NARRATIVE PAINTING TODAY: FOCUSING ON THE BROADER NARRATIVES THAT INFLUENCES OUR PERSONAL HISTORIES

We think, we talk, we look, we write, we draw, we paint, we touch, we speak, we read, we dream, we think, we write, dream, paint, build....

The contemporary artist is the modern nomad who explores global issues searching for the meaning of life in the 21st century. The artist is defined by the concept of the nomad, the explorer, the traveler, the transient, where borders have almost ceased to exist. They are the modern ethnographers that go on site to expand and research on the world and to materialize it in their art. National identity is becoming less relevant in terms of identity in this new age of digital communication. The modern world is reconfigured through the infinite eyes of the web. It’s never been so easy to pass through cities, countries and continents. It seems that in the near future personal identity will be defined by personal history rather than by nationality or language spoken.

The paintings featuring in this exhibition are inspired by real and invented tales decoding personal narrative and auto-fiction through visual means. They use personal history as a story-telling device. They reflect around the ideas of nonlinear narratives where time is explored in medias res. This process conveys the disjointed narrative of remembered dreams, where the real and the fictive spaces are confused and blurry, with only the illusion of reality. Some of the paintings explore how text and image can weave between themselves: the text interacts with and stimulates the image as the image stimulates the text. I want to suggest the connection between the written word, colors and figuration. I use a variety of idioms and languages to open pathways and to bring ideas of multiculturalism and globalization to the foreground.

The paint and the line carry the psychological drama of the subjects together with areas of gestural paint on the surface, both transcending the literal and linear interpretation that the scene exposes. Most of the paintings in the series ‘Woman Alive’ are self-portraits reaching out for the underlying personal struggle. The artist/subject is extracted from her/his relationship to reality, revealing the true reality of the painting through the physicality of the brushstrokes. The act of painting brings together all the elements; the thought, the emotions, the personal psychology, the state of mind and the gesture. It materializes the sensorial within the action of doing it. The paint conveys the artist’s state of mind; whether it’s a disjointed more aggressive gesture or it’s antagonist; a softer more detailed and precise gesture.

‘Que Sera Votre Vie?’ is executed on a relatively large scale and depicts the path of an ongoing, life-changing journey of self-discovery and self-identification; it is
drawn to penetrate the viewer’s inner questioning. The subject is the struggle, the joy, the emotion that arises from the search of meaning and truth. It documents and celebrates the artistic process in the studio while creating a double dialogue with old masters*. In that particular painting, I represent myself and/or my symbolic alter-ego, as Courbet (*) represents himself in his L’Atelier du Peintre. Instead of painting a landscape, I am painting a version of Cézanne’s (**) La Femme Etranglée (*Courbet: L’Atelier du Peintre 1854/1855, Musée D’Orsay/ **Cézanne: La Femme Etranglée 1875/1876, Musée d’Orsay). In my version of Courbet’s painting, I portray myself painting with my left hand; the inspirational muse in the nude is replaced by my two year old son. In some of the works, I portray myself from the rear, either thinking or in the act of painting, it alludes to the seventeen century Dutch painter Vermeer (*** in his painting The Act of painting (***Vermeer, The Act of Painting, 1662-1668, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

In visual art there are almost as many stories and interpretations as there are viewers. The spectator is an active character; he is free to find his/her own order to the narrative of the painting. He fills in the gaps and create his own personal story. At the same time, I attempt to reveal to the viewer their own presence in the painting. The composition, the geometry, the use of space and the colors hold everything together to open the paths for the viewer to enter in the painting; as an appropriation.

Neo-narrative paintings exploit the full spectrum of an image. Today’s artists don’t have to relate to religious tales or references to paint their images. They can open the idea of story telling through the absence of story while focusing on what is missing or hidden rather than on what is being ‘seen’. The underlying subject is the actual subject of the painting. Expressing the absence, what is behind the painting, the characters. What drives the artists behind the scene? Where lies the secrets of the painting, the unspoken drama?

Showing and telling stories through art and paintings in particular has never ceased to exist. Stories open to the viewer the inner world of the artist/creator and therefore he will relate to it. The means of the actual painting and the visual challenges of the depiction of the story will give the viewer the outlet he searches for in art.

Drama, tragedy, fiction in the literary sense is a way to present a personal approach to revealing one’s struggle, in the way auto-fiction concentrates on the particular as a means to serve a more global purpose. Visual narration edifies and elevates the viewer across a broader spectrum. The artists can use historical associations and/or personal life events to unravel his/her unique story onto the canvas. Rather than falling into narcissism, it explores the particular to express the universal.