

REVIEWS

Fernando Alamo

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The theme of still life is not infrequent in the History of Art. It is rare to find a painter who has not felt its fascination. Fernando Alamo, in his recent exhibitions at La Regenta (Gran Canaria), and at the Casa de Cultura (Tenerife), devotes an almost exclusive attention to this subject. The title of both exhibitions is *Nature morte*.

We know that artists practice arbitrariness and that painters are vague when it comes to the use of words. The concept of *nature morte* is labially developed by Alamo. The non marine animals that tend to travel through his paintings, mainly cocks and rabbits, hide under chest of drawers, climb onto tables or play with watermelons. Death hasn't yet called at their door.

Leopardi identified nostalgia with the repetition of ancient images. In his now distant "foam series", Fernando Alamo began to investigate the possibilities of such a sentiment, that etymologically denotes the confluence of return (nóstos), and pain (álgos). His compositions are now structured by period furniture that reappears and which is occupied by "characters". Around it, an unstable void emphasizes the atemporality of the scene and confines it to silence.

Many finisecular artists have actually invested in a kind of painting that literally rejects contemplation, as Baudrillard has pointed out. It isn't the case of Fernando Alamo who tries to seduce with vision, to attract the spectator through the persuasion of beauty and the clarity of concept. It's an easy-to-behold painting that leads us to a world of great complexity, open to multiple interpretations. Under the apparent simplicity of the image, dwell certain concerns and anxieties that have accompanied the artist during his voyage through pictorial language. It isn't hard to discover the themes that he invites us to reflect on. The most obvious is that of repetition and difference, illustrated by the use given to the same furniture painted in different ways. We can also recognize the alternation of void and tension that handles man's existence, evoked by the desolation of the pictorial backdrop and the intensity of the motif. Or the references to dream that amazing encounters suggest, like a slice of salmon on a commode, or the coincidence of a hen and a tropical flower on a table.

Strangeness is used within art for its natural inciting capacity. Alamo is aware of the transgressive power of anomaly

and of its greater efficiency when it is more plausible. He introduces it discreetly into his paintings through disproportion: the slice of watermelon is similar to the commode where it lies, the cock that climbs onto the chair is enormous. What before in his painting was an attitude of waste and excess in terms of the pictorial act, is now artistic strategy, a means of



Fernando Alamo. Sin título. 1992. 100×75 cms. Tec. Mix. Cortesía: Socaem.
Foto: Alejandro Delgado.

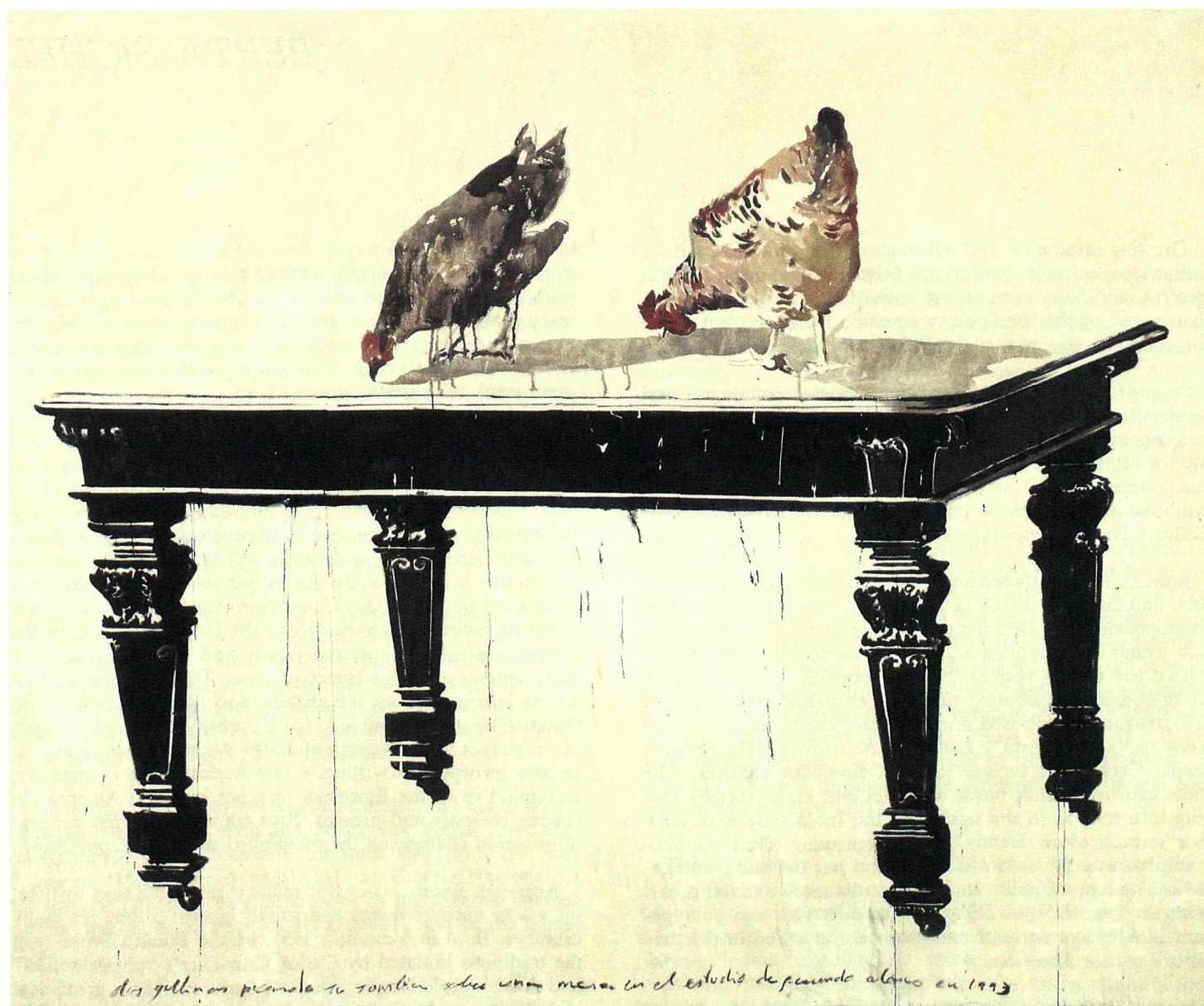
organizing space. The artist reconciles freedom with thought, passion with intelligence.

Juan-Manuel García Ramos, author of a monographical study of Fernando Alamo, already observed how the more fortuitous coincidences submitted to a demiurgic process, without losing innocence or spontaneity. The striving to clarify expression has led him to the reduction of his expressive code but not to renouncing the power of spontaneity, nor the transgressive gesture that alters the placidness of the image. Painting drips and destabilizes the geometry of drawing, one in spirit with "character" and with "still life".

Lover of life, he prints image in death, in the void surrounding his objects. A hare runs through an empty, actionless space with a tulip between its teeth, an anthropomorphic cucumber rests on a chair immersed in nothingness. Around existence, represented by the characters and the objects, the hollow presence of the void. The artist tries to depict the inefable, to reach beauty where the word is silent.

In other paintings, the letters of the word *Natura Morte* are the motif. Made up of flowers or fruit they occupy the painting that becomes a feast of colour and rhythmic dance. The painting is in these cases, a voluptuous retreat, a space for the delight of the senses. Words forgetting their meaning in the vertigo of sensuality, in the atmosphere of the epicurean. Painting ceases to be scenic recreation, or anecdotal narrative, and becomes a wholly pictorial reality.

The exhibition finishes with a series of photoengravings intervened by the artist. In some he imposes his ludic tinge, in others, passion, the incontinence of the hermeneutic gesture. The dominant technique is repetition. The concepts employed, manipulation and appropriation. The artist reproduces objects from the past and old furniture that symbolize a time when things happened in unalterable order, and incorporates elements that distort the stability of the reproductions. The visit to bygone time concludes with pillage, and nostalgia suffers the butt of irony.



Fernando Alamo. *Untitled*. 1993. 155×200 cms. Mixt. Tec. Courtesy: Socaem. Photo: Alejandro Delgado.