

Georges Ward's Voyage of Discovery through the Universe

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*“The arrival of the ship caused a real delirium
in the city. Nicola Lascaris was back,
the man who had led them to that paradise returned.
And that same night, perhaps because of the excitement of reunion,
Laura gave birth to her son.
The news spread throughout the city:
The first child of Atlantica was born!
He was a beautiful big-eyed boy and Ermolao, who had returned
of his trip to the Island of the Cliffs fascinated by the chronicle that was kept
in the most secret of its crypts, decided to give his son the name of Orpheus ”¹*

The previous quotation corresponds to the end of the novella titled "*La Isla del Ensueño*", The Island of Illusion, that takes place during the period of the Renaissance: the time of discovery, of humanism and universal knowledge. It was the time of great illusions and adventures. A time in which, from the knowledge of the classics, from Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylon, the Turks, etc., a new way of life was contemplated. An adventure, a new society, a utopia. This was the island of Atlantica, which the Venetian's ancestors sought, although it would be Nicola Lascaris who would fulfill the dream of creating a new world. Surrounded by scholars, poets, painters, architects, scientists and philosophers, as well as technicians and experts in agriculture, botany, and boats, etc., he would create a world anew and rooted in the best of Western culture, developing next to the dense and splendid blues of the Mediterranean Sea. The novella begins in the banquet in which the expedition is programmed and prepared, after which the first voyage and the discovery of Atlantica is carried out. A part of the expedition explores the island and gathers knowledge about planification of cities in harmony with nature and another part returns to Europe, passing through Cadiz, Seville, Madrid, Valencia, Cyprus,

1 N.T. Translation of a fragment of TABLATE, Jesús, LLEDÓ, Joaquín, *La isla del ensueño*, Madrid, Album letras artes, 1990, pag. 176

Padua, Venice, etc. It was the preparation of the journey of new generations to the new lands. The story can be concluded with the quotation from the beginning.

In the Island of Illusion, in Atlantica, there are all kinds of waters, mountains, trees, plants, fruits, animals, fish. Everything is harmony and beauty. In Atlantica they discover the best of metals: gold.

"Its crystalline waters showed a sandy bottom in which a thousand pebbles emitted flickering reflections when receiving the light of the evening. One of the sailors entered the water, and after staring at it for a moment within his hands, he turned around, pale and trembling, and handed it to Bocconio. It did not take him long to realize what it was. It was gold. An enormous gold nugget. As big as his little finger. The sailors hurtled into the water and started nervously picking up the little pebbles. They were all made of gold... Gold! The bottom of that lake was strewn with gold! Pure gold in huge quantities!"²

As I read *The Island of Illusion*, I have imagined Georges Ward in all the flow of voyages, of challenges, of labyrinths, of war and of peace, of love and adventure, of discoveries, always with eyes wide open to understand the world, to know nature and to capture it with the subtle and precise brushes that he uses in his paintings. It is not surprising that Georges Ward met Landini and helped him in the task of representing and inventing all the novelty of Atlantica, and painting with mythologies the interior of the noble buildings from which to govern the newly discovered island.

Georges Ward presents us with an ample exhibition of around ninety works of different sizes, small and large, square and round, some of them three-dimensional. The number may seem even slightly excessive. However, the artist's way of working, in series, and their rhythmic arrangement, as they are displayed grouped, are effective in capturing the message - the multiple messages – and harmonies that convey beauty. We have to bear in mind that our artist loves and enjoys nature, and the beauty it holds. A beauty that it sometimes offers in an ostensible and open way while some other times requires us to search for it or even hunt it out. Speaking of the desert areas, the Monegros, for example, says Ward:

²TABLATE, Jesús, LLEDÓ, Joaquín, op. cit. pág. 80

"... our dry landscapes, where apparently life is scarce, offer a continuous search for the hidden, for the life that is concealed and is not apparent to our eyes."

Life is not ostensible but the artist seeks and finds an incredible plant and life abundance. Because life justifies everything and adapts to the environment.

The exhibition revolves around a few large works, and beside them, others are diversified and grouped by series. The result is harmony and balance, which could not be missing in the works of someone that applies the Golden Section in his works.

I was saying that Georges Ward paints nature, landscape, mountains, flowers, deserts, flora and fauna, sky, land, air and water, fish, birds, and always represents the world with devotion, respect and admiration. At the same time, we find in his paintings symbolism, metaphors and forms of exaltation of the nature around us, so that it does not deteriorate, since it is the only nature and the only planet we have to live.

Georges Ward presents an extraordinary work he painted in 2013, titled *Natura*. It is a tondo of 113 cm in diameter. In this work appears an imaginary world in which harmony is structured in hidden geometries; there appear the four elements: the fire or light of a hidden sun, water, air and earth and in that environment represents the infinite flora and fauna of birds, insects and flying butterflies. At the bottom of the sea, the delta, there are fish, mollusks and crustaceans. The central axis is formed by action and sacrifice. A kingfisher throws himself into the water and fishes a small white carp, which recalls the sacrifice of the Mystic Lamb to be found in the cathedral of Ghent painted by the Van Eyck brothers.

A tribute to Martin Johnson Heade, is a tribute to this 19th century American painter who, after a trip through Italy to understand the Renaissance, at his return to Pennsylvania, will carry out various expeditions. Probably as a result his paintings always had a hummingbird and an orchid in the foreground. Ward pays homage to this painter who, like him, sought beauty. In the present case, the author represents several mountains of the world such as Everest, Ararat, Gongga or Bow in Canada, among others. Hummingbirds and orchids always appear in these tondos.

Symbolism appears in the times of industrialization, especially in the Catholic area of industrial Europe, and ended in the turmoil of World War I. Its members went through other artistic currents and some were precursors of vanguard currents. *"The logic of science, of industry and*

commerce, responded to a whole series of practical needs of society, as well as an evident will for power; but certainly could not quench the thirst that, according to Gustave Kahn's metaphor, can only be satisfied at the fountain of dreams"³. We can see that the Symbolism of the nineteenth century had a feeling of decadence, depression, a kind of nostalgia for positivism, a resistance to a change of values. Michael Gibson himself wonders what the symbol, which is the core of Symbolism, opposes. "For that we have an answer: to 'the real', determined and delimited by the period, to the given, to the profane"⁴.

Could we ask, bridging the distances, if Ward is a symbolist? Somehow we can say he is. Some symbolists in the past affirmed the absolute autonomy of art and, in that sense, it can be affirmed that Ward does not get carried away by fashions and tendencies. He has sought a path centered on the landscape, nature, harmony and beauty with a background, a metaphor of life. Every piece of art, every plastic art, says something and means something. Dante Gabriele Rossetti or Fernand Khnopff have something to say to Georges Ward. Our author investigates the Renaissance, the world of beauty and alchemy, and that clashed frontally with some current tendencies. Ward is interested in the mentioned authors, he is interested in Alexander Humbolt, the expeditionary and botanist who classified leaves and plant species. There is nothing better than following one's own route marked by convictions.

Now it is advisable to analyze a work that intrigues by its apparent simplicity. That is *Diamond Dust*, 2016. A snowy landscape that the author has solved with a technique now scarcely used, which is dry glaze. The colors are hidden under the layers of white but have an effect on the result. Thus cyan, yellow and magenta, the three basic colors, have their outcome in that white landscape, where diamond dust is seen when there are frozen microcrystals in the environment. It is another homage to Martin Johnson Heade.

But Ward's world is not over. We have the series *The garden of the sun*, horizontal landscapes in which we find flowers, insects and birds of great beauty arranged as if they were the flowers that the Boticelli Venus received when being born out of the waters of the sea. To continue

3GIBSON, Michael, *El simbolismo*, Madrid, Taschen, 2006, pág. 15

4GIBSON, M.: op. cit. pág. 19

dreaming we also have the *Paradises* where the African jungle, the Asian botany, the elm bark, etc. are represented. And the *Paradises of Aragon* such as *Contemplating the Rodeno*, which highlights the red shades of the Sierra de Albarracín, *El canto de Riglos*, *Juslibol* or *Paraíso de Monegrillo*. Everything is beauty.

It is not my pretension to give a complete description, nevertheless it is necessary to mention the *Life System* series, the *Herbariums* of intense delicacy, the *Wall* series composed of twenty small and delicate pieces, the series *Compendium*, series *Memories of Ibiza*. This last series of 2015 was a homage to his late mother. It is painted in black and white, and around the flowers, the bee predominates as a memory and homage. We return to symbolism again. Apis, in Latin is the name for "bee" and also leads us to recall the Egyptian god Apis. The bee flutters and buzzes around the bell in almost every paper. If we remember the symbols, we will know the reason for mourning.

Aenigma, 2017, measuring 150 x 150 cm, is an acrylic on board. It seemed very interesting to me the explanation of Georges when I saw the work in his study, almost finished. The author has done the work of a miniaturist, of a man of alchemy, anthropologist, astrologer, architect, biologist, archaeologist... He has sought the appearance of parchment or worn leather, has paid tribute to history and to art and, in my opinion, he has suffered until the moment of the happy birth. He told me that the next thing he was going to paint in the picture was, in real "Rosenoble of 23.75 carats" gold leaf, a Sanskrit phrase that speaks of unity (God is one) and that can be translated as "*one without a second, that is Brama, without gunas, without constitutive elements and without matter*". The phrase is highlighted in the top center of the painting. Underneath and occupying the whole center of the picture is represented the sacred beetle of the Egyptians, the *scarabaeus sacer*. This figure is inside several geometric figures that are interrelated with the *Vitruvian Man* of Leonardo da Vinci. The study of this beetle in the midst of sacred geometry symbolizes, according to Ward, the unitary being in the midst of the universe. References to the Keops pyramid, the representation of the solar system and the situation of the planets in orbit, the constellation of Orion, the calendar, are things that float on this "*ancient scroll*" that interprets the world and its evolution. This evolution, the transition from life to death, transmutation, is also reflected in the balls of excrement that beetles place underground for their transformations.

And I forgot an extraordinary tondo, *Rosas del mundo*, 2008, explains Ward:

“The spiral of life leads us through a kaleidoscope composed of roses and peonies of multiple varieties, which make up the "Ward work". This painting is planned and made in a rotating way, marking a spiral from outside to inside. An introspective spiral that defines an open central space, a door to another dimension. This central space makes us reflect on a nature that embraces us and protects us from the elements, the emptiness and the unknown. (...) My last name, Ward, is an Arab and English surname; in English it has to do with guardianship and in Arabic means «Rose»”.

Georges Ward paints landscapes, flowers, beetles, insects, birds and fish, representing the universe. It reflects it in a detailed and hyper-realistic way. However, they do not respond, except in their individuality, in the individuality of each element, to a vision that tries to represent reality as faithfully as possible. Rather, on the contrary, the compositions are of concept, they are carried out by an intellectual reflection. Let us remember *Roses of the world* and we will see that this introspection is of concept. The works of the artist are works created, as William Blake said, "*to see the world in a grain of sand*".

To conclude, I quote Paul Valery, who wrote *On the Centenary of Photography*, the following:

"What would be of Philosophy if it did not question appearances?"

The mirages, the branches that brake just touching the water and recompose themselves wonderfully upon leaving it, all the astonishments that the eye accepts have been treated in that memorable and inexhaustible collection of Philosophy”⁵

⁵VALÉRY, Paul, *En el centenario de la fotografía*, (1931). Recogido en BENJAMIN, Walter, *Breve historia de la fotografía*, (1931), Madrid, Casimiro libros, 2016, pág. 58