

## ***Interview with Ramón Lapayese***

### Ramón Lapayese in the Sala Bernesga

#### **'THE PAINTER IS NOT A PHOTOGRAPHER'**

His paintings offer the suggestive and gratifying air of all well-interpreted expressionism. The spectator appreciates this splash of optimism and of vital exuberance, especially in these times in which spiritual crisis and pessimism spread over all aspects of society. This is Ramón Lapayese. A painter with a universal name and prestige, who has come to this land of León, where other members of his own family have had so much success; the idea of the dynasty of painters seems to be on the verge of passing from the exception to the norm. His paintings –authentic symphonies of color, the creative impulse turned rational– have been on exhibit since last Tuesday afternoon in the gallery of Arte Bernesga, one of the few galleries that still resists the continuous ravages of low sales and the deep teeth marks of a crisis that now seems will last for some time.

#### **INHERITED VIRTUES**

— It does not seem necessary to ask Ramón Lapayese about his presence in the world of pictorial art.

— Of course not. As you know, and I am sure many others from León also know, my father was a multifaceted artist and, in many aspects, he was brilliant. He did everything: painting, reliefs, polychromy. Carlos Areán even said that he was the inventor of a new genre: “the sculpture-painting” or polychrome relief; he also worked successfully with ceramics and enamels and was the one to revive the famous cordovans once again; honestly, he was a *monster*.

— I suppose these virtues are hereditary.

— We grew up in a world that was especially conducive to studying and creating in the workshop of our father; for me in particular he was not only my model for life and work, but also my only drawing teacher.

— Ramón Lapayese’s list of accomplishments is the kind that frightens readers; it is incredible that a man, although a veteran and still far from what is nowadays called a senior citizen, has been able to complete such a large number of works. Tell us your secret.

— It’s very simple. For me the work has no special merit because it is what I am good at, it is what I like, what makes me happy; I think it is even a vice. Believe me, I would have to be shut up in a psychiatric ward if I didn’t work, for the simple reason that work is like the oxygen that I need in order to breathe. I live in a continuous anarchy of hours; you cannot tell the muse: “wait, tomorrow I’ll pay attention to you”. You have to pay attention to the muse when she appears.

#### **CHANCE AND RATIONALITY**

— Effort or inspiration?

— I trust in both things. Inspiration comes when the artist is at work. Sometimes you start painting with some preconceived ideas, with some determined plans, but chance decides a lot. Chance plays an important role in the life of an artist. Of course neither chance nor inspiration are everything; they are a point from which to start, but the mind has to put some order in the chaos; the irrational exists in art, but it needs to pass through the filter of reason.

— What are the specific areas of your artistic activity?

— I have also done everything; art is joined in all expressions; the means of expression are all related. I don’t care if I work with crayon, with clay, watercolor, oil, etc. The important thing is the idea and the end result, not the means. I normally use oil because I think it is the queen of all material. Goya, Velázquez, Titian all expressed themselves with oil; it must have been for a reason.

## THE PAINTER IS NOT A PHOTOGRAPHER

— I have gone through diverse styles, but I have never been a faithful follower of any trend; I have always been a little bit out of place. I did this for something that I believe is called professional honor. I didn't care at all for any movement if I saw that it did not fit with what my body and spirit were interested in. In Paris I did abstract painting for two years; but I soon saw that I was saturated and I returned to the road of expressionism that I had begun in my youth; when I was in the midst of expressionism, Paris was swarming with informal abstract. Now everybody has turned to realism. I continue in my own personal style. When I was young I was also realist, even academic; but I did it to learn, as a discipline. I realized right away that it wasn't for me, because it would never open wider horizons for me, but rather it was going to take me down excessively narrow paths. Now it is what prevails. I don't care. I know that I am isolated in an environment dominated by realistic art. I accept this art as something well done, but I find it very limited in invention and freedom. I know very well that by copying real nature, the painter will never do better than the excellent photographic machines that produce wonders these days. The artist has to do something different. The painter is not a photographer, and he must put something personal into his work. Nature demands to be understood and interpreted.

## TWO KINDS OF CRITICS

— And the critics; what have they said about your work?  
— There are two kinds of critics. The serious and reliable critics recognize the painter's true values and talent, regardless of whether or not the painter goes along with the fashionable trends of the moment. There are also critics who are easy and not very knowledgeable that let themselves be swept away by the current tendencies of what is popular in a given time, and they discredit without blinking anything that does not fit into those molds.

## SPIRITUAL NEED

— Does your painting sell?  
— Yes. It has been well accepted all over the world. But I know that I would be able to sell much more if I were willing to make concessions to passing tastes. Sincerity is my priority. The only thing that the artist has to do is work with order, with honesty and sincerity; then, if the work has value and talent, it is up to the critic to point it out  
— What motivates you to paint?  
— I paint above all because of a spiritual need. In the first place, I paint for my own satisfaction and not to sell. If I also sell, well, then I am very happy. My happiness does not come from the possible material earnings, but rather from the satisfaction of seeing that there are people in the world who like what I do. This encourages me to keep working.  
— And the future?  
— To continue along my same line. Next May 15<sup>th</sup> I open an exhibition in Houston (United States). I'm going to work in that country for a few years. While I'm gone I hope that Spain gets over its terrible economic crisis, which is affecting painters in a bad way.

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