

Daniel Enkaoua: painter of inner music

It is referred to as Synaesthesia; the ability to see sounds or to hear colours. Rumour has it that Rimbaud imputed a colour to each vowel. The ingenious Richard Feynman, Nobel Prize winner for physics, saw colours appearing in Bessel functions. It is not imaginary or affectation, but the phenomenon is real and occurs when the brain makes a connection between the areas in the brain that process information from the different senses. People “suffer” from synaesthesia, although many, especially the artists among them, regard the condition rather a blessing than a burden. A gift in the literal sense of the word. Something that is bestowed on you.

I do not know whether Daniel Enkaoua suffers from synaesthesia or not. To be honest, I have to admit that I know little about Daniel Enkaoua. I know that he resides in Barcelona. He is of Jewish descent. And when I look at his paintings: he has sons and daughters. I do not need to know more. It does not matter anyway. His paintings contain everything that I *would like* to know about the man. His paintings say everything. They address all my senses. I smell them. I feel them. I do not only see them, I also hear them.

It seems that the figures that Enkaoua paint are listening to some kind of recalcitrant inner music. It could easily have been Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*, in any case, something muted. Something mysterious, with altering harmonies that disclose their secrets very hesitantly. The figures bathe in silence, but silence is much more than merely the absence of sound. It is the inner music that makes the silence audible, almost tangible. It is a kind of music that resonates with reality, with the depth that it evokes itself. And behold: the colours vibrate, as if they are singing a sonata for the cello and piano. Wassily Kandinsky painted symphonies. Kandinsky suffered from synaesthesia. And he was a gifted cello player. But, there was something more intimate about Enkaoua; no symphony orchestra with percussionists and brassists and first and second violins. When it comes to Enkaoua's still lifes, I hear piano sonatas from Beethoven. Or one of his late string quartets. I only experience synaesthesia, or something that abuts to it, when I look at Enkaoua's figures or still lifes. I sometimes experience it too with Mark Rothko. Even though the music is vaguer. I do not hear a melody with Rothko, only a harmony.

Would one be able to call a melody as being concrete and a harmony abstract? Enkaoua balances on the border between the two sometimes; on the cutting edge. I see a still life in

front of me: a kettle. The paint has been applied so sparsely that the canvas is visible here and there. I have always had a soft spot for painters who do not try to hide that they are painting in the first place; that it is not a question of portraying reality to them, but that it is all about the matter that they apply to the canvas. Painters who do not try to pull the wool over my eyes: "Just look, it's as if it's real." No, painters who have enjoyment when they are painting and who venture to do something with paint and canvas of which others recoil from. It can be figurative painters, or abstract painters. I hesitate to classify Enkaoua in the figuratives. What is his opinion about this? If ever I see him, I would like to ask him.

I hesitate a bit, because the boundary between abstract and concrete is so deceptive. Abstract art does not exist. What can be more tangible and more concrete than paint, than colour, than canvas ... than matter? The matter with which each painter occupies himself? Enkaoua's paintings breathe an all-embracing love for the matter. Each spot, each key, each accent, each brush stroke and each layer of colour are concentrated and tense. They are of a physical directness that penetrates the observer deep into his soul, and yet of a sustained battled elusiveness. They are loaded with meaning. Who said again that colour and paint on their own are nothing? That they do not have any meaning? Look at one of Enkaoua's work and you will know better. It contains an inexhaustible expressive richness, however frugal the colour has been applied.

This expressiveness can only be realized thanks to a virtuoso technique. However, that is the last thing noticeable with Enkaoua. Technique must be like a waiter: indispensable, necessary, but inconspicuous. Painters who are noticed because of their masterful control of technique merely create kitsch. I will not mention any names. I would, however, like to mention the Van Eyck brothers, or Johannes Vermeer: they controlled the technique in a breath-taking way, but that is not the first thing that comes to mind when you observe *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, or *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*. You are deeply moved, you get a lump in throat, and the craftsmanship is a means to realize that emotion, nothing more. It is necessary, but not sufficient. Real artistry begins where craftsmanship ends. Only those, like Enkaoua, who can take the next step will succeed in detaching themselves from reality and create an own reality. Or even better yet: a supplement to reality, and then in such a way that it seems obvious. The work of Enkaoua invokes the feeling that it has always been there, as if the observer has had those works within himself his whole life. They exude an

obviousness that is completely misleading when scrutinised up close. This is what distinguishes the artist from the amateur painter.

A figure thrown upon his own resources. A bunch of leeks. A kettle. It does not seem that Enkaoua needs more than that. And where is the vibrant life then? Where does the contemporary time lurk in Enkaoua's work? At first sight, nowhere; but that is a mere façade. Enkaoua's work is not an escape from reality, but a flight towards or in reality. The look of his figures, when they look at the observer, seems to want to say: "Have a good look; this is the only reality that there is. When we are excluded, you and me, the observer and the painting, there is nothing else." Are Enkaoua's figures lonely? By no means. Because they claim engagement, reciprocity, even when they look away. Their gaze rouses us to life; in a similar way that some elemental particles in quantum physics only become reality when someone observes them. This sounds paradoxical, but every student who has ever had a lesson of subatomic physics knows what I mean.

The involvement of the observer and of the figure is therefore not free of obligation. It is art that cannot be without the presence of the onlooker. It creates a world with which you cannot maintain any relationship other than to perceive it. Even though the suggestion of a possible relationship is there. This is why this work penetrates so deeply, and this is why it is also so ruthlessly melancholic. It speaks of expectations; about unuttered commitments. About something that could be, and may have been, but of which the existence for the duration of the painting, for the duration of observing it, has been withdrawn. This lack of effectuation means that we cannot distance ourselves from it anymore. Enkaoua does not paint figures as such, but rather their presence. And who is looking at whom? Are we looking at the painting, or is the painting looking at us? What is the unredeemed promise that each painting reproaches us about? It is a fascinating question that I hope never to get a response to.

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