

INTERVIEW WITH CARMEN WAUGH

ANTONIO ZAYA

“VOCES DE ULTRAMAR”: AMERICA BY AMERICA

CARMEN WAUGH:

International forums claim that everything still remains to be done in Latin America. What they do not mention is that we existed long before Columbus discovered the New World, that tasks have always existed, and that the great communicators have paid no attention to us. We are the Third World. We lie off the beaten track of the First World's traffic routes. Only a handful have come here to walk along the small tracks towards unknown places, to make new acquaintances in an anonymous population, and to try to get to know different cultures.

We abound in culture, in different origins and idiosyncracies. I believe that for the first time this exhibition has provided us with an opportunity to explain our vision of things. The eclectic nature of our people prevents us from making a single analysis, but despite our different origins we share the same roots, the same search and the same claim: here we are, this is our reality, this is what we are.

We have a lot to say. We would like to tell our story, to talk about our past, and lead the friends who come here down the secret paths of each different group of people. We want them to know who we are, and what our past and present is. We want them to know who we are, and what our past and present is. We want them to listen to the voices of the past when they talk to the future, to understand how,

when our memory came back to us, we thought only in universal terms. Our ingredients are syncretism, the culture of ethnic, popular, political and cultural resistance; myths, religions, language and magic. All this makes a world that is not easy to understand.

The almost total absence of Latin American participants in art activities organized by museums or galleries in Europe and the United States is a permanent feature. The curators come here with preconceived ideas and little esteem for their Latin American counterparts. The situation is not helped by the fact that there are no publications for us to consult and study, as a result of our economic problems. The books and catalogues on Latin American artists which we have access to, are usually published in the United States. As a result of this, we find ourselves in a strange situation whereby the same artists and the same paintings are always selected for exhibitions (I refer to collective exhibitions).

This time we have worked closely with people who are true connoisseurs of their countries art. We have tried to offset an anxiety and a void.

Voces de Ultramar is different from anything that has been done before. We have called on many people from each country; the texts are all Latin American, and we have selected works which were in many cases unknown, by great artists. We hope to portray the respect, unity and search for identity which is a feature of Latin America, and this is our opportunity to do so.



NEMESIO ANTUNEZ. *Rodeo de Talca*. 1956.
Oil/canvas. 101×66 cms.

A.Z. What fundamental differences does *Voces de Ultramar* (Voices from overseas) establish with respect to European, North American, Western hegemonic art? Can we talk about a specifically South American art today?

C.W. *Voces de Ultramar* sets out to prove a Latin American hegemony, through the recovery of that continent's memory and identity. We don't wish to establish differences with Western art (Europe or North America); to establish such differences would be the work of many people, it would take many years and it isn't the concept at issue in the exhibition. Under no circumstance do we overlook the influences of Europe and the United States, on the contrary, these influences exist and they are absorbed by Latin America, where from other ethnic standpoints, artists transform and assimilate them creating an art that is different from European or North American.

As regards the issue of a specific Latin American art, we believe it exists. There are great Latin American artists in the world of contemporary art, and we find in them differences of identity in relation to European North American artists. We can name Wilfredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Armando Reverón, Rufino Tamayo, Diego Rivera, Joaquín Torres García, among many others...

A.Z. To what extent can we actually talk about cultural colonization?

C.W. In our nations, due to insufficient means and also to apathy on behalf of our governments, the necessary importance hasn't been given to culture, which has made our countries appear receivers of information sent from abroad, and perhaps manipulated. What *Voces de Ultramar* precisely wants to make clear is that despite foreign influences, there exists in our countries a differentiated identity.

A.Z. Is the art produced in South America comprehensible without its relation to modernity?

C.W. No, not at all.

A.Z. Do terms such as identity, nation, race... have relevance in these works?



Estanislao Guzmán Loza. *Landscape of Rioja*, 1956.
Oil/canvas. 60×80 cm.

C.W. Most certainly, all of them are relevant, if they don't even constitute their essence.

A.Z. Recently I heard a Mexican shaman say that he didn't feel either the invader or the invaded but the result of that past situation. What is your opinion of this "collision" as Bryce Echenique describes it?

C.W. My personal opinion is that we are in fact a mixture of both races; if our indigenous people were brutally treated by the invaders, as you say, these people were also brutal with their own kind in their religious ceremonies.

This matter of the invader didn't end with the Spanish or the Portuguese, we've got invaders even today. We don't fight with swords and machetes any more, arms are more subtle, and we're at the mercy of North American imperialism and its conveniences.

Latin America is coming out of military dictatorships in many countries, that were once approved of by the United States; these authoritarian regimes have done away with thousands of people. Furthermore, the Latin American diaspora during recent years was enormous, millions of exiles were received in many countries.

Isn't this brutality that we've exerted ourselves? What I want to say is that the invaders have continued to inflict brutality until today.

A.Z. Do the African, Indian, European and Creole components syncretise to define the present reality of this art or is this an Eurocentric vision?

C.W. Yes, absolutely. The Indian, African, European syncretise to define an identity in Latin American art.

A.Z. Is it possible at the moment to talk of another reality?

C.W. No, it isn't. What we must understand clearly is that its roots are different and that thanks to syncretism this reality is different to the one in Europe or United States.

A.Z. What place do the Canary Islands and the art it has developed occupy in your hierarchy?

C.W. Well, the Canary Islands curiously have a movement called indigenist that coincides with movements in Latin America, that also pretends to rescue its aboriginal roots.