

The "Petrales" of Xaverio by Antonio Enrique
(freely interpreted from the Spanish by William Tate Dougherty)

"Petrales": a word used by Xaverio to describe his work, which is done with minerals, metals, sands, stones, shells, and many other natural, found objects. When I first encountered these "Petrales" I was overcome by a difficult feeling. In front of them, I could say nothing. Such was the power of their aura: silence. It was a primitive silence that harkened back to the earliest substratum of genetic memory. That silence in the contemplation of this work amounted to, without doubt, a sense of the furthest most reaches of the psychic void, to the sensitive question of "origin" which here, could be experienced. Perhaps "vertigo" would have described better, although "silence" certainly applies to the incomprehensibility of these forms, as well as to the inert power of these materials

For a long time, I have been searching for an adequate answer which would save me from the feeling of defenselessness in front of Xaverio's "Petrales". I have only come up with an approximate interpretation, which though only approximate, allows me to expound on a few succinct and precarious "answers":

Through his "Petrales", Xaverio has made me understand that a great part of the art of the late twentieth century is absolutely ancient in origin, more ancient than can be remembered. Before Culture, to be exact. It is art created in total freedom, far from any inherited or established "form"; it is an art carrying the message of pure suggestion; and it is an atavistic art, which in its pristine meaning announces, "inspiration". In other words, it is a tribal art with spontaneous incursions into the realms of dreams and the esoteric: an ethnic art. Because it is an art that precedes "beauty", it does not search it. I think of prehistoric cave paintings, the shapes of totem poles, and the first pictographs. From Brancusi to Miro, such signs had irrigated the fertile fields of modern art. Now, more than ever, it is time for Africa.

Look at the "Petrales" The first surprise magnificently distinctive--is their irregular form and asymmetrical surfaces. Moreover, there is the paradox that they do not feel whimsical nor capricious in any way. Considering that one has never seen them before, these shapes are remarkably familiar.

Continue to look at them. One can see on these contoured surfaces the mark left by a graffiti-like gesture: a line or a primitive stroke. This stroke, rapid and certain, is not a concrete representation, it is a stroke indicating something remote, albeit vaguely known. Suddenly you become strangely aware that the contour of the "Petral" coincides with the powerful lines and details of the composition. This is when one remembers Xaverio's words, "The first painting must have been made by someone scratching into the sand with his fingers. The composition does not have to be geometrically framed. Symmetry is not natural. After all, it is not found in nature."

And perhaps even before the first painting, the first drawing (and the sand painting would be analogous) was a tattoo, a ritual mask. They are coinciding values, art and ritual. Leonardo Da Vinci, in his "Treatise on Painting", argued that the first drawings must have been tracings of shadows projected against walls. Whether

representation preceded abstraction, or whether abstraction preceded representation, we shall never know. It is sufficient here to say that both come supported by subliminal archetypes.

Then how is it that these "Petrales" produce an unequivocal aesthetic when, true to their primitive origins, they so not try? With this reflection, I remember once again Xaverio's words. He tells me that after creating a series of "Petrales", he discards those which lack harmony in line and color and those which are not visually appealing. This, I assert, is metapainting. This is to reflect on painting in the same pictorial language as the ancients.

Observe that some of the "Petrales" do not contain any "graffiti", How does one evaluate the form of a "Petral" whose interior is non-existent, at least from a linear perspective. This poses a few challenging questions. Can color function as line? And what about the consideration of light? The dark tones and shadows contain something soft, while the light tones with their profiles indicate something accidental. My own thoughts surprise me. These "Petrales" present themselves as an intrinsic unit of heterogeneous elements, which coincide solely in their plasticity and rhythm.

Experimentation in Xaverio's work is continual. The material of the work is just one of their many aspects. Light--which I mentioned before must be considered. From light springs the energy of other "Petrales" where a solution of quartz is layered on sandstone with chromatic pigments of very different densities. The surface of the dolomite or clay, depending on the angle of refraction of the light, animate reflections that encompass an entire radiant gamut, from dull velvets to flashing satins close to the feel of damask.

The various granulated surfaces of these "Petrales" give life to many figures that such plasticity generates.

The series continues in a severely framed world offering us, surprisingly, nature in its primal geological state. In that which we could call "the breaking of darkness," we appreciate the feeling seeing a shaft of light beaming into the tenuous underworld of a cave and illuminating the dark earthen walls. It is the only thing we can see: the raw, unspoiled, primal earth. Or, and I refer here to Xaverio's "Water Petrales", they are like diving underwater. They are so engrossing one can actually feel the bitter bite of saltwater. In their purity, the "Petrales" denounce the pollution and contamination of our times. Without directly saying so, they denounce glass, coins, garbage, and anything else that despoil our land.

As I said earlier, art of the Twentieth Century, in its claim to absolute freedom, is the most ancient art we know.