

EDUARDO GRUBER. *The Room of Mirrors*

Drawing, graphite, paper. The idea and process in Eduardo Gruber

“It is possible to classify drawings according to the intent and intention that guides them. Drawings done by architects are unmistakable because they indicate a place and highlight lines that encapsulate volumes, real or imagined architectures. Drawings done by sculptors focus on an interest, or on a condition: weight, strength, volume; or in its absence: lightness, synthesis, hollow. In drawings done by painters, we can see an idea emerging in the form of sketches or outlines.

The drawings done by Eduardo Gruber (Santander, 1949) are special because they encompass the whole work process. They start with a motive, often borrowed but appropriated, and the piece of art then unfolds and develops from this motive. He draws, writes, adds and subtracts, in search of the ideal scale. Only when using watercolours does he proceed in a light and precise manner, clean and accurate. He is always daring and agile, transporting the spectator to this desired image that contains quests and tracks. Many of his drawings express a cinematographic rhythm or resemble intense short stories or long fictionalized sagas. Sometimes his pieces are small, but occasionally he produces murals, in any case, his pieces are always enigmatic, mysterious, confessional, subtle.

The Room of Mirrors brings together his recent works on paper, in these pieces line, text and graphical symbols coexist. The exhibition starts with a reflection on chance, this fine mirror that separates or unites reality and fantasy, violence and tranquility. Just like in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. A book of books unfolds, the result of noting down those books from his library, with an apparent and sincere carelessness; passionate portraits of writers, a subtle yet evocative story of shadows, and a strange exquisite *cadaver*. Next to these, you will find a magical mural, just in case you may have been led to believe that drawing was a fleeting or temporary occupation, or one that is done at intervals.

The exhibition ends with a series called *Femme Fatal*, in which Gruber uses police files, which he came across almost by chance, to update portraits and hint at new lives, by going through the mirror of reality. There is a lot of Carroll, an inventor of stories, and even a romantic fabulist in this work. Perhaps that is why the exhibition opens with a swan taking flight, on the verge of being devoured, being shot at by alpaca cutlery. “Twist the neck of the deceptive swan / whose white in the fountain seems unreal’ wrote the poet, but that is a whole other story, and perhaps, a whole other exhibition.”

Miguel Fernández-Cid

Exhibition curator

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A Creational Moment

“Jan Asselijn and Carl Orff have nothing in common. Jan was a Dutch Baroque painter from the seventeenth century, while Carl Orff was a German composer from the twentieth century who formed part of the musical neoclassicism movement.

Artists tend to be remembered by the legacy that they leave behind them through their works. The artistic sensibility of others is what allows their work to become immortal. Perhaps both artists did have one thing in common; they were both artists of one single piece of work. In reality, we know that both of them produced numerous pieces of work, but while Jan Asselijn is known for the magnetism of his painting, *The Threatened Swan*, Carl Orff found his alter ego, his equal, and practically his pseudonym in *Carmina Burana*.

I remember visiting the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam many years ago. I was visiting for a fundamental reason: I wanted to look closely at *Early Age*, a self-portrait of a young Rembrandt as I was going to discuss it in a chapter of the novel *El devorador íntimo* which I was writing at that time. And, as often happens when you visit a museum, without really knowing why, I found myself engrossed in the painting of *The Threatened Swan*, which from that very moment became one of my favourite paintings, and since that day, the image of this powerful painting has had a permanent place on the wall in the corner of my studio, alongside other clippings and notes.

Everything, absolutely everything that surrounds you in your studio will influence your work one way or another. Two years ago, my eyes looked at the swan in a different way, and as my work motto has always been, ‘if you have a good idea and you can do it, do it’, that is exactly what I did. My initial idea was to make a natural-sized sculpture of the *Threatened Swan* as portrayed in this painting. In the world of art, or more specifically, in the world of artists, chance occurrences can often have a significant impact on the final result of a piece, and this is a good example of this. Painting while listening to music is very common in studios. That day, the image of the *Threatened Swan* and the music of *Carmina Burana* aligned like two stars. In that instant, the image of the swan led me to recall something that I had once read about Orff’s work. Carl used a collection of Goliard songs from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as his inspiration, choosing a series of raw songs for soloists and choirs at random, which, when accompanied by instruments and magical images, allowed the listener to experience music as a primitive and overwhelming force.

One of the Goliard songs, which is perhaps most representative of *Carmina Burana* is the *Cignus ustus cantat*:

...Once on placid lake I floated,
Once I of great beauty boasted,
A snow-white swan...
Look served up on a platter
My bones the diners scatter
Their teeth gnash, mash, gash...

The swan complains with a certain comical tone, which is rather surprising in a twelfth century text. *Ten diners* is a vocational sculpture, in which the swan is the victim of violence and this is used as a metaphor for the frequent ignoble relationship that exists between humankind and nature.”

Eduardo Gruber