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Collectif, *La Magie du silence*, catalogue de l'exposition à la Fondation Vila Casas, Can Framis, Barcelone, du 27 septembre 2010 au 12 février 2011.

Successive returns to order and various classicisms during the 20<sup>th</sup> century claimed the attention of those viewers who did not buy into the avant-garde idea that in the century of abstraction, minimalism, and conceptual art it was impossible to continue with figurative painting.

A Catalan from the town of Sabadell, where one of his first teachers was the remarkable Polish painter, member of the Gallot group, Gabriel Morvay (1932-1988), Antoni Taulé, who finally moved to the “melting pot” of Paris in 1973, celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday this year. Having lived his adult life removed from rules and regulations, now, at the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, his voice comes to us loud and strong – the voice of someone who has been able to demonstrate in practice that the figurative path renounced by orthodoxy is possible.

Architect by training – in his early days in Paris he even worked with Le Corbusier – performer and Sixties street artist, in photos of the period he has a certain air of Dalí. He had already experienced a revelation at the Prado and the Rijksmuseum, which to a certain degree set him on his path, as did his discovery of Formentera, which appeared in many of his paintings of the time, and the Mediterranean, as well as his love, from 1970 onwards, for Lætitia Ney d'Elchingen, Princesse de la Moskowa, his steadfast intellectual accomplice, painted by him countless times and who was tragically taken from him in 2005.

Jean-Christophe Bailly, Jean-Claude Carrière, Jean-Luc Chalumeau, Julio Cortázar (who, fascinated by Taulé's rooms and tables, was inspired to write the story “Fin de etapa”, in *Deshoras*, a book published in 1983), Michel Cournot, Jean-Philippe Domecq, Gérard Gassiot-Talabot, Pierre Gaudibert, Michael Gibson, France Huser, Alain Jouffroy, Petr Král, Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, Marc Le Bot, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Harry Mathews, Gilles Plazy, Jean-Louis Pradel, Georges Raillard, Serge Sautreau, Ramón Tio Bellido, Antonio Urrutia and André Velter, are just a few of the French, or Paris-based, writers and critics who have written on the painter's work; while he has been involved professionally with gallery owners such as Nina Dausset, Mathias Fels and Patrice Trigano; and with colleagues such as Christian Bouillé, Erró, Piotr Kowalski, Jacques Monory, Daniel Pommereulle, Bernard Rancillac, Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Antoni Seguí, Peter Stämpfli, Hervé Télémaque, Vladimir Velickovic and Jan Voss. I cite, after the writers, critics and gallery owners these, mostly important artists with whom Taulé has been in close contact, and with whom he has shown more than once. I remember now the joint exhibition of the New Figuration, held in 1979 in the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, curated by aforementioned Gassiot-Talabot, as part of the cycle *Tendances de l'art en France* which also included a review of painting under the direction of Marcelin Pleynet, as well as a third and last show dedicated to conceptual art. To these three lists should be added the names of “seniors” such as Pere Quart from Sabadell – a key figure in the group of local avant-garde writers that came together in the years after the civil war – Joan Miró, Joan Brossa, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras and even the great Jorge Luis Borges. We are dealing here with a painter interested in all things human, perfectly at home in the world of literature, who called a picture from 1989 *El Amor, la poesía y la muerte* (*Love, Poetry and Death*) and whose architectural fantasias ring with echoes of Borges. To exhibitions mounted in his adopted country, France, we can add those held in Barcelona, most important of which were the ones in the now defunct Sala Gaudí (in 1973 under the telling title of *Normalismo*), in the Maeght Gallery (1976) and in the stunning Saló de Tinell (1979), followed by many

others, bringing us to this present show in 2010 at the Fundació Vila Casas, comprising of a selection of large format paintings and only slightly smaller photographs all executed over the last ten years. Thanks to these shows Catalan writers and critics from different generations such as Maria Lluïsa Borràs, Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, Victoria Combalá, José Corredor Matheos, Josep Miquel García, Joan Gil, Daniel Giralt-Miracle, Fernando Gutiérrez, Lluís Permanyer, Rafael Santos Torroella and Marie-Claire Uberquoi, curator of this exhibition, have all come to discover his work.

Reviewing Taulé's career and body of work, exquisitely documented in the faultless and voluminous (400 pages) catalogue for his retrospective at Villa Tamaris in La Seyne-sur-mer, held in 2006, we can see after early tentative experiments in post-informalism, from 1972-1973 – a year he practically dedicated to still-life painting – his adoption of a figurative language. Later, starting in 1975, there was a move towards the language of Pop Art and the New Figuration; an increasing interest in photography and film; an all-devouring passion for art from the past – especially for Italian and Dutch old masters, as well as our own Velázquez and Goya; an interest in wandering, travel and other cultures, including the North American (in 1976, cityscapes of New York in which he planted a metallic case), Oriental (Indian and Chinese) whose influence on art and modern culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been extremely fertile; and lastly, from 1982 onwards, an intensive dedication, largely springing from development in his own painting, to set design, to which he has made significant contributions for some of the great opera and theatre, including Molière, Anton Chekov, the aforementioned Marguerite Duras and Nathalie Sarraute, Josep Maria de Sagarra, Mercè Rodoreda, Francis Poulenc and his *Dialogue des carmélites* adapted from a play by George Bernanos, and Rudolf Nureyev. All this has determined to a significant degree the development of his art, still virtually unknown in the country of his birth – not to mention in Madrid, where I am from and now write these lines; a city where, incredibly, he still has not had a solo exhibition. This enumeration of activities and interests could make a casual observer think that we are dealing with a creator who over-stretches himself, but the exact opposite is true. Taulé could not be more coherent. He is Taulé when he paints, when he draws, when he does graphic work, when he takes photographs, when he films, when he designs sets for plays or operas, when he writes and when he gives interviews.

Limiting ourselves to his painting, in Taulé there is first a commitment to the real, apparent in his landscapes and still lifes from 1972 and 1973, the portraits of his daughter Djamilla from 1974, in the various urban and rural scenes he called “**Espacios fuera del tiempo (Space and time)**”, and the New York cityscapes. As an aside, a certain “Pop” playfulness with representation is evident, from 1975 onwards, in his versions of Velázquez, comparable with those of the Equipo Crónica. Curiously Brazilian versions in more than one case; the painter was dazzled by his visit the previous year to the country of the future, and he was to evoke the feeling on several occasions. From 1977 onwards, Taulé gradually found his own space – with a marked tendency to the scenographics. He shows an attraction to deserted spaces, metaphysical architecture with its accompanying De Chirico feel, to the colonnades and arcades which suddenly, in a picture from 1991 with Monsù Desiderio-like light, are those from **Rue de Rivoli**, to abandoned streets and cities in ruins, to staircases, corridors, backlit windows, to imagined darkened interiors as in the expressively titled “**Laboratorio de espera (Laboratory for Waiting)**” from 1977, to the grottoes which occupied him between **1984** and **1986**, when he connected with the poetry of the sublime. Interiors of the Alhambra, or even the Versailles-like palaces, or of museums, even the Prado. Interiors of mansions as mysterious as those painted by the Danish artist Hammershoi; far away and long ago – his own family's house in Sbadell. Cortázar, mentioned above, so close to Taulé that he would paint his own “Fin de etapa (End of Phase)”, was exactly right when he said the essence of the Catalan artist was, “*a climate both unreal and profoundly real [...], each of his pictures is an instant of something that has not yet happened or could happen at any moment.*”

Occasionally Taulé plays with historical periods, for example the presence of a Goyaesque image in *Nautilus 9*,

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a painting from 2004, sole example of his work in the Stämpfli Foundation, soon to open its doors in Sitges, which was his for a short time thirty-five years ago. But with the passing of time his mission as a painter has morphed into something, to my mind, much denser, more significant. We are struck by his monumental, luminous, unsettling interiors, populated with enigmas, empty or occupied by a single solitary figure (frequently in silhouette or with their back to us), or by some object like a typewriter or the telephone that provides the title for *Teléfono* from 1978. We are struck by his ability to evoke faraway atmospheres; northern seasons, the singing of Cathy Berberian, sailing ships, Iceland, the Islands of Kerguelen, deserts, romantic forests, the universe of Sigmund Freud, solitary towers as in *The Desert of the Tartars*, the Great wall of China, legendary stories such as Marquis de Sade or the Breton mariner Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon who sailed to Brazil in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We are struck by his colour photographs, some of which have been appositely included in this present show focusing on the last decade; photographs that seem to almost pre-figure some of his painting although his photography is becoming increasingly independent. We are particularly struck by his coherence – I use this word despite it not being especially fashionable – and the fact that his paintings, prints, photographs, set designs and texts all depict a universe that is apart and totally his.

I think that at a time when we are making assessments of what the 20<sup>th</sup> century has given us, it is very revealing to focus on a painter as remarkable and apart as Taulé.

“*The enigmas of light*” (Gilbert Lascault dixit) and shade are in the end the great protagonists of his painting which over the years has become ever more silent; which is where the title of the exhibition “La magie du silence (The Magic of Silence)” comes from, chosen by Marie-Claire Uberquoi, it is appropriate and in keeping with the painter’s current mood.