

REVIEWS

J.M. Alvarez del Castillo:

A dream of airplanes and distant lands

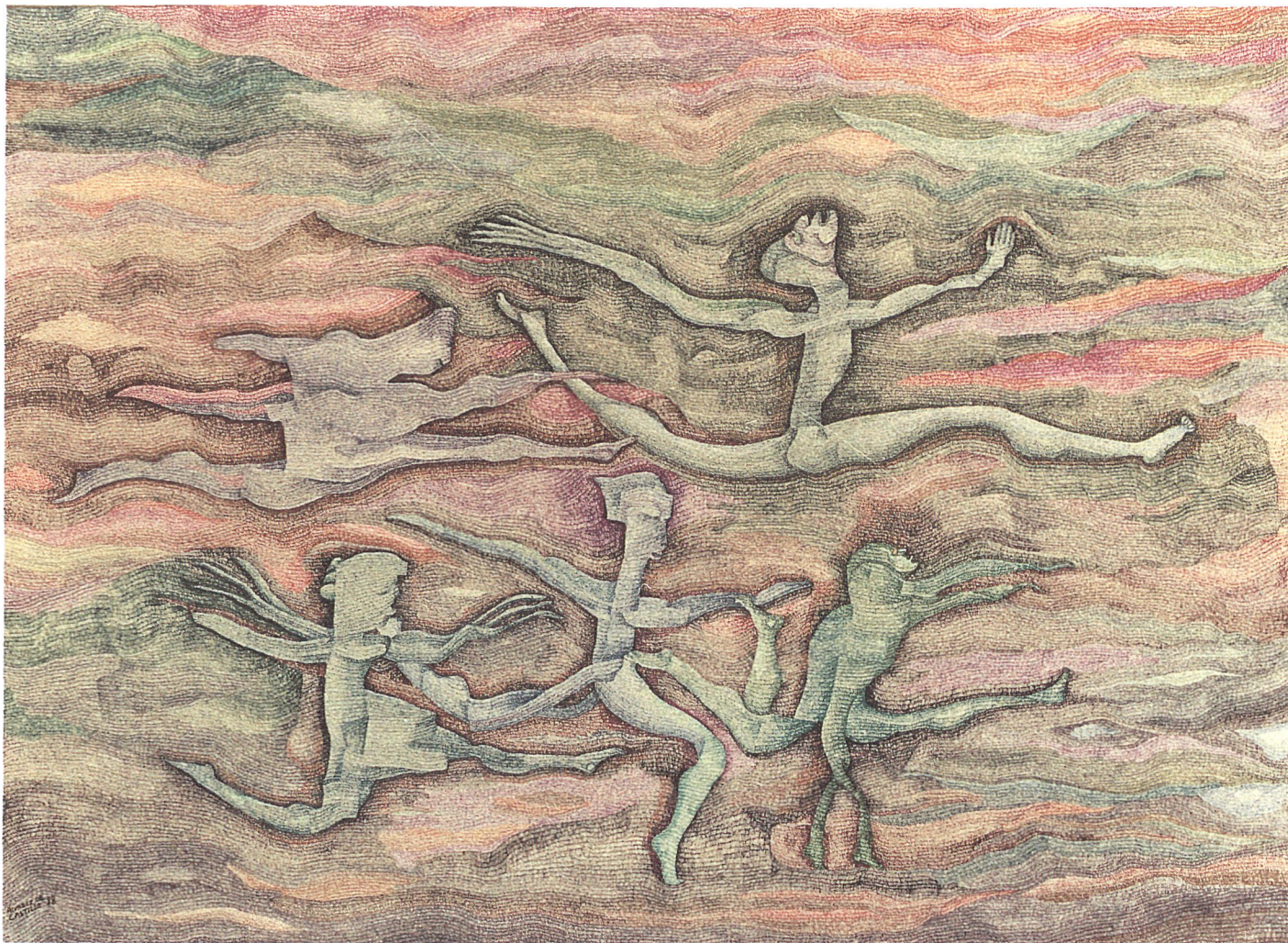


Although Galician by birth, (La Coruña 1926), José María Alvarez del Castillo is one more Canarian. The fact that the artistic community of Las Palmas chose to ignore him isn't really important, as some critics that supported his work locally have noted. It is almost insuperably difficult to be a prophet in our land, especially when one proves the rare ability of being able to embark on the artistic adventure alone, just using your own resources, without any godfathers looking after you in the press, not incurring any propagandist debts,

without protective coteries, without the nepotistic friendship that is our daily bread and the ideal precondition for our reigning mediocrity.

His childhood was devoted to music, he alone studied the violin, the piano, and composition, and wrote his first piano, violin and choral works between the age of twelve and fourteen. However, at seventeen, fate tears up his musical scores, because he is denied, completely unexpectedly, a grant for musical studies in Paris. As a result of this setback he

burns nearly three hundred concert pieces that he had composed until then. In 1957 an art work by him is included in a collective exhibition in Las Palmas. He had started to draw at sixteen, although he decided to have his first exhibition in 1977, at the Vegueta Gallery. He had previously obtained the first drawing prize at the XVth Fine Arts Regional Biennial of Las Palmas in 1972. In that initial individual show that took place in the Calle de los Balcones, Alvarez del Castillo used black ink and



Alvarez del Castillo. *De la danza*, 1988.

pen, though colour was also beginning to appear. His composition is always chorally structured, like the “horror vacui”; elements that express purely subjective realities, separated from time and more akin to an aesthetic concept of rhythm in music.

In 1982, the 2nd Biennial of Painting was held in Teror, a village in the mountains of Gran Canaria. During the decision taking process of the jury, I discussed with the exceptional canarian avant-garde painter Felo Monzon, (since

then sadly deceased), the merits of Alvarez del Castillo’s work, that we both finally supported, and consequently awarded it the prize, among many works presented which had been stored in the basement of the Town Hall of Teror.

It wasn’t a black and white drawing. Its size was hardly bigger than a sheet of foolscap paper, and it incorporated a slight technical variation that his style developed after 1978. The artist described it this way: “Small pointilliste-like strokes appear on the paper, in

black ink and then with coloured inks and Rotring, and so they gradually weave and give shape to the work which eventually resembles a small tapestry”.

He was right. During his individual exhibition in Madrid, (1980), at the Ramón Durán Gallery, the Ministry of Culture acquired one of his works for the cartoon competition at the Royal Tapestry Factory. His work is one of the three finalists, among some 180 works submitted to competition. He would have received the first prize had he not

previously refused it. However the Royal Tapestry Factory eventually made a tapestry based on one of his drawings.

After the Madrid experience, he had exhibitions in Zaragoza. (Sala Torre Nueva, Caja de Ahorros de Aragón y Rioja, 1981), and in La Coruña. (Caixa de Ahorros, 1983), and finally in the Gabinete Literario of Las Palmas in 1985. In 1987 he was once more awarded the First Prize for Drawing at the XIXth Fine Arts Biennial of Las Palmas and in 1989 the First Prize for Small Format Painting of the Xth Exhibition of the Painters and Sculptors Association of Spain.

Yet we have already remarked that Alvarez del Castillo isn't a painter of

exteriors and even less so of everyday reality. Had it not been for these prizes we would hardly have followed his career and his social life, almost unknown. Alvarez del Castillo hasn't had an individual exhibition for a decade.

Last spring Seville brought him back to the present, by choosing his painting, "Corrida Fantástica", (Fantastic Bullfight), for the VIth Prize for Painting of "El Conde de Barcelona de la Real Maestranza de Caballería de Sevilla", presided by his Majesty King Juan Carlos.

In 1977, Luis García de Vegueta wrote of Alvarez del Castillo:

"He has devoted his whole life to drawing, in a reserved and domestic fashion, not daring to show his work while other of his activities and pastimes emerged: playing the violín, horse riding, dreaming of airplanes and distant lands..."

For Alvarez del Castillo's drawings are like dreams in the air, a very carefully charted territory in flight, that is timeless and placeless, echos of other distant inner voices where we recognize surreal mutterings, souls in purgatory, outsider rythms.

He is currently exhibiting the work of the past five years at the Museo Nestor in Las Palmas. A.Z.



Alvarez del Castillo.