

153 Rudolf Häsler. Portrait of Paul Bowles.

1997.

Acrylic on board. 21,1 x 29,5 cm.

Private collection.

“Only those who suffer isolated, alone and great, placid and measured, will be the great ones of Art. The future belongs to the solitary ones!”

James Ensor

This is one of the most important portraits made in the second half of the XX Century. Few times has extreme age been portrayed with such sharpness and tenderness. The pride and the dignity of an extraordinary person, as well as his intelligence and accumulated wisdom over the years, the detachment which he shows on knowing that he is near to death, can be seen by only looking into those watery blue eyes.

The photograph and the great tradition of European painting are united in this work done in the maturity of the great Swiss artist, without one imposing on the other. Thus giving place to a work which is the complete synthesis, the harmony of the perceived objectively, filtered by the subjective world of the artist. In this modernity which Baudelaire proposed, product of the balance between the novelty (with its acute awareness of transience) and the eternal and immutable (as Jean Renoir aptly expressed when he said: “All painting, from Pompeii to that of Corot, seems to come from the same palette”).

The painting of Rudolf Häsler expresses clearly the change which occurred to European art from the advent of the daguerreotype in 1838 to its absolute triumph in the visual arts from the end of the XIX century.

After his beginnings, where he explored the possibilities of the line, in his Cuban period, he experimented with the potential of colour, arriving at a stage of synthesis, when he produced a greatly original work, both in results and methods. Making hundreds of preparatory drawings with notes about colour, authentic music scores, on the basis of which, in the solitude of his workshop, he would make the picture. Working like an antique painter, as if the photograph did still not exist. Later on, with the discovery of Pop Art and Hyperrealism, his painting took an important turn, the last and definitive. The photographic aesthetic, although manipulated, violated and “corrected” in its defects (flatness, almost expressionist accentuation in the foreshortening, deformation of perspective, etc.), would definitely mark his mature paintings. However, even though having introduced this ungrateful component into his work, the which is the photograph, his painting is saved by an “idealistic” use of colour, by an exacerbated sensuality which transcends and turns “unreal” these extraordinary paintings, hybrids of Realism, Abstraction (in his geometrical accentuation of the lineal rhythms), Conceptualism and colouristic Expressionism, in an never tiring search for the characteristic beauty of his time.