

Ernesto Morales and the eternal city of art

by Victor Fernandez

Just over ten years ago, Jean Baudrillard, describing the system of contemporary art, he questioned that vacuity fiercely claimed combined to the lightness proudly hired by individual interpreters, by groups and contexts, that participate at the formation of a strictly self-referencing system, folded over their practices and that legitimate an art conditioning by the values set within their borders.

However, there is an "other" art, which intends to engage in a challenge at the same time simple and titanic: the deep involvement with the spirit of an era, but without renouncing to the transcendence.

So there are "other" artists, those who deviate from what the establishments of cultural system determines how politically correct, go towards conceptual and cognitive insights, questioning and communicate; reveal, hide and testify. Owners then of a real creative freedom that allow us to retrace meaningful aesthetic experiences. Ernesto Morales belongs to this category of artists.

The complexity of the work of Morales allows us to observe an artist engaged with his time and his story, and that as a result of a broad and deep universe of interests, is able to express with the same equal effectiveness in disciplines and languages so close, yet so different in their specificity, such as painting and video art. An artist that at the same time has also been able to accommodate relevant projects in its path of curatorship, of teaching arts and of cultural management, greatly appreciated both in Argentina and in Italy, his current residence.

There is something of that Homo Universalis, its concept of Renaissance culture, which crosses the prolific and versatile artistic personality of Ernesto Morales, so that his works seem to interpret an echo of that topical ideal, especially in his last painting productions, in which cities, its recurring theme, evoke with intensity the Renaissance depictions of the "ideal city".

Idealization of an urban space full of complex symbolism, the ideals cities were represented not only in the paintings, but they have also populated literary dreams (remember the famous *Utopia* of Tommaso Moro, *The city of the Sun* of Tommaso Campanella, *The New Atlantis* of Francis Bacon). In addition, there have been urban projects, which have sought to make concrete that ideal (Sforzinda, Pamanuova ...), until the next foundation of the cities in America in the wake of his conquest, which allowed the Europeans to experiment a new way to represent the same ideal.

And it is indicative that those who encourages us to these thoughts through his works, it is precisely Ernesto Morales, an artist deeply American, intensively engaged with the different questioners on cultural identity closely related to the conscience of a young continent, whose artistic culture sinks its own double roots both in aboriginal component that European tradition.

"Paint as you live", I said once, so as the work of Morales turns out indissolubly tied to its history. Without succumbing to easy interpretations, we cannot fail to consider the obvious links between production and biographical context of an artist who has established an intense and creative relationship between the Rio de la Plata of its origins and its current Italian residence.

And perhaps, by understanding what has been said, we may be able to get closer with more depths to those issues inherent to his artistic production, as leitmotif omnipresent, in the video, as well as in the

paintings, through which Morales supports the reflection on identity, migration and spaces of belonging.

"The Art happens" Whistler said, and it is so, just as the cities that Ernesto Morales paints that do not constitute representations but apparitions.

With so much of evanescence, but also with strokes of sufficient realism, the spaces and the architectures that inhabit his paintings, introduce us in a deeply unusual atmosphere but at the same time intimately familiar.

The specific condition of Morales, (simultaneously national of several worlds) probably corresponds, to what ultimately appeal crystallizes in those cities that oscillate between fiction and reality, between sleep and wakefulness, between Italy and Buenos Aires. The hybrid condition of these spaces, in which the dissimilarity ends up to configure unknown city, but that we feel as if we belonged to, it does not come only from occasional inclusion of representative elements of urban realities that are familiar to us (the obelisk and the bridges of Buenos Aires, the arches and the Roman towers ...), but also from a spatial elaboration that involves us immediately.

The perspective escapes which run the streets are lost in indiscernible horizons; solid volumes and ethereal at the same time establish dialogues between them and counterpoints of stylish formalities; outlines that evoke backlighting city profiles, creating articulated compositional rhythms effectively. A palette seemingly reduced to the essential elements, drives us to discover a notable tonal richness and thin chromatic variations that are alternated within a same range; at the same time a balance between open shapes and sharp edges, fills the works of an evocative atmosphere, sometimes indecipherable, touching moments of intimate melancholy. What Ernesto Morales reveals us, it is a renewed sense of the city as archetypal symbol among the most ancient that the humanity knows.

The original nucleus of the city was generally associated to the "axis of the world", as a centre of confluence between sky, earth and hell, where the becoming proper of human condition recovering the native sense of timeless and transcendence. The cities were conceived as celestial, earthly or infernal, sacred and cursed; they have been suggested with official names and evoked with mysterious appellations. Often associated with the female figure, the cities never conquered have been call as "Virgins", and those who have had a different fate as "daughters".

They had been identity more than places of residence, and they still represent the space from which we are confronted with the universe; and all of them is revealed at the same time when one stops in front of each painting of Ernesto Morales,