

TITIAN'S POESIE: AN OASIS OF FREEDOM BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL.

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The exhibition on Titian's Poesie at El Prado represents a stellar example of how art flourishes at its best when the necessary spaces of freedom and independence are provided for genius to expand its creativity without the moral limits that govern human relationships in the real world. This is essential to understand the meaning of a work of art, which, is perfectly highlighted throughout the exhibition. In this sense, we can only rejoice that an institution like El Prado has long prioritized the formulation of artistic scenarios coherent with its collection, for the pure enjoyment and delight of the viewer, as opposed to the very current trend of choosing content conceptually in line with today's values considered socially correct.

The evolution of the visual arts has progressed throughout history because society, at a given moment, has known how to value the independence of the artist in the choice and treatment of the represented themes. This is despite the fact that they may be interpreted as authentic acts of provocation, not exempt from controversy, as they go against technical conventions and the dominant social morality. The cultured viewer, who observes the work with the enrichment provided by art history, or the one who immediately feels captivated by its timeless beauty, both transcend the world of the real to enter the imaginary, where there is no room for prejudices, and only the order created by artistic genius prevails.

Every masterpiece is the result of an act of inspiration in which its creator synchronizes the intimate process of the birth of a concept or idea with the skill of its representation on the canvas. This act, to be genius, must be eminently free. Undoubtedly, this exercise of the artist's freedom has occurred more in some genres and historical periods than in others, with the artist often having to adapt to the decorum, taste, and morality of each era to survive.

But if there is something that distinguishes genius from the rest of mortals, it is their independence of judgment, an indispensable value to create new aesthetic solutions, new pictorial treatments that deviate from the conventional, even in genres not prone to innovation such as portraiture, religious painting, or historical painting.

The paintings with mythological themes currently exhibited in the Prado, whose origin in its most sensual form can be found in Titian's poesies, represent a true oasis of artistic freedom in a world constrained by principles, models, canons, and traditions that dominated both the real life and the pictorial realm. This type of painting, by narrating the most human passions of Greek gods, particularly fosters the outbreak of that creative freedom inherent in genius, which could only unfold without restrictions in works created for the private rooms or hunting lodges of kings.

In this sense, it never ceases to amaze us that in a cultural sphere so theocentric as that of the Spanish Habsburg Monarchy, such groundbreaking art could emerge. This speaks about the level of artistic sensitivity of these patron kings, to whom homage should be paid for knowing how to discern the purely artistic side of these works without passing judgment on the stories they represented, separating the public from the private side.

A full-fledged lesson for today's world, so prone to promoting actions aimed at emphasizing the new prevailing morality, leaving little space for artistic expressions that foster contrary thoughts, even when they are products of a different sociocultural environment. An example of this lack of artistic tolerance is the criticism that sometimes arises when art deals with something as natural and inherent to humanity as carnal love and how the beauty of youth is an object of desire. This content appears continuously in this exhibition and, fortunately, has not been the subject of any criticism, probably due to the respect deserved by the represented artists.

Visitors who contemplate the works, immersed in an imaginary world, find themselves naturally fascinated by images that represent some of the most provocative acts, accepting them as normal. They experience the illusion of a magical reality that art provides, even though many of them might have condemned such acts in the real world. Some might even be surprised by an intimate and uncontrollable attraction, excusable when revealed by Art that opens the way to tolerance and a world with its own rules evolving parallel to the real one, through the assimilation, rejection, and overcoming of its own rules to recreate new scenarios that elicit aesthetic sensations in the viewer.

From ancient Greece and especially during the Renaissance, when art focused on humanity, eroticism has been, albeit more or less veiled, one of the main leitmotifs of art. In this sense, the passions expressed in these works are intimately linked to the lack of rationality of the stimuli that nest in humans when they feel overwhelmed by love, a love represented in its

most carnal form. These passions that are described through pictorial art invites one to experience sensations, evoke atmospheres, and feel the emotional states of these gods. It is an art dominated by the correspondence that the painter suggests between the touch of the corporeal and the human image in its most intimate relationship with desire—a constant that appears as something alive in each of these works and obsesses the genius, who, like a sorcerer, imparts his own spirit to the forms.

Titian's Poesie mark a turning point in the history of painting, as they describe the mythological adventures of the gods in an absolutely human way for the first time. They delve into the various moods a person experiences when overwhelmed by love. Jealousy, the feeling of loss, sexual impulse, the delirium caused by love—a carnal love at the opposite end of platonic love. Human feelings had never been treated with such freedom, both in the choice of an allegorical language intended to represent passions under the veil of a mythological story freely selected by the painter and in the form of its pictorial execution. This conjunction is not coincidental, as genius finds the best breeding ground for inspiration in the respect for its autonomy as an artist.

At this point, I allow myself to point out some of the deficiencies of this exhibition, such as the lack of homogeneity in the selection of certain works accompanying Titian's poesie, especially those from the French school. I don't see them in line with the spirit of this artistic series, which is sensual and intimately connected to the contradictory feelings that the beauty of human body evokes. This detracts clarity from the message and impact on the viewer. The beginning of the journey is not without provocation and serves well to introduce the concept, although, in my opinion, it would have significantly improved if the Venus by Allori, of lesser artistic value, had been replaced by a vertical-format work by Rubens, such as "The Three Graces" or "Ganymede", for example. The introduction would have gained immediacy and featured an emblematic work by Rubens, the clear alter ego of Titian, throughout the exhibition. However, I found the placement of the Venus of Cnidus in the center of the first room very appropriate, acknowledging the classical origin of Titian's artistic sources and the mythological narrative itself. The juxtaposition of Titian's reclining Venus from the Prado and Cupid Kissing Venus, a copy of an original by Michelangelo, was also well conceived. On one hand, they both display the sensual spirit of the presented discourse, and on the other hand, they represent the confrontation of the two master artistic directions that dominated the "Cinquecento": the Venetian, where "color" prevails over

"design", and the Roman, where the line prevails over color—the atmospheric painting versus the sculptural, a crossroads heralding the awakening of modernity.

Within this ensemble of masterpieces, the works of Titian and Rubens stand out prominently over the rest of the paintings, which act as mere supporting characters in their discursive line. Notably absent, to the point of being the great omission, is Velázquez's "Rockeby Venus" which, by right, should have occupied the place of "Las Hilanderas" which in spite its unparalleled beauty, I consider its connection to the core narrative somewhat forced, except for the fact that it represents a passion—the vengeance in the myth of "Arachne." Imagine the impression that the "Rokeby Venus" would have made, occupying the central axis of the room, flanked by Titian's Poetries. A Venus with an undeniable Venetian accent that glosses over narcissism, the state of tranquil fascination of a woman with her own face, displaying the cold and unattainable beauty of a woman's body in a resting position. Velázquez would have then participated on an equal footing in this struggle of titans for the pictorial representation of the beauty of the human figure, contributing his unique nude. The Prado would have thus culminated in an unparalleled comparative view of the three painters who form the most revolutionary apex in the history of painting—Titian, Rubens, and Velázquez—as precursors to Goya, Delacroix, and the Impressionists. This bias configures the pinnacle of figurative painting where the magical interaction between the natural and the illusion of reality in pictorial space is achieved to express what is not seen: the human emotional states with which the viewer identifies.

The feeling of total surrender and ecstasy in pleasure, so present in Titian's representation of "Danae", painted with extreme delicacy, in a sensual pose of careful languor. The fear of losing a loved person in "Venus and Adonis", whose drama Titian magnifies by creating one of his most dynamic compositions. The sentiment of modesty that Diana feels when discovered naked by Actaeon and the sense of betrayal and revenge expressed by Venus toward Callisto—both scenes by Titian, which, due to their similar diction, form a perfect pair. They constitute one of the most beautiful artistic ensembles in the history of painting, thanks to their perfect composition framing a symphony of colors and forms, highly evocative. The "greige" tone of the architectural landscape literally merges with the ultramarine blue of the sky, creating the best of scenarios where the bodies of the nymph's camp with exquisite delicacy and naturalness, grouped in vivid and intimate closeness with suggestive tactile and olfactory connotations. From this emerges the beautiful Actaeon, notably enhanced

by a curtain of pink-salmon tone that abruptly cuts the scene to characterize the inherent surprising effect of the myth. Infatuation, like that emotional state of bewilderment so well described by Titian in the gaze of Zeus transformed into a bull in "The Rape of Europa," copied by Rubens and recreated by Velázquez in the background of "Las Hilanderas". The latter demonstrates the mastery of the Venetian genius in the interplay of color transparencies, executed with the extremely free technique of his late period, allowing him to configure a composition diagonally of unlimited depth. In it, the sea blends with the clouds under a sparkling light, giving the scene a sense of airy movement required by the myth and the evocation of unbridled love. In all these works, Titian unfolds his boldest, increasingly modern technique of prioritizing color over line, the prevalence of visual sensation over material reality. He uses increasingly loose and expressive brushstrokes to recreate the illusion of touch on vermilion velvet or the soft, pearly skin of his Venus in contrast to the roughness of the ocher skin of the satyrs. Throughout his work, there is a special sweetness, a gentle breeze, a still Renaissance balance that takes time to fade away—an "allegro ma non troppo" movement, beauty still reminiscent of classical canons. In Titian, there is no excess, only moderation, although the change of rhythm is already hinted at.

As Titian's alter ego, Rubens painting is dominated by movement, manifesting both in the dynamism of composition and the energy of his style with very material brushstrokes. Rubens represents the exuberance of forms, the extravagance of pictorial resources, the joy of life, titanic strength, baroque in its splendor. The small painting representing "the dance of villagers and mythological characters" stands out for the intensity of its circular movement, creating a sensation of vertigo, typical of the state of intoxication and sexual desire of its protagonists who are carried away with frenzy by the rhythm of the music. "The Three Graces" from the Prado, a masterpiece among his masterpieces, shows how Rubens chose in this case a delicate, rhythmic, cheerful but not intense movement to represent the female body in all its aspects. He takes great care in the treatment of the skin, a true cornerstone of his artistic vision of women, through which, with the interplay of light, he manages to recreate the opulence of his highly original incarnations that give a sinuous corporeality to the female body, turned by the artist into the stereotype of Nordic beauty.

To wonder through an exhibition like the one offered today by the Prado, filled with masterpieces of Western painting that recreate something as intimate and intrinsic to the human being as the feeling of delirium in their romantic relationships, represents a unique and ideal opportunity to escape

the boredom that invades us in a world as dehumanized as the present one. It is a way to transcend the daily monotony, to sidestep the continuous hammering of modernity, to elevate our thoughts, and even to sublimate our most secret internal stimuli. In essence, it is a way to purify ourselves; we just have to let ourselves be transported to the universe of the imaginary, to that paradise where the sense of good and evil has no place, to participate in that "Voyage to Cythera" so well described by Watteau, falling under the spell of Art, the world of illusion that delights us with its forms and colors, provoking sensations to momentarily free us from the constraints of convention. An instant, yes, just a moment, but a moment that remains indelible in memory, enriching us and making life more bearable.

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