

## THE LAST NARRATOR

Carlota Beltrame

*Ése es nuestro oficio: testimoniar el llanto,  
testimoniar la historia, ser memoria.*

*Leonardo Favio*

We did not get along very well, and we even had some arguments regarding the work of contemporary emerging artists; episodes such as the one where he wanted to shut down Deborah Pruden's exhibition<sup>1</sup>, a fellow in the Kuitca Scholarship program, or when he waited for me, incensed, at the doors of the museum because I had selected and exhibited an early drawing of his authorship<sup>2</sup>. It was of little use trying to explain to him that I was interested in showing the genesis of his creative process, the moment in which the "brand" of his practice had begun to form. Like many others, Tito Quiroga was strongly tied to the concept of the author as an individuation of ideas or knowledge, making it stand out forcefully over the performativity underlying every artistic piece and over its post-production. Indeed, compared to the notion of authorship, he considered those two moments weak and secondary. To make matters worse, in a recent interview, he did not hesitate to publicly demonstrate his disagreement with the awarding of first prizes to young artists from the local contemporary scene, as he also tended to grant the status of truth to what was "well done," thus disparaging the many legitimate ways of constructing a poetic discourse.

Nevertheless, the respect we professed for each other never waned, and Tito did not hesitate to let himself be "curated" by me again<sup>3</sup>, nor to collaborate generously with *Sin Miga* by authorizing us to publish images of his wonderful paintings. For my part, I continued to think that his work, framed within the strictly academic and disciplinary, is one of the best produced by the evolution of our visual arts, both in the context of the province and the nation.

Several articles were published before the unexpected death of Víctor "Tito" Quiroga, specifically on the occasion of "*No me le afloje la cola a la vaca*" (Don't let go of the cow's tail), his great monographic exhibition of 2019 at the "**Timoteo Navarro.**" I was surprised, however, because, in my view, all of them eluded speaking about his work, falling into mere description, "color notes," or the temptation to poetize their own prose, renouncing a rigorous aesthetic analysis. As things stand, I wish to be the one to try it now, out of an unnecessary loyalty to someone of whom I was never a friend.

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<sup>1</sup> At the Centro Cultural "Alberto Rougés" (2004).

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the exhibition "Dibujo" curated in 2006 by Jorge Gutiérrez.

<sup>3</sup> "La mano, la cabeza," at the University Museum—MUNT (2007).

In 1971, the aesthetic analyst Marta Traba argued that to find its own language, Latin American art had to cultivate the political, the erotic, cyclical time, and, of course, myths and regionalisms. In Tito Quiroga's production, several elements converge: the Tucumán landscape of the '50s and '60s; the academic representational paradigm established by Spilimbergo in 1948; the critical realisms of the '70s; and, of course, the myths surrounding the sugar culture. Through these categories, Tito finds a way to fit into Traba's proposals, but he adds to them a command of scenographic light whose legacy we must seek in the Baroque movement; the idea of the Sublime characteristic of Romanticism, which we observe in his grand and threatening landscapes; the accelerated perspective of German Expressionism that generates environments full of unease; and the saturated, lively colors of Pop.

This curious syncretism, guided by his gifted hand, generated a unique body of work that changed the direction of our visual arts, in which both landscape and characters had always been represented in a calm manner, even when alluding to poverty or corruption (I am thinking of Timoteo Navarro's series of puddles or the famous *virreinas* by Linares). However, in Tito Quiroga's iconography, the anthropophagic appropriation of resources characteristic of those European movements paradoxically makes them local, as they are applied to the representation of vast open spaces planted with sugarcane over which hover those saturated skies of eternal ill omen, marking the destinies of the popular classes of which this artist spoke with obstinacy.

But, if we were to delve even deeper, we would see how Tito Quiroga also manages to give a "twist" to the landscape, the costumbrist portrait, and local myths, for thanks to this maneuver, they emerge saturated with drama. Indeed, his paintings look like film stills because, with the strategies of a film director, he saturates the wide shots of his rural landscapes with information, while achieving the emotionality of close-ups by introducing curious small scenes in which subsidiary stories unfold. The abrupt contrasts of light and shadow and the overflowing skies and perspectives certainly rhyme with the cinema of Leonardo Favio (recall *Nazareno Cruz y el lobo* or *Aniceto*, among many other auteur films). I mean, while Favio conceives his films with the visual devices of a painter, Quiroga delivers stories in narrative sequences that can develop piece by piece, painting by painting, as if unfolding the visual script of a film. But Quiroga's work joins Favio's cinema not only because of this twist, or for the deep vindication of the popular, or for his talent in uniting emotionality and critical reflection, but also for the creation of magical atmospheres where politics and poetics become one and the same.

I spoke of subsidiary stories, "micro-narratives," I would rather say, which, within the main narration that constitutes the dominant image in many of Quiroga's paintings, enable a second twist that further localizes the appropriations this great artist makes of hegemonic European art. I am referring to the cyclical or circular time of which Marta Traba spoke, for the "marvelous real" (which

in Latin American literature had been explored with Gabriel García Márquez at the helm), appears in Quiroga's paintings as narrations whose complex plot can be broken down into small subsidiary stories which, on the same plane of representation (again, as in cinema), are performed by the same characters doubled and/or at different moments of the same myth.

I do not know what Tito Quiroga was like, but I know a little of his work, of his virtuous technique, of the tone of popular comedy and tragedy that he was able to represent because they were his own, as much as the magical and the real; the mysterious and the unequivocal; cruelty and innocence; the stormy and happiness.

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