



Photos reprinted courtesy of Manuel Felguérez

Clock Awake, 115 x 135 cm, 1994 (oil on canvas).

MANUEL FELGUÉREZ

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A VISUAL POETICS

*Luis Rius Caso**

For me, thinking about the relationship between a concrete piece of work and the poetics that originates it is one of the most enjoyable ways of approaching Manuel Felguérez' art. Each of his pieces stands alone thanks to the forcefulness of his artistry, always secure, unquestionable. It could be said that it is permeated with that aureate hue that imposes a distance on the viewer, the dis-

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tance needed to understand the special conditions created by the artistic experience. But each piece also refers us to an original poetics that sustains it in its own conceptual order, in which personal world views are framed, views of art and of esthetics, that as a whole signify a proposal of specific, original knowledge. This poetics is verified on a long trajectory that—to my mind—has been in large part characterized by a play of tension, an opening toward the possibilities that a dialectical conception of life and creation offers, in

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Submerger Shadow, 160 x 180 cm, 1997 (oil on canvas).

which opposing categories and registers come to synthesis: order and chaos, forms of continuity and breaks, systematic proposals and lyrical treatments.

Writer Juan Villoro puts it this way:

In Felguérez, the sense of order coexists with purified rebellion, the discipline of form with the vertigo of textures and delirious graphics. As in Rothko, Felguérez requires a map for his abstraction: if for Rothko, the dominant form is the rectangle cut in two, the metaphysical clay field, for Felguérez, an ordinary line requires small pairs of circles, like watchful eyes, the square (or better, an unfolded cube), organic curves that look like kidneys, French beans, buttocks, snails.

Therefore, we have each canvas, each sculpture, each object produced by Felguérez fraught with this poetics, always

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imposed as the immediate reference. Looking at one of his recent paintings, for example, the viewer can keep in mind the poetics that points to the limits of a series worked on for years by the artist, using his own parameters as a starting point to move toward greater formal synthesis or an admirable satisfaction of the model with which he began the series. He or she can also note the artist's breaks and his returns to previous points in his own work—in the expressionist vein, to mention one example—and thus witness the interior codes of his creative adventure.

On the other hand, it is important to underline that this adventure has concentrated on exploring art proper and on expanding the limits of art, within the autonomy that this form of knowledge has won throughout the century. We find,



The Reading of Silence, 150 x 180 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).

then, that in contrast with other artists who have taken into account social, political or strictly speaking esthetic questions in their art, landscape painters, for example, Felguérez has used the conceptual and technical possibilities of art to express, experiment and find links in this terrain as well as in others, like science and technology, that presuppose other forms of knowledge. This is borne out by different experiences like his integrating sculpture and non-figurative mural painting, and allying art and science, among others. Regarding this alliance, Felguérez opened up a road now very traveled by artists who create with computers. Octavio Paz wrote the following about his exhibition “The Multiple Space”:

Felguérez’ proposals do not come in through our ears, but through our eyes and

our sense of touch: they are things we can see and touch. But they are gifted with mental and animal properties, not by some mechanism, but by a logic. The multiple spaces do not speak: silently, they unfold before us and transform themselves into another space.... Art with all the rigor of a demonstration that, nevertheless, produces unexpected objects on the borders between chance and necessity. Felguérez’ objects are visual, tactile proposals: a logic of sensibility that is also a creative logic.¹

This creative logic, on the other hand, is what defines his career, which, if it had to be classified, we would say belongs to the openly pro-active family of artists. This is the case from that mythical beginning, that initial moment in which Felguérez established himself on the Mexican scene as one of the young artists of the break of the 1960s. Those were times for propos-

ing new models, for reaffirming an artistic pluralism that broke with the hegemony of the ill-named Mexican School of Painting, whose foundational myth had been left behind at least 40 years before.

Like few representatives of that “generation of the break,” Felguérez can be singled out as one of the artists who successfully met the challenge of the avant garde: breaking onto the artistic scene with a fresh, original, pro-active language, conditioned to the consolidation over time of a body of work exemplary in both conception and execution, the body of work of a true master. **NVM**

NOTES

¹ Luis Mario Schneider, “La obra de Manuel Felguérez o la anatomía del vértigo,” *Catálogo Manuel Felguérez, Muestra Antológica* (Mexico City: INBA, 1986), pp. 14-15.