

Illustration

MANUEL GUTIÉRREZ

(NATIONALIZED ARGENTINE- CONTEMPORARY PLASTIC ARTIST)

Madrid. The Manzanares River had been left behind with its thin thread watercourse of calm waters. Next to his father, Manuel sat on the snow-white doorstep of his home. Above, the stars shone tearing the dark canvas of the sky. He looked up.

- What are you looking at Manuel?
- That star - he replied raising his right index finger.
- Why, son?
- I feel nostalgia, father.

He was just a young child. Later he undertook the final trip to Buenos Aires. The ship had passed the Equator. Manuel watched from a distance the pool full of swimmers. When everyone retreated before the fall of a relentless sun, he took off his clothes and dove in. He could not swim. He felt he was hopelessly sinking despite his struggle. No one around. He could barely splutter. He thought fleetingly and thrice repeated "I'm a child, I cannot die." He never knew what enigmatic force deposited him on the edge. Thus he led his existence by the star of nostalgia. Early on had he realized that with faith or denial, with metaphysics or rationalism man is bound to an Absolute, even if by ignorance.

You cannot talk about a work of art without knowing about the artist. Creation is too important in its genesis so as not to dig into the unconscious and hidden core of the craftman. These considerations, rather than anecdotal, are the buds where his creative edges are reflected in the way in which he is withdrawn from "human being" and led to the "spiritual being" that constitutes in art its nature of essential prayer. Manuel Gutiérrez reminds me of Charles Baudelaire's words that can be judged as contradictory when analyzed confronted with the life of the poet: "the puerile utopia of the school of art-for-art, in excluding morality and often even passion, is necessarily sterile."

The large transparent window showed the first shadows of the summer sunset. Manuel pulled his chair closer to mine. I felt a confession. His voice turned deeper.

- What reason does a work of art hold?
 - To remain- I answered with conviction but surprised.
 - Can something unethical or impassionate endure?
- At that moment I understood the meaning of his earthly legitimation. Commitment to man.*

Art is not exempt from ethics, being a creative, new, original process, born without speculation. By not ac-



"Star Voyage"
Oil on cardboard, 35 x 35 cm, 1998

cepting fraud it becomes a moral act. Yet we must understand that its aim is not that moral search, it is forged in it. Works of art by belonging to an emotional moment that comes from deep thinking, have an absolute correlation with creation, the highest stage of "existential being". Hence its ethics. This is the passage leading from the aesthetic to the "spiritual being" as Kierkegaard claimed in human development.

Man participates in a historical process by the mere fact of having a conscience that allows him the possession of a sharp memory. It is a biological fact that arises from the property of memories, in the construction of past and unavoidably projects towards the future. Here Kant obvious question arises: what is man? His answer is far from everything known to man. It leads to nothing if we use gnosis and to faith if we move towards the mystical, but there is also a different way, unbound from positive or negative belief. It comes from aesthetics and ethics to place him on the true extent of its current evolutionary state. Born as "animal being" (instinct) he could detach from that origin to become "human being" (rational), but this condition added misery to human faculty. At this point he faces with emptiness or with faith. To rise to a "spiritual being" (feeling) will not avert him from his existential angst but it does lead him to a respect for

creation (aesthetics) and behavior (ethics). And this is the pending issue of Nietzsche's "The Last Man". Limits representing impossible or desperate situations. But is this world man's sensory perception? Or is it independent of it? Any concept of the cosmos and the human role comes from experience, but this is limited, merely inconsequential given the magnitude of what he perceives with his senses.

The reason of the existing post-modernity is a result of instinct, speculation and solidarity rooted in lust, but inevitably this position is referred to the human rational limit with the knowledge of his destiny and the inability to understand it. Given the temporal and spatial infinity taught by Nicholas Cusanus when he pointed out that "Contraction" is a metaphor for the finite status of creatures, all of whom are limited images of God; the area to be occupied by man is that of solidarity by benevolence, the path towards his fellowmen and the complementary nature of gnosis and faith. There he will find aesthetics in the creative act of life and ethics in his fellow-man. And this cannot be detached from man's integrity. Behavior cannot rely on afterlife or its denial. Man's dilemma is that he takes part of the finite and the infinite, and this is not understood by reason, thus becoming a challenge to the spirit.

What is man? It seems an impossible question, only understood from the bottom of the heart, from ethics and solidarity. Man often answers through reason, but the question reaches a limit insurmountable to knowledge. A key is required to get through, based on the spirit albeit not satisfying the subject. The human factor possesses the possibility to satisfy its anxiety and feel redemption through fate.

Man is the only being in the cosmos that can describe with adjectives and try to explain. He cannot be displaced from this position as he was from the center of the universe (Copernicus), from the center of evolution (Darwin), from his conscience (Freud). In this self-reflection he cannot detach from his own self. Here self and anguish, reason and spirit come together in the same being.

With Saint Augustine man is surprised by his incapacity to understand. A lonely soul remains in the post-Augustinian period that Renaissance tries to compensate. In Pascal we find man's deficiency, knowledge deepens ignorance, the eternity. The evaluation of man is born out of the recognition of his fallibility. Kierkegaard raises his voice to alleviate man's loneliness in search of a faith. The infinity of the world, not grasped by human reason, is his greatness. Not in his physical extent, but in his transformational power. It is the most terrible blow to human capacity and its pride. It is impossible to possess the cosmos. It can only be embraced with spirituality. It is unconceivable despite the knowledge gained. The cosmological space-time crumbles all human time. Spinoza with his ethical naturalism leaps that distance.

Thinking is also infinite and makes man understand he can take refuge in aesthetics, ethics, spirit,



"The Circus"

Oil on cardboard, 45 x 45 cm, 2005

and his fellowmen. Every man recapitulates what evolution built, by passing from animal instinct to reason. Art seeks to achieve the next link, the "spiritual being". He understands the inclemency of isolated reasoning. He acknowledges that in the strict control of reason lies the world that terrifies him, the misfortune that haunts him with his speculative behavior.

Man's dilemma is that he is subjected to a limit with knowledge and to anguish with destiny. Hence, the roads to nowhere and faith, which occupy the cosmological but not the temporal time. For this interval between birth and death man may reach the "spiritual being" represented by the scream which validates him from the aesthetics releasing him from anguish, to build an ethics for others. This path must be understood as fidelity to his finest achievement, art. Man began soaring with art, leaving a transcendent imprint. Now he shall deposit in his fellowmen the morality to probe into the infinity of his thinking. Thus he may climb from the "rational self" as he did from the "instinctive" rescuing himself from the decadence of technological, economic and political certainties. Beyond nonbeing and mystery, the "superior man" alluded by Nietzsche will be achieved to rise above the "existing man" to a "spiritual man", not in a metaphysical but ethical sense. As Manuel Gutierrez wrote in his teens: "I wish there were one flag in the world so that no one felt different" With art he finds his solitude. I believe he no longer asks for the entity of existence, but for his own self. He satiates with light in a postmodernity in darkness.

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