- Universidad de Nariño web page).

Insuasty's painting rescues, with its earthly force, the cultural energies in constant transformation and pilgrimage. His work is telluric, sustained from the erotic, the sacred, and the profane, inquiring into the significance of our deepest and most secret imaginaries. The Metaphor is his universe, a poetic

singularity, his highest aesthetic gain. A painting that unites the instinctive-sensory with abstractionism-symbolism; the ancient roots of ancestral images of a mythical-sacred unconscious, with a psychic geometric abstraction. Thus, planes, lines, squares, rectangles, and circles dialogue with asymmetrical, voluble, volatile, chaotic forms, building a mixed imagery with primitive and modern urban archetypes. His work provokes a state of sensorial reminiscence in the observer, as it sends him back to "ghosts" archived in the memory while making them aware of the desacralisation and disenchantment produced by instrumental reason in the contemporary world; the origin of the sensation of mystery, terror, and miracle that his work produces in us.

In these searches, Insuasty took advantage of avant-garde experimentalism by introducing chance as a creative possibility. Paul Klee wrote: "Make chance essential," and Edgar Insuasty assumes, as an initial exploratory attitude, the fruitful gain of chance, until he finds unique techniques, unusual and original forms which, in his terrace-workshop in Palos de la Frontera Street in Madrid, he has been able to discover and achieve. Like the vision Max Ernst had in 1925 when he contemplated the floor marked by thousands of scratches, on which Ernst said, "I made a series of drawings of the tiles by throwing sheets".

foot note: Max Ernst continues: "When I laid my eyes on the result, I was stunned with a sudden sharp sensation of hallucinatory series of overlapping and contrasting drawings."

An intimate-interior and communitarian-exterior work, aware of the disintegration and fragmentation of reality in today's world and the expulsion of the realms of the real - hence its abstract and figurative fatalism - but, at the same time, seeking to conquer, in this ontic-gnoseological void, the poetic

sense of the existing, the beauty of the terrible that, in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, we humans "can still endure."

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His published works include *Origen de Silencios*. Fundación Banco de Estado, Popayán (1981), *Serenidad Sitiada*, Si Mañana Despierto Ediciones, Bogotá (1990), *Veraneras*, Antonio Llanos Poetry Prize, Si Mañana Despierto Ediciones, Santafé de Bogotá (1995), *Atlas de callejerías*. Trilce Editores, Santafé de Bogotá (1997), *Charlas a la Intemperie*. INCCA University in Colombia, 2000. *Aesthetics and postmodernity. Nuevos contextos y sensibilidades*, Editorial Abya-yala, Quito, Ecuador, 2001, *Tierra de Sol*, Jorge Isaacs Poetry Prize, Gobernación del Valle del Cauca, 2003, the anthology of his poetry entitled *Serenidad Sitiada*, Universidad del Valle, 2004, and several essays in specialised magazines and national and international newspapers.

His poems and essays have been translated into English, Italian, and Portuguese. Winner of the Antonio Llanos Poetry Prize, Santiago de Cali 1991; second prize in the First National Poetry Competition ICFES, 1984; Honourable Mention in the Jorge Isaacs Prize 1996 and 1997; Honourable Mention in the City of Bogotá Prize, 1994. He was awarded the Jorge Isaacs Poetry Prize in December 2003.

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