

## JAVIER GARCERÁ = EXHALE INHALE

*Is time the same for bodies not bathed in  
light as for those lightened by it?*

María Zambrano

In the whirlwind of our day-to-day lives, it seems as though we have no time for silence, to stop, to observe what we live and choose to contemplate, and contemplate ourselves. As yoga novices we are asked to keep our "minds blank," to focus on the "here and now." We are to try to clear away past and future thoughts that cast a shadow over that moment, which, unbeknownst to us, disappears without being lived. This is a first step. If in some moment we were to be capable of attaining that abstraction, that connection to our own body, we could possibly start to know ourselves more honestly, more fairly. Stopping ourselves in our breathing, listening attentively to how our muscles groan—or scream—would make it possible for us to forget about ourselves, and initiate a new experience of what is real.

Javier Garcerá works toward a continuous knowledge of himself. I always have the feeling that he is in another stage, looking back over a process that he has already moved past; with this, I do not mean that his search is finished, but rather that he has discovered the path to continue down. Silence does not frighten or bore him, and the distractions surrounding most of us cannot steal even one moment away from him. He has less and less need for the company of a book, or a song in the background. He suffers through banal conversations as if they were irreparable wastes, because life is short to him. Marvelous and short, even though he is not afraid of death. He has also overcome that.

This unsuffering acceptance of the fleeting nature of life, of the uncontrollable

ups and downs where everything escapes, makes him adopt an ethical—or even political—position of compliance with the loss, and modesty towards the world. He is interested in living in the moment, a calm moment, without that existential anguish born of the Baroque certainty of everything human being doomed to disappear. This lack of expectations (in the best sense) makes the frustrations derived from the projection of our wishes and worries, and that mostly turn us into our own enemies, disappear. A few days ago, when thinking about this, I read a story that reminded me of Javier. I was reminded of some of our conversations about the immense power of the mind when dreams are created, and how dreams do not take the present into account, denying the present's privileged position<sup>1</sup>. Borges' Paracelsus<sup>2</sup> prayed for God to send him a disciple. He projected the idea, day and night, until a stranger knocked at his door. The recently arrived visitor, to expel his doubts, asked Paracelsus to prove his mastery real by making a rose disappear. Paracelsus insisted that the visitor not rush him, and asked for his trust. "I know there is a way," he told him, not wanting for his disciple to fall into the trap of limiting himself to the appearance imposed by the magic of his eyes. He was unable to fulfill the request, and neither had their expectations met: the disciple felt disappointed, and the master was once again alone.

In his artistic task, Javier Garcerá also works “without expectations,” putting intuition before planning. He allows for time to do its work, and learns during a creative process that seems at once comforting and enigmatic to him. He often works with his hands, patiently, serenely, in contact with the material, happily pausing like an Indian artisan creating silk robes for a ceremony. This way of working as a master of a trade, an artisan, is more and more relevant to the artist. The discovery of the fabrics has brought about a strengthening in this way; he has also found an ideal vehicle in the fabrics' characteristics to

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<sup>1</sup> KUNDERA, Milan. *La identidad*, Tusquets, Barcelona, 1998, pág. 13.

<sup>2</sup> “La rosa de Paracelso” en BORGES, Jorge Luis. *La memoria de Shakespeare*, Madrid, Alianza,

make his intentions know. It is as if he had found the way to formalize what is real, what is shifting, of objectifying a place to stop the gaze and find oneself protected.

When he intervenes on the material—painting it, fraying it, eroding it—he presents the spectator with what has become a priority in recent years: the stimulation of a purely contemplative attitude. In Chillida's words, "Experience is oriented towards knowledge, perception towards knowledge. I think that a *priori* artwork is born dead. In art, everything can be learned, and nothing, or almost nothing, can be taught<sup>3</sup>". In this case, erudite discourses are also formulated *a posteriori*. Each person may operate wearing the critic's, historian's, anthropologist's, or gallery owner's hat, but only once the first exercise is complete: that of intensifying perception. "I invite you to not be distracted, to search for the truth," Tàpies warned a journalist asking about the meaning of his work. "Equivalencies and clues may be given, but not exact intellectual explanations, because they would go against the original idea of the art. The less words, the better. The spectator's attention should not be limited or directed"<sup>4</sup>. As a reward, that *temporary dwelling* that María Zambrano spoke of, and that Javier has made his own, is found.

The same is true for his day-to-day life: Garcerá recreates the gaze, an attentive gaze bucking social and cultural conventions. He is interested in the nature of human beings, in the transcendence of man towards primordial reality, towards the sacred and mysterious beginnings of life and of things<sup>5</sup>. He believes that the answers to most questions facing the individual come from within. It is only from within the most intimate space that important changes can be produced in every area of our existence: From inside to out,

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1997, págs. 49-60.

<sup>3</sup> CHILLIDA, Eduardo. *Aromas*, Edouard Weiss, París, 2000, pág. 15.

<sup>4</sup> RIGALT, Carmen. "Nunca he conseguido hacer un cuadro de una sola pincelada", *El Mundo*, n° 135, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> MICHERON, CÉCILE: "Introducción al pensamiento estético de María Zambrano: Algunos lugares de la pintura". *LOGOS. Anales del Seminario de Metafísica*, Madrid, n°. 36, 2003, pág. 217

but not the other way around.

Maintaining this vital attitude, and carrying out his work in a society filled with media stimuli, cannot always be easy for him. Even though he seeks refuge in the solitude of his workshop, in silence, without the sound of words, he is conscious of the society he lives in. New technologies attempt to outrageously call attention with their siren songs, relying on an obscene multiplication of images. Commercial publicity constantly interrupts our daily lives, becoming the dominant discourse of many aspects of our lives. Art is not removed from this preference for media, and this is why it is pleasing to him that his art cannot be reproduced. What started off as a negative aspect—disappointment upon seeing them printed—became something special, a plus he would rather not be detached from. Taking pictures of Javier's latest works do not make any sense at all, because with each step, they turn into another work. There is always a veiled, hidden part<sup>6</sup>, and what we believe to faithfully possess, we lose as easily as we made it ours. This last consideration made me return to the "mysterious shadow" and the "magic of the shadow" that Tanizaki spoke of: "As perpendicular vision gives way to lateral vision, the surface starts to emit a soft and mysterious radiation. What until then only showed as a soft reflection, muted, as you go by suddenly lights up with a flash, and you ask yourself, stunned, "How has so much light been condensed into such a dark space?"<sup>7</sup>. *In Praise of Shadows* was among the readings accompanying me in my stay in Palermo with Javier. When he saw it, he asked "Who is reading this?" and I smiled. I realized that he did not ask about any books that were not there.

It is a proven fact that he feels closer and closer to the East than to the West, albeit without the embrace of any orthodox religious belief or mysticism. He is transcendental, "understanding that what is transcendent is in what is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> TANIZAKI, Junichiro. *El elogio de la sombra*, Siruela, Madrid, 1994 (primera edición en español) (1933), pág. 53.

immanent, and when facing the great beyond, choosing the great here"<sup>8</sup> and considering that we and everything make up the cosmos—a close cosmos we must be generous with. This reminds me of our visit to the medieval cloisters of the Basilica of Magione, a peaceful haven in the historic center of a city that still conserves the footprints of the bombings of World War II. He broke his silence only to make me see, in the strength of the olive tree, the generosity of nature towards man and the tight relationship that unites us. “In a few years, I see myself surrounded by trees, living peacefully, like a cat,” he told me. At first, it seemed strange to me; I had thought of him in a *studiolo*, like Federico de Medici's, with immense windows boasting views of the Roman countryside. Just then, a moment of clarity: Of course, Zambrano! She was the figure of the cat that was present during the contemplation, but outside of the picture. The cat was the guardian of harmony... a promise of calm from the painting.

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<sup>8</sup> RIGALT, *op. cit.*