

The poetry of artificial light: the art of Pablo Avendaño

There are two principal areas of reference in Pablo Avendaño's paintings. The first concerns the process itself: Painting. Pablo's works are all about Painting: its technical aspects, the effect of oil, color, the brush marks and drips, its ability to convey energy and emotion, the unique qualities that set it apart from other mediums of artistic expression. The second involves the idea of narrative and story. 'Stories' are the very essence of Pablo Avendaño's art.

Pablo's paintings revel in the pure plastic art of Painting. Painting is extremely specific to its nature. Compared to other mediums, Painting is able to convey a multitude of emotions and imagery through color, its tactile quality, matt or shine, mark making. Whereas photography originally concerned itself with recording the 'now', these days, through manipulation, it can now express a different version of reality. Nevertheless, the colors and finish of photography have a different look to painting, even though there are many 'painterly' photographs. Vice versa, the photo realist school of painting does its level best to approximate a photograph, but on close inspection, the qualities of Painting and paint are always apparent. Likewise music, poetry, theatre, literature, can evoke coordinates in the mind, but they cannot show color, for example, in the same manner as painting (though many early 20th century composers wanted to associate particular musical keys with colors)

Until the advent of photography in the 19th century Painting was the recorder of History and its events. After the introduction of perspective, Painting was able to create a window into another world, or a reflection of our world. It became specific in terms of detail, in so much that the professional artist was judged by the technical ability to create a life like version. After photography dethroned Painting's dominance as the recorder of the real, the art of Painting was allowed to follow different avenues. Released from the studio, painters wanted to recreate the outside world in the flesh, the colors of their contemporary life. Artists then tried to symbolize inner worlds; a canvas thus became a portal to psychological states. Abstraction and especially Abstract Expressionism allowed painting to create an art that was self-reflexive, being nothing more than paint on canvas, though arguably many abstract paintings also create their own narratives, are loaded with emotion and drama. Such is the power of color and mark making.

Pablo's art uses different source material, often photographic images, but never to recreate a photograph. Painting allows him to collage all these images into a different image. He is always reminding us that we are looking at painting, with its drips, run offs and brush marks, visible identifiers of the process. In certain works such as *It was the best thing that could have happened to us*, from a distance we feel like we are looking at a photo, but as we move closer the particular tones, colors and marks dissolve the illusion. In certain other works, he pointedly

outlines or sketches an element, and we are made aware again of the presence of primed canvas and a loose brushstroke. Works like *These whales are scary* have the sensuous color palette of old master paintings, a rich, burnished tone that places his works, so very modern in aspect, firmly in the story of art history, relating back to a time of exquisite still lifes and luxuriant Italianate landscapes. Painting's ability to create a scene, a stage, leads us into the awareness of the second critical point of apprehension when looking at Pablo's art.

Taking his cue from movies and novels Pablo creates each painting or series as stories. One of the greatest talents of mankind in all cultures is the gift of storytelling. It is what keeps us reading, listening, going to the movies. Stories create a world in imagination, and we experience something different. They have the ability to transport us to a different place, peopled with characters that we feel we come to know as we spend time with them. Cinema, poetry, theatre, literature all weave different stories, as does painting and photography. Many times the most memorable stories are the ones that always retain a certain mystery - a quality of open-endedness, something unresolved...

In Pablo's works there is a story, but it is never clear what the story is about. His stories are full of magical realism and mystery, most satisfyingly unsettled and unresolved. We want to know more. Very cleverly, like great masters of storytelling in all genres and mediums, he only gives us so much information – and we complete the story. The tropes of cinema and literary mystery and romance are there. We see windows, houses, lights, distant, indistinct figures. We feel something is about to happen, or has just happened, but it is a mystery. Like the artist Peter Doig, who also uses the power of painting to create narrative, Pablo uses different image sources as source material, but never to recreate the source, but something entirely different. Photographers such as Gregory Crewdson painstakingly create a set, like a film set, to take a photograph. We are drawn into the scene. Pablo similarly organizes a setting, a stage set. There is a mood. There are actors, sometimes on stage sometimes waiting in the wings. They wait to enter, or maybe they have just departed.

Like slides or photographs, stills from a film, we stumble on a scene, waiting for something to happen, or has it already happened? As we look at these scenes - empty streets, reflected light in the windows of a home, we wonder about the life contained within or just out of view. In the work *At this point the story grows obscure*, with its black frame device, we seem to be looking at a still from a roll of film - there is a train, a deer, a house. The scale is not right. The brush marks seem to evoke movement, but yet the scene is wonderfully still, frozen in time, a deep color in the composition, like the colors of modern cinema, rich and vibrant. Throughout Pablo's art there is an exciting play of color, some contemporary and fluorescent, some rich and sumptuous, inherited from his Spanish heritage, brilliant masters such as Velazquez and Goya. In works such as *There was no plot, no action, only someone on his way to apprentice* and *They tried not to think about it to name it*, we are looking at open, glass walled Modernist dwellings,

but as 'open' as they are to our probing regards, they contain stories we cannot know. Figures stand looking out, but their story is unknown.

In many ways Pablo is like a novelist, corralling the attributes of writing into his work. In addition to the very specific titles, he even paints text. Thus text becomes a figure, 'figurative' in the language of painting, as opposed to 'abstract'. His works are like sentences in a novel. Often they respond to each other like different parts of the same story. *Moving to a different observation point* and *A hint of jealousy made him strangely euphoric* are like two paragraphs in a book, visually responding to each other with their surreal worlds of blurred photo realism. Thematically, the former, with its doll like figures relates to the toy train in *At this point the story grows obscure*. The color palette in the latter work reflects directly with the night light of *The clocks stopped at 2*.

This brings us to the title of this essay - The poetry of artificial light. Without light we cannot see. Light illuminates.

Photography depends on light for its existence. Film exists because of light. Great film directors have used light in unique ways to accentuate their stories. Films like *Citizen Kane* are examples of the genius of film makers, directors and their photographers to create masterpieces.

Throughout the history of painting there has been an emphasis on 'light' with artists focusing on the qualities of illumination. To this day we marvel at the ability of master painters like Carravaggio, Reubens, Chardin and many others to paint the subtlety and brilliance of light. The Impressionists gloried in the natural light outside the studio. The Post Impressionists divided the color spectrum into separate particles, claiming that in reality it is our eyes that blend the particles together to create the color.

Like the masters before him, and like film directors, Pablo marvels at the power of artificial light. We are surrounded by artificial light, it defines our modern world. There is a constant glow of artificial light in his work, a point of reflection, a point of focus, a character in the story. In *Propiedad privada #15*, the glass front of the dwelling is a glowing golden light, blinding us to what is concealed behind the façade. The beacon of light across the beach in *The clocks stopped at 2* fixes our gaze. In *You don't have to be anyone but me, that was my answer*, we see the glowing lights of the back of a house or bar, lonely but tranquil. This is an angle of view not normally seen as we usually enter such places in the front. Yet, they have their own quiet appeal, tell their own stories. They are the guardians of the many stories contained within the walls beyond. Throughout his works there is a joy in the perception of light. Thinking of art lifestyle comforted him for a while, has the glorious outside light pouring in through the glass front competing with the bright inside swimming pool light. In several works, there is the particularly lighting of neon, acid green, wavering pale yellow, unique to the quality of artificial light. In all these works, lighting is very much a part of the story; it sets the scene and plays an important role. The poetry of artificial light is a truly magical aspect of Pablo's stories and tales.

Like a director or writer Pablo Avendaño allies the physicality of painting to spin engrossing, open ended stories, stories that invite each of us to finish...

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