

## **Pascale, or the dialectics of drawing and material**

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A strange fascination with wood runs through the Uruguayan art of this century. Despite Uruguay's not being a naturally wooded country, despite its only recently having found a destiny in forestry overcoming long-standing indifference, for years now its artists have shown a tendency to turn to wood as a vehicle for expression.

Today, the work of Wifredo Díaz Valdez, based on the decomposition of old wooden objects articulated so as to play on the opposition between their agedness and the soul of the timbers, has reached decanted levels of originality. In the recent past, there have also been sculptors of wood, like Salustiano Pintos, an intuitive with phenomenal imagination, who brought to the cut logs a powerful yet soft organic character. But much earlier, a genial painter like Joaquín Torres García sought out wood to make sculpture, toys, reliefs or simply assemblages where the pieces of material are organized in keeping with the canons of Constructivism. His followers would continue in that direction. Francisco Matto's reliefs, composed with the school's customary equilibrium and painted with tonal sensitivity, attain a quality comparable to the master's. Manuel Pailós not only uses wood as a base for drawing, by making incisions on the surface; he also turns to relief and sculpture itself, a three-dimensional vision, generally in small-format works, painted in white, black or basic colors charged with symbolism. Augusto and Horacio Torres also explored wood relief. What we find, then, is a curious duality: artists with a geometric vocation, adherents of a search for formal equilibria, who slip into the use of wood because of its expressive force. They almost never leave the wood as is, they paint it, operate on it, yet they contribute its material force to the grammatical conception of the drawing they start with.

In recent years this search has taken on new facets in the work of two particularly sensitive artists, Washington Barcala and Nelson Ramos. Ramos started as a draftsman, doing black drawing on white paper; later he became involved in installations, always adhering to a very severe, stark conception where the line predominated, defining spaces, sensitizing objects. Until, as Angel Kalenberg says, "the line thickens" and "ceases to be a line: it is, finally, pure matter, where color barely shows through. It is no longer a painted or drawn line, but instead

matter that corporealizes it, a sliver of wood that perchance managed to generate it." His is a delicate, never shrill, sensitivity. He goes so far as to renounce color, working generally in the ascetic world of black and white, interrupted now and again by a chromatic gesture.

Very close to Ramos, older, but his contemporary for much of his career as an artist, was Washington Barcala, a painter showing refined formal accents, who stopped using the brush in order to assemble, glue and sew little pieces of wood, string, rags and threads, with the preciousness of a chamber musician. He began by cutting out cardboard and ended up assembling mysterious boxes where balance and movement live in dialectic tension in a world of materials.

It is not strange, then, that one day a Pascale should turn up. He has been a student of Nelson Ramos' for years, using pieces of wood that he cuts and assembles with formal rigor, guided by a careful drawing that reorders the chaos of old, abandoned material. He uses Paraguayan woods, lapacho, curupay, ibiraró and a marvelous sun-reddened ibirapitá. He cuts and relocates them. Unlike Torres García's followers, he does not infringe on the surfaces of the material. They stand as time and use have left them, without any painted touchups, with their own wrinkles, colors and roughnesses. The dialogue thus becomes more intense, between a very pure sort of drawing that runs over them in vertical and horizontal lines, at times wavy, at others parabolic, and the organically expressive material. This dialectic tension between drawing and material is sometimes sensitized by the use of color, but a natural color, that of the pieces of wood themselves, which are opposed and juxtaposed to one another.

Also unlike Torres García's followers, Pascale does not start with a rectangular space, as they generally do. His works have their own shapes. They cannot be called sculptures since there is no real pursuit of three-dimensionality, only the differences in relief proper to rustic pieces of wood organized on a support. But we are far from a derivative of painting or drawing, as can be found so clearly in some illustrious constructivist precedents. What Pascale does is different. Thought out and organized, but very free, with curves, undulations, and reverberations that give shape to each work, each very different from the others.

From all of this it is clear that the rusticity of the materials does not spring from an artistic naiveté. Pascale's work is informed by solid training, in both theory and practice. Just as Dr. Pedro Figari, an attorney with a long and distinguished career, one day began simply painting human archetypes -gauchos, blacks, cave dwellers- after a lengthy theoretical inquiry, today

the economist Ricardo Pascale is embarking, in the maturity of his life, upon an adventure that has nothing to do with spontaneity. He knows very well what he is doing. He is not out there eyeing the horizon to see what turns up. Some people believed Figari to be a "naive" and they were dead wrong; there is no more intellectual, no more elaborated an artist than he. His work was an attempt to materialize a long-theorized theory of regional art. In Pascale, while that previous incursion into doctrine is not present, we do find a long and decanted artistic training that only today is being poured into a systematic body of works. And in so doing Pascale does not seem to be an epigone of Ramos' or Barcala's, or a post-Constructivism constructivist. His work is the fruit of those roots, but it exudes originality.

Naturally, the artist Pascale is irked by Ricardo Pascale the Professor of Finance, who won that appointment in 1969, the two-time President of the Central Bank of Uruguay, and consultant to any number of international organizations on banking questions. It is not normal for a financier-public man to get involved in art while still fully immersed in his professional activity. Something similar happened to Dr. Figari, when after years of practice as a lawyer, writing about legal and criminal matters, being a national deputy in the Uruguayan parliament, President of the Athenaeum, General Director of the National Polytechnic, he threw himself into the artistic endeavor. But Figari began his artistic work upon abandoning public activity, and just as the attorney initially outshone the artist, later -and until our day- the artist has obscured the formidable thinker. Pascale, instead, has resolved to superpose the two planes and today reveals his artistic maturity while at the same time holding the office of President of the Central Bank. Some unbending spirits might be put off by this circumstance. We instead are delighted by one of the best facets of our country, where the humanist tradition breathes free, imbuing all aspects of our life and encouraging us to continue believing in the unlimited possibilities of the human spirit. In such a materialized world, where money rises like the sun, it is comforting to see a financier, a money specialist, who takes some space from his professional life simply to generate a world of fantasy.

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