

# **BUGALLO, THE POETRY OF TRAGEDY**

**"Painting is poetry that can be seen."**

**Leonardo Da Vinci**

**"How to reach sacredness without losing humanity?"**

**Luis Caballero**

**In Memoriam.**

## **GERICAULT-BUGALLO: ABOUT THE DIMENSION OF PAINTING**

As if he had interpreted the emotion of Gericault and the impulse that moved the artist to choose the tragedy of the Medusa as a theme and paint it on a huge canvas, the American contemporary painter Marc Rothko said: "I make very big paintings. I know that, historically, the objective of big paintings is painting something great and pompous. But if I paint them, it is precisely because I want to be near, to be very human" [...] "Painting a small picture is to put oneself outside the feelings [...] When you paint big paintings you are inside."<sup>1</sup> Francisco Bugallo chose to paint in big dimensions.

When talking about the size and the powerful foreground of the raft and its occupants in Gericault's painting, Delacroix felt that, as he wrote in a letter to a friend, that one was about to set foot in the water, or to be splashed by the rough sea around the scene of the drifting raft. And, in fact, when Gericault learned about the terrible story of the shipwreck of the frigate Medusa, the first thing he did was going out and buying a huge canvas in order to paint it. His project was triggered by the commotion he felt before the painful reality that a group of men, who were unknown to him but were his fellowmen, had just gone through. His imagination and his sensitivity get into action to create a vision that is more extraordinary than the account; that surpasses the story value and acquires the power of a symbol.

From the crudeness of the circumstances revealed by the survivors, as the many sketches he left testify, Gericault selects an episode that does not only convey horror and desolation, such as the episodes of cannibalism that in fact took place during the hazardous trip, or the ones that show impotence and fear, like the scenes of sheer madness or the rising of seamen against officials that caused the mass killing of ones against the others on the day after the raft was separated from the lifeboats that were dragging it.

The moment he chose is when after 14 days adrift there only 15 survivors left, 5 of them dying, from the 150 passengers that went on the raft. It is a moment of the emotion, the happiness and the hope of those who saw, in the distance, over the horizon, the sails of a ship that might rescue them, as in fact happened a few hours later. It is the moment when they have just seen the *Argos* but are not sure yet if the ship will come and get them. Generosity is back, as we see through the man that turns to those behind him and, stretching his arm to the ship he has just discovered, seems to cheer them up by sharing the good news with them. Also solidarity, when one of the characters moves the body of another who, prostrated with pain, doesn't even have the strength to look up. But it is also the moment of tragic and infinite sadness when the old man who, plunged into grief, his eyes lost in space, holds tightly to the dead body of his son. Like in one of the images of the *Pieta* that the great masters in the history of painting have left us, the man motionless holding his immense grief in his arms, his son's corpse leaning against him, remains undaunted, unperturbed before the happiness and the excitement of those who wave white and colored rags trying to be seen.

Gericault manages to make of this episode, that could have been otherwise a simple anecdote for the red chronicles, a great "epistemologic metaphor" of reality, in the words of Umberto Eco. It is the revelation of change itself, which is as Life, and even in death, an unceasing vital stream, Nietzsche would say, in what it has of contradictions, horror, pleasure, cruelty, deceit, illusion, truth, voluptuousness, appearance, falseness, pain, cunning, seduction, joy and tragedy. It is an allegoric expression existence, of Life in its most intimate essence, in its deepest nature that, as Being, is a Will of Power that asserts Life and is, also, its negation, nihilism in Nietzsche's words.

Just as in an analogous way, Bugallo in his aesthetic proposal solves the composition with an installation, Gericault looks for a powerful, pervading and imposing foreground. The dynamism of the diagonals: the number of different perspectives and focal centers through the group of figures that provide the composition with movement and impose the

notion of drama. The gloomy atmosphere in Gericault is stressed by the violent contrasts of the chiaroscuro, by the gray clouds, the menacing waves and the oscillating movement of the raft about to capsize. The treatment of the bodies, blackened by excessive bitumen, intensifies the shadows. In Bugallo's installation the same effect is achieved by the different kinds of light in the two rooms.

In Bugallo the composition is asymmetrically built, as in a sort of visual theory of chaos, between fate and need: in Gericault's painting it is developed in psychological progression, as in an imaginary triangle whose top is the group of figures of the black and the white men waving rags together asking for help. In Gericault, this progression goes from the infinite pain depicted in the foreground (base of the triangle), with the father-son scene with a dying man lying in his back (for which his friend the painter Eugene Delacroix served as a model), to the hope in the background, expressed by the expectant happiness wan can imagine from the two figures described before. Bugallo produces a similar effect by making the two works he recreates interact.

With his images, still echoing in the present with the same disturbing energy, Gericault wanted to hit people's sensitivity, their emotional ability to see, in an aesthetically bearable way, the painful and the sublime sides of existence, defined by Nietzsche as the supreme art form.

However, paraphrasing Luis Caballero, who explained the reason why he preferred, like Gericault, drawing from a model, that is, painting from nature, since "all of man's visual imagination is nothing compared to nature"<sup>2</sup>, we could say that neither the most realistic art, nor the most refined expression of reality, is comparable to Life itself. In a letter to his friend Savigny, collected by Clement<sup>3</sup>, in regard of the scandal caused by Raft of the Medusa and the interpretations people were making, such as the criticism for having painted a black man with such an important place in the composition; for choosing such a modern theme instead of the motifs that neoclassical aesthetics dictated; for daring to say that the government was responsible for the tragedy when they chose a man who hadn't sailed for years as the captain of the fleet with the mission of repossessing the French colonies in Senegal. Gericault writes: (...) "The stupid people that write such nonsense have definitely not fasted for a fortnight, because then they would know that neither poetry nor painting are able to show all the anguish that people in the raft were into." First Gericault, and Bugallo many years after, make their art a task that goes beyond the mere demands of a painter's job. With their projects they seem to pursue the same. In the words of Caballero: " I wish I could create an image that imposed as much as reality and even more. An

image that concentrates in itself all the strength, all the drama and all the violence of reality.”<sup>4</sup>

This is what Bugallo has accurately understood and the reason why he chooses to re-create a reality with even more vividness than the painting itself and he re-interprets reality in an even deeper dimension than that of what is perceived as real. Bugallo does not only face us with the exact same measurements as the original (5 x 7 m). By proposing, scattered in the middle of the room, the installation of the painted wooden fragments whose sizes are the same as those of the parts of the reference painting, which is reproduced twice on twelve vertical and twelve horizontal boards, apart from twelve other called ‘aleatory’ because they reproduce at random different areas of the original painting, the artist takes us into the physical space he evokes and makes part of the shipwreck as if we were its protagonists. The fragmented Raft of the Medusa is multiplied by the reproduction of each of its parts, painted with oils and pigments on pieces of wood, polished and painted in one side but keeping its bark, the knots and the wood grain from the trunk of an old tree, fallen because of the rain and the strong winds. It was cut down and chopped by a party of men who finally, after many incidents, managed to take it to the artist's workshop<sup>5</sup>. There, the artist was able to save its wood and used it as the base of this splendid pictorial effort.

The complete painting, with its system of symbols of light and darkness, is reduced, just as the remains of a shipwreck, to being nothing but fragments, by scattering on the floor and against the room walls, with no explicit logic, the pieces of wood on which the elements of the composition were painted. To make his evocation more truthful Bugallo resorts to one of his techniques of construction and deconstruction. By an erasing treatment, the painted surface looks as if washed and faded by the seawater. But the use of oils and egg-distemper, glossy varnishes and wax, show not only his excellent technique but also the loving use of the materials to emphasize its essence and make them reach the heights of its potential.

At the end of the room, a replica of Gericault's painting, an oil-painting, presides the scene. It is not a literal copy but its reinterpretation. The outline of all the figures is seen against the light, reproduced with an almost monochrome version of chiaroscuro in which the tone gradations make the descriptive values stand out. The volume of the bodies, the figures, the clothing and some traces of color seem to emerge from some dark mixture of earth and magma; all the shapes, characters and things are seen as if in a shadow theatre, the complete outline of the raft and its men against a clear background, dimly lit. People can walk around the boards, placed without a fixed order on the floor or leaning against the

room walls; they can even move them or change their position. Some of the pieces cannot be seen because the painted surface turned to the floor or facing the wall.

A number of similarities bring together Bugallo's work with that of Gericault. The most obvious here is their deliberate aim to copy the great European masters; and make paintings "in the manner of", but not with the academic interest of reproduction as a practicing exercise but with the purpose of searching for an expression that goes beyond the topic or the anecdote introduced by the artist that inspired them, that goes beyond the conventions of story-telling, to explore the essential elements, the deepest sense and the underlying plastic expression of the recreated painting. Like Bugallo, who graduates from Art School at 18, Gericault's formal training was short in time but intense and fertile. The list of the works he left registered more than sixty copies of all genres. During his short life his formation process as a self-taught artist through his constant visits to the Louvre is far more important than his actual personal production, at least as far as big sized paintings are concerned, which amount to no more than three canvas. In Gericault we see a copy that is free from formation, personal reading of the work, that is, an original approach to the copy<sup>6</sup>. In this manner he copied Tiziano, Raphael, Caravaggio, Michelangelo and Rubens. This is also the way Bugallo copy Holbein and Gericault. Although with an important difference from the original painting, both Gericault's, with the game of evocation that Bugallo presents us with, and Holbein's, reproduced by the artist with a refinement that serves as allegoric synthesis of his aesthetic proposal. Both works are adopted as codes subordinate to Bugallo's expressive needs, as elements contributing to, just like words in a language, to decode the visual language of the Venezuelan artist.

It is worth remembering, following Donald Goodall, that in figurative expression, as Luis Caballero had pointed out, "the power of suggestion of the fragmentary work of art is greater than that of its theme as a whole... By using an acute concentration and a selected segment of the theme, it is possible to reveal new and unexpected implications to the idea we wanted to convey. By focusing on those aspects of a source of feelings that generate emotions we can widen this source in our conscience and give it the power to renew the theme as a whole."<sup>7</sup> Certainly, with a visual language that comes from the Renaissance, Francisco Bugallo has also learned this very contemporary lesson.

From the concept of installation that Bugallo conceives there is an analogous relation, or at least one of double nature, with Gericault's painting. On the one hand, when he takes the human body as the object

to represent the conflicts of forces, pain or death, he turns a classical theme and the main motif in the neoclassic repertoire of Latin and Greek reminiscences as regards the exaltation of the human body into a baroque expression. On the other hand, by fragmenting and multiplying the painted parts, the baroque expression of his interpretation is dramatically intensified, with the broken pieces of wood the immediate perception of dislocated bodies, broken,, that remind us of Gericault's obsession to increase the truthfulness of his paintings by copying real body parts from corpses that his doctor friends gave him from the morgue of the Beaujon Hospital for his preparatory sketches for his final work.

Bugallo's aesthetic project is as ambitious of that of Gericault in the sense defined by Alvaro Medina when he described the last great work by Luis Caballero, in September 1990, a huge (5 x 6 m) hanging in the central nave of an old colonial church in Bogotá. "An ambitious work requires maturity (that is, control and self-confidence), passion (that is, energy and determination), imagination (that is, what Italians call *invenzione*), high doses of poetry (that is, feeling and representing a theme without thinking about aesthetic rules, just as we speak without thinking about grammar rules), and a motivation that comes from the guts in choosing and treating the theme."<sup>8</sup> Also Rothko, paradoxically, said: "In my opinion, abstractions are just not possible. Every form, every space that doesn't have the pulse of the flesh and the bones, the vulnerability to pleasure and pain, is nothing. I am not interested in any painting that doesn't testify to the breath of life."

An interesting detail: Gericault's painting was taken to the Exhibition of 1819 to be shown there, but in the end it couldn't be hung, because of its size and weight, and they had to leave it on the floor, leaning against one of the walls. Thanks to this many saw the ship that couldn't be seen when the painting was hanging on the wall. This means that if at first the painting was interpreted to a melancholic chant to death, it becomes a hymn to life and hope due to the finding of the almost imperceptible vessel.

### **Holbein-Bugallo: Painting as the horizon of sacredness and place of transcendence**

Bugallo retakes this idea symbolically, in a visual manner, to expand its perspectives and make it into an "open work" by adding Hans Holbein the Younger's Dead Christ to his pictorial proposal. And he also relates Gericault's painting to Holbein's, a work that was originally thought of as the lower horizontal part of an altarpiece, that is, a piece of 30,5 x 200 cm, which Bugallo transforms, with a semantic turn, into a supreme

symbol of light, of creative assertiveness, because of the way in which it has been reinterpreted.

In the oils on wood by Holbein, Christ's lifeless body is in a horizontal position. His profile has been sharply outlined from the forehead, through the chest and the slight protuberance of the navel, to the feet. In the darkness of a stone crypt, in one of its vertical walls, behind Christ's feet, the date and the signature of the German artist are seen; the corpse appears in the foreground, lying on the tombstone and covered with a shroud. Bugallo eliminates the background, the closed space against the sarcophagus and the white sheet where the body had been placed. He paints the reclining effigy on a polished surface with an enamel finish, in the style of Renaissance artists. He is mannerist, like Holbein, because of progressive stress put in the flat surfaces to the detriment of depth; classical, like Holbein, because of the symmetric composition, harmonious and balanced; and baroque as well for mastering the art of staging, of producing illusion in the aesthetic sense pointed by Nietzsche and being able to captivate and seduce by applying gold around the figure of Jesus Christ. And he is also anti-academic, an artist of today, as his installation proves.

The painting of the Crucified reproduces the features of the reclining image of Holbein's Jesus; the fixed expression of the eyes and the half open mouth; the nose holes dilated in a last effort for breathing, in the extreme moment of agony, when life escapes; with the imprint of the pain and the tortures he suffered in his contracted forehead; with the hair falling in short black tufts. The sallow color and rigidity of the body, the marks of the open wounds in the side, feet and right hand, and the bruises left by the nails, so skinny and so helpless, are reproduced by Bugallo. Holbein reached an exacerbated realism, "so true to life that makes what he describes look truer than in nature, as wrote Pierre Vaisse when referring to the painting of the German master, whom he relates with the French artist when he adds: "this livid corpse is even more ghastly, in its rigidity, than the human body parts studied by Gericault for his Raft of the Medusa.

Bugallo, on the other hand, emphasizes the symbolic and poetic character of this interpretation of Dead Christ, beyond the rhetoric aspect and the poignancy that prevails in Holbein. Around the image painted by Bugallo, instead of darkness, we see light and brightness because of the golden color used as a chromatic and symbolic element, although we also see roughness, in the coarse carving of the wood covered with gold-leaf. The board becomes an icon that refers us to those old Byzantine paintings inspired in religion. There is not only chaos and despair. If it is about

representing visually a parable of human suffering, of frailty and horror, we must say that it is also about evoking the hope and the joy of life.

The way in which Bugallo makes this analogy is not limited to reinterpreting the original painting. Through an ultramodern language seeks to open a new space, like the life-saving boat in Gericault, not perceived at first sight when you enter the room where the installation starts. This area, a smaller one, remains in the dark. It is separated by a wall from the room where the replica of Raft of the Medusa is. The position of the painted board of the same measurements as Holbein's painting, with the effigy of the dead Christ, hung in an invisible way, makes us feel that it is suspended in space, at the same height as that boat in the horizon in Gericault's painting. An intense light illuminates the wooden piece, while the rest of the room is in the dark.

Thus, Bugallo manages to describe the ineffable, and covers the destiny of painting, from the primitive Italians or the late gothic of a Grunewald to the refined expressionism of Rothko; from the frescos in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to Gericault's Raft of the Medusa; from Holbein's heartbreaking effects to Caballero's tragic intensity: to "speak" with images, which is the thinking that cannot be expressed with words, the singularity of the individual and his feelings of detachment; the testimony of eternity, of the superhuman.

From the reference of painting, Bugallo decided to make his reinterpretation from a perspective that goes beyond painting itself, which antecedes it, according to his own words, like a pre-text to say, with other means and other techniques, what the symbolic meaning of the fragility of human condition, ethic pessimism, and, at the same time the moral greatness revealed by men's confrontation with themselves and others in extreme situations is; the metaphoric view of a shipwreck and also of the rescue; the defeat and the victory that every human being has to confront every day. The expression of the basic feelings and their opposed passions that, since the human being has existed as such, have moved, hold and challenged him. These pairs of contradictory feelings: love and hatred; uneasiness and joy; energy and depression; serenity and despair, constitute a metaphor of the absurdity of existence and, at the same time, of an affirmation of Life.

### **Holbein-Gericault-Bugallo: The ambition to make the destiny of painting**

Bugallo proposes new poetics and a different reading of the works of Holbein and Gericault. He changes the original meaning in Holbein's painting. He takes the sacred quality of the image of Christ and

transfigures it in the timeless presence of man himself and his tragic condition. He renews the meaning of religious feeling. The almost mystical, overpowering atmosphere created in the intriguing space of the installation seems to be the place to express the most important human emotions: need and plenitude. This atmosphere seems to demand that every one of us confront our deepest feelings. Although through other paths, Rothko's painting developed in a similar horizon. "the people that weep before my paintings –said he– goes through the same religious experience I went through when I painted them." Bugallo subverts and updates the scandal with which Gericault's painting was received in 1819, against the trends of the moment, in a time when gigantic and grandiloquent painting centered mainly in the mythological themes ruled, together with academic neoclassicism, refined and restrained, that set a distance between the public and the illustration of the Greek and Roman themes that inspired that kind of painting. Gericault, on the other hand, chose a contemporary theme and represented it dashing, with passion, impetuosity, movement and expressive power, characteristics that he emphasizes with an austere palette of unexpectedly warm and luminous shades; the lines of the drawing highlighting the bodies, the game of tensions and muscles, the dynamism of the composition. Gericault adopted a revolutionary attitude, both in the theme he chose and in its treatment. So did Holbein in the crossroads of the declining Middle Ages and the Renaissance of the beginning of the 16th century, contradictory and stormy. We are surprised by the contemporary resonance of the preoccupation that both the German master and the French artist had, that Bugallo's work also reveals and that Rothko summarized when he said: "I think that the gist of the problem today is how to give the proposed space the greatest eloquence and the heartbreaking violence my paintings are capable of." Although Rothko is in the antipodes of the coarse figurative realism of Holbein and Gericault, and the path Bugallo proposes to trace his personal style from the abstract (but extremely moving) expression with no immediate reference with which Rothko reaches the plenitude of his language, there are, no doubt, similarities between the two artists, at least as regards the motivation of their searches. Although position regarding the human figure is different (for while Gericault thought that painting it was not only reproducing reality but also revealing the horizon of the basic and most intimate human emotions; Rothko defined himself as a member of a generation that was interested in the human figure and studied it, but just as a representation\*, and Bugallo is interested in representing reality through the deconstruction of the body with an impeccable technique that draws the figures, to erase them later, putting the reading of the image beyond the image itself), they all reopen an issue that artists have always found distressing: To what an extent does art mean rupture? To what an extent,

as Delacroix said, are the newest things maybe the oldest? Bugallo wants to answer these questions. Repeating is not copying, because the act of reproducing something implies a different moment in time, from the temporality that defines the human being; it means referring each time to another moment and another context. Thus, repeating is creating, and by creating and reproducing new meanings appear, which are different from those of the original work. The act of creating is an act of deconstruction, re-making, re-elaborating to widen the senses and deepen in the symbolic dimension that makes history a movement that is not linear, ascending, one-dimensional or repetitive. The theme of the "eternal return of the same" of Nietzsche's philosophy doesn't mean the same is coming back, but speaks, like Bugallo's proposal, of cycles in human history, of times that meet again without repeating.

Both paintings, Holbein's and Gericault's contribute to recreate the specific atmosphere that Bugallo looks for with his installation and act as a guiding line to discover the meaning of the visual and plastic signs within this allegory unfolded of many metaphors that strike the public's sensitivity and imagination, whom he introduces, with very modern resources and a very different way of saying from the masters that preceded him (and who are a reference for the Venezuelan artist) in the revelation of human condition. Bugallo's selection is not a casual one. In \* Raft of the Medusa as well as in Dead Christ extreme situations are described, "told" with a vividness that reaches, beyond realism, a strong elegiac quality; life and death coexist, as the tragic symbol of human condition, like despair and hope, nothingness and desire, desperation and trust. But Bugallo points at a poetic transformation of the original sense of both paintings. This difference lies, precisely, on his personal contribution, his way of saying, from a modern perspective, why Raft of the Medusa keeps its poignancy, whatever our latitude, and why an artist like Gericault is still present in the development of art in the western world, not only as a revolutionary, by introducing Romanticism in painting, with a new poetic that will influence the development of French painting, but also as anticipator of many of the elements that have shaped the gist of contemporary sensitivity. And why, the image of the reclining Christ speaks intensely of Life and not of death. But, also, this difference pints out why Bugallo has become an artist whose compromise is not only to make artistic objects , but to answer , more than to a basic necessity of material self-preservation, to an existential desire of transcendence.

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\* (and for that reason, although he said: "my paintings today refer to the scale of human emotions, of human drama, as much as I am able to express it," he considered that "making a human representation is to mutilate it.")

### **Bugallo, classical and contemporary**

In Francisco Bugallo's aesthetic proposal we see one of the characteristics of artistic contemporary production, according to which culture is the element of reference and not nature, as it was for the artists of old times, or its idealisation or representation, as it was for modern painters, or its "copy according to reason" as the rhetoric of classic aesthetics prescribed. The references are now from one cultural production to another. From painting to painting. Another contemporary aesthetic category emphasizes art's 'constructive' effort by which its conception as a 'mimesis' is not valid anymore. It is, as Mondrian had pointed out, a "neo-realism" that reduces nature to its essential forms and holds to its most refined reality, through the primary elements: the line, the dot, volume and color. Art, beyond copy, implies a construction process. But construction implies its opposite. There reappear, then, in present time, different types of deconstruction, a term recently created as aesthetic category to explain not only the perception system of our time, trends in art and even in philosophy, but also to define, within the field of figurative painting, among other movements and trends, expressions of the new critical figurativism in its different sides, none of them naturalistic nor academic, some of which might transform the figure or even eliminate it.

For Bugallo, an artist of today, deconstruction means retaking the model from the point of view of its basic content; grasp the theme of the painting from the emotion that moved the original artist and allowed its representation on the canvas. Here we cannot speak of "mannerism" *stricto sensu* or of pure and simple reproduction. There isn't mimesis but poiesis. There is not copy but a creative effort of contemporary re-elaboration re-definition of the elements that make these works be still an important landmark in the development of our culture. There is a clear attempt to recover tradition, and not only painting tradition, it is also about looking for echoes, communication links, elements of dialog that turn the artists from the past into our "fellowmen".

When Bugallo takes as a reference to recreate Gericault's painting *Raft of the Medusa* and Holbein's *Dead Christ* to offer an aesthetic vision through his own artistic proposal, he wants to outline his own perspective of comprehension of reality, which is both contemporary and original; when he un-makes, re-structures and multiplies the meanings of these paintings, he wants to adapt, as a painter, to classical tradition, but at the same time he wants to define himself as innovative. By appropriating them as if they were real facts, although they were paintings, Just like Gericault did before (by appropriating a real fact as if it was a symbolic one) and Holbein (by turning a symbol into a historical fact), Bugallo

retakes a classical theme –drawing the human body– in the classical manner of the renaissance masters, especially German and Italian: Mathias Grünewald, Hans Holbein, Raphael, Tiziano, Leonardo da Vinci – the pictorial demand of accuracy, and the virtuosity –, far from many of the experimental works of contemporary art that, after the exaltation of game for its own sake and the prevail of the *vouloir faire* over the *savoir faire* in the creative process in detriment of the finished product, seem to hide an absence of meanings, improvisation and sometimes even lack of experience.

The principles of the composition that lead the Bugallo's project sit on the concept of installation, in the fragmentation of motives, in the deliberate choice of reference works and their re-elaboration by deconstruction, by using veiling or by slightly erasing the painted images; or by re-interpretation, when modifying the pictorial space around the main motif in the painting he chose for his reproduction, or when he cuts the figures to draw only the outline and make the contrast between the figure and the background stand out. These composition principles, in their simplicity, allow very rich possibilities, since they make the most of the materiality of color, shadow-light; of the relation between the different materials and their interaction in the physical space, with the pictorial spaces. The installation facilitates the overflowing of the traditional boundaries of two-dimensional painting. The incorporation of temporality to the artistic product and the compulsory implication of the viewer in the exhibition to make it reach its full meaning, that doesn't end, with the voluntary displacement of important elements of the composition, establish the open work. In this process, he induces the transformation (motorized by the viewers themselves) of his aesthetic conscience of reality, a re-appropriation of the symbolic horizon, of the cultural dimension that defines us essentially but that the dynamics of the economic relations that predominate in our society usually disregards.

Bugallo is defined as a painter of our times because of his conception of art and the way he appropriated the past (a French painting of the beginning of the 19th century and a German painting from the beginning of the 16th century) to rebuild it with resources from the present (a multiple and "open" installation, with a "conceptual" approach on behalf of the artist and the public's intervention to induce to make free interpretations and break loose the "collective imaginary" in a random participation of the people visiting the show) and project its meaning to the future (a new reading and a new horizon of meanings, a different comprehension paradigm and a different reach, from both the semantic and the visual point of view, to that of the original works adopted as reference) with a language that has acquired a personal style, through

being at anchor in the cultural tradition of which, in Latin America, we are all heirs.

Bugallo's attempt to build his own style, displayed all along his evolution as a painter could be described with the same words Beatriz González used referring to Luis Caballero: "Classicism is a complex the third world has. The feeling of insecurity produced by not counting with a past of classical perfection makes the artists spend many hours of practice until they achieve by means of the virtuosity of the line, the precision of the outline. [...] Luis Caballero managed, through drawing, to master the shape; however, his urge to disturb, to upset the viewer, separated him from the academic domains."<sup>10</sup>

But apart from the features mentioned before, typical of Bugallo's painting, and his attempt to rescue the continuity line that, in the development of western painting, unites the present with the most important works of the past, there is the will to restore art in its original function, closely bound to the anticipatory magic of the triumph for life, to exorcism, to catharsis, to the feeling of transcendence, to the enigmatic and unexplained presence of divinity, to manifest and to make the essence of reality visible, to the creation, through plastic production, of a sense of community cohesion, despite personal vicissitudes. This task is today more necessary than ever, when art has ceased to be essential for social life and has become a superfluous consumer object; when all the parameters of quality and exigency seem to be lost and art is not longer required to be something aesthetically valuable, and there is a strong temptation to validate everything –as a consequence of the consolidation of consumers societies, of the "aesthetisation of goods" and the "mercantilisation of the work of art"–; when the whims of "change for the sake of changing" and the wish for "novelty" at any price seem to induce the critics, artists and art dealers to succumb to the danger of "the indiscernible", as Arthur Danto would say, of the "transfiguration of banality" and its conversion into an artistic object; when a rupture like the one caused by Duchamp before traditional aesthetic and his iconoclastic action before the traditional concept of art do not impress anymore and have become anachronistic. But, on the other hand, painting is a very serious matter, –Van Gogh had already said it- if art and life are not different; if it is about understanding such task as a challenge in which the artist is putting at stake, everything, every time. This was the impulse that made Gericault paint Raft of the Medusa. This is the task Bugallo imposed himself when he undertook, with great tenacity, his present pictorial project.

But Bugallo, under the weight of the pictorial references he selected, could not escape a limitation that they suffer from and that only the art from Manet on will be able to abolish. It is what we call painting as a "means". Marc Le Bot detected it in Gericault's Raft of the Medusa. This artist, although he wanted to be "modern", could neither get rid of the "traditional" procedures of image representation, nor relinquish the prevail of the moral and political messages for which, explicitly from Diderot, it has been agreed that art is a vehicle. "He could not give up the mental habits of another time and be of his time, be romantic without ceasing to be classic, to speak like Delacroix."<sup>11</sup> Neither could Francisco Bugallo shake the imprint of tradition and be, in that sense, an artist fully of his time. The moral implication of his painting is clear. If it was merely a "means", painting would cease to be search as such, art would lose its anticipatory capability, its poetic power, its function of being made within the limits of liberty. But we should also review if, when values are what defines the human being as such, when the basic feelings that exalt his greatness are at stake and put his humanity at risk, then, the moral dimension, Being "political" in the Aristotelian sense, is an ineludible human condition, from which painting cannot withdraw.

Marta De La Vega  
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1. Mark Rothko, "Texts by the artist" written on the panels for the retrospective exhibition Mark Rothko. Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, janvier-avril 1999.
  2. Beatriz González (interview to L. Caballero), "Luis Caballero: la voluntad provocadora", Luis Caballero, Santa Fé de Bogotá, El Sello Editorial, 1995, p.15.
  3. Charles Clément, Gericault, Étude biographique et critique. 3<sup>ème</sup> éd. Paris. (Réédition: Paris, 1973), p. 170-172. Apud. Gericault. Tout l'oeuvre peint de. Introduction par Jacques Thuillier. Documentation par Philippe Grunchev. Paris, Flammarion, 1978, p.116.
  4. L. Caballero, "Es el cuerpo lo que yo quiero decir." (Text for the catalog of the exhibition in the Albert Loeb Gallery, Paris, 1892). Reproduced in Luis Caballero. Santa Fé de Bogotá, El Sello Editorial, 1995, p.10.
  5. Story told by F. Bugallo to Marta de la Vega. Valencia, Venezuela, January 1998.
  6. See "Gericault". Le petit journal des grandes expositions. Retrospective pour le bicentenaire de sa naissance en 1791. No. 226, Paris, 1991
  7. D. Goodall, "Luis Caballero" in Luis Caballero. Op. Cit., p.24.
  8. A. Medina, La cuarta ambición de Luis Caballero. Catalog for the exhibition Luis Caballero. Bogotá, Galería Garcés Velásquez, September 1990.
  9. P. Vaisse, Holbein le Jeune. "Tout l'oeuvre peint de." Introduction par Pierre Vaisse. Documentation et mise à jour par Hans Werner Grohn. Paris, Flammarion, 1987, p.5.
  10. Beatriz González, Op. Cit., p.15.
  11. Marc Le Bot, Apud. Gericault, "Tout l'oeuvre peint de", p. 116. To eliminate once and for all the accent from Gericault's family name, we quote Jacques Thuillet, Ibid: "The Gericault family, who were part of the rich land-owning bourgeoisie, comes from Ger, a little village near Mortain, whose inhabitants are called 'Gericots'. Note that the artist's family name should be written 'Gericault' and not 'Géricault', as testified by the official pieces: this may seem unimportant at first, but can make a difference in the judgement of the signatures in the works, especially in the drawings."
  12. Other bibliography: BUGALLO. Obra Reciente. Catalog No. 116. Presentation by Sofia Imber, Director and Founder of the Sofia Imber Museum of Contemporary Art of Caracas, November 1993.
  13. Bugallo, Francisco. Imagen y semejanza. "Exhibition project." Valencia, Estado Carabobo, Venezuela, (1997?).
  14. Le petit journal des grands expositions. "Les années romantiques. Une fête de la narration." Paris, exposition No. 274. Avril-juillet 1996.
  15. Régis Michel. Gericault; l'invention du réel. Paris, Gallimard, 1992.
  16. Régis Michel et al., Gericault. Ouvrage collectif dirigé par Régis Michel, 2 tomes, Paris, La Documentation Française, 1996.