

Villa
Florita



Moments of serene beauty

By Eduardo Mendoza

It is never easy to speak in general terms about paintings which, by definition, should be seen and judged individually, but this is a difficulty that must be faced when these paintings are presented forming a whole set and corresponding to a stage of the artistic career of the painter, in particular a recent stage. Each piece of work is valid on its own, but as a whole set they also have a meaning, a context that is fundamental for fully understanding each individual work. This difficulty, in the case of Oscar Tusquets, is aggravated because this is his first exhibition strictly speaking, in other words, the first time that Oscar Tusquets, whose name is well known and recognized in other fields, appears before the public as a professional painter, having painted now for several decades.

Let me clarify that Oscar has never been an amateur painter. He has not painted as a professional, but he has never painted as a simple pastime. Right from the start, he approached painting as a creative task with everything this involves and he has worked this field with the capacity and technical knowledge of a professional. However, it is true that he has not done so in a professional sense, meaning that he has not been subjected to public assessment, the erratic verdict of the critics and the implacable verdict of the market. In other words, he has not earned his living by painting, nor has he had to justify his painting, nor has his painting had to justify him. The results of this lack of confrontation could be positive or negative for the artist, but the theoretical aspect of the matter does not concern us now. Things are what they are and we will never know what would have happened to Oscar's painting if it had been more exposed to the elements. What matters is that now a painter, in full maturity as an artist and as a person, is now emerging into a public space, with several decades of career behind him, during which he has reached many conclusions, has

added and has taken away and has changed his attitude with regard to painting and also with regard to reality.

The work now being shown is work that is apparently dispersed, but decidedly unitary in as far as it contains and expresses the world of the painter with a sincerity that the formal perfection of each piece of work should not conceal. I do not use the word conceal because Oscar is shy or moderate when expressing his opinions about art, which are founded but categorical, especially about the art of representation and everything it involves. This can be seen in the half a dozen books published for the edification, stimulation and, at times, exasperation of those of us who have read and enjoyed them. I would like to quote a paragraph about the artist from the first of them *Más que discutible* (Tusquets, 1994): "... if one blindly believes in the historical transcendence of work itself, everything that contributes to make it possible... it will be well received, while what makes it difficult —faithfulnesses, uncomfortable relationships, old commitments— will tend to be rejected. We work convinced and absorbed because we love humility so much that we are willing to sacrifice our life in an everlasting piece of work, but we do not have enough time or place to share our affection and dedication to those around us". An acid definition that does not apply to its author. Oscar Tusquets is quite the opposite: loyal to his people and his world; and his work is based on and is recognized in this loyalty.

The paintings of which this exhibition is made up refer to diverse components of everyday life. They are, shall we say, a chronicle of the things that capture his attention: moments of serene beauty. A well-proportioned object, the capacity of organic or inorganic matter to absorb and reflect light, the harmony of the body with regard to the moment. Oscar does not ignore the existence of what is ugly, he simply leaves it for others and opts for a pictorial world that

◀ VILLA FLORITA *Óleo sobre acrílico, 92 x 50 cm*

reflects reality as it should be. In this sense, his painting is figurative but not realist. Like the great painters of the past, with whom he has always maintained a respectful, affectionate dialogue, Oscar does not hesitate to correct defects or remove anti-aesthetic elements. This can be clearly seen in his urban landscapes. What Oscar paints really exists and the painting reproduces this reality with rigour, not forgetting elements that are fitting for the place and time: the name of the street in a square, a traffic light, a zebra crossing, a traffic sign. However, what would make the image ugly is left out of the painting. There is a process of idealising which is external to the painting. The result offers scenes, people or buildings that appear independent from the world that surrounds them. They live their life in the painting. It is notable that Oscar Tusquets, who is an architect with a long, consolidated career, paints buildings as if they were people, with a treatment that would be more fitting for a portrait than for landscapes. Paradoxically, the contrary occurs with his portraits of people, in this case, women. Maybe it is not just chance that Oscar has only painted women and, occasionally, his self-portrait. However, I will refer to this apparently revealing feature later. For the time being, I will mention that the portraits of women do not ooze psychology but situation: a being in the world. They are all portraits, and good ones at that, in as far as they are not limited to the physiognomy of the person portrayed. They have a life of their own and each model sets up a human relationship with the viewer. The one called *Villa Florita*, for example, oozes spontaneity, affection, sweetness and joy; some cacti provide the contrasting note, but the spikes are not threatening: the cactus transmits the sensation of heat, a Mediterranean or tropical touch and it could be an aloe, a balsamic, curative plant. Even so, I believe that from the pictorial point of view, Oscar is more interested in the formal harmony of the female body and the quality of the skin or of the hair than the personality. On two occasions, the face of the model has been left off the canvas. This is not a shortcoming, nor is the choice of females to which I referred above. What happens is that Oscar Tusquets the painter is not interested so much in reality as in the moment. He does not paint what he sees, but he paints himself seeing it. All the paintings in this exhibition and probably all

the paintings that Oscar Tusquets has painted have the same subject: the perception of a moment of beauty or of harmony: women he knows and appreciates because of their beauty and their character, buildings, flowers, his dog. Perhaps in this sample, an example of what I have just said can be found in the painting called *After the Party*: a comfortable sofa, a bookshelf with books in the background, on the sofa some elegant woman's shoes carelessly discarded no doubt with great relief after an amusing but tiring evening, a fur stole on the back of the sofa, the light of the dawn shining in almost horizontally through the half-closed blind. A marginal moment of perfect happiness, minimal in time and forever memorised. I would mention in passing that although his admiration for and personal friendship with Dalí and with Antonio López is well known and that the influence of both of them on his conception of painting is clear, Oscar does not share the emaciated vision of Antonio López or the gruesome universe of Dalí. His world is rather the pictorial one of Morandi, with whom he has no similarity but with whom he shares the perception of shape and of light detained in time.

Banality is a threat that hovers over all works of creation, and in particular those destined to be exhibited in public. In abstract painting, banality can get by fairly unnoticed; in conceptual art it is a positive factor in as far as it is attributed with a critical discourse. Figurative painting from after the avant-garde movement is on the edge of the abyss. Having lost its function of inspiration and testimony, its use has been reduced to being merely decorative: painting flowers, dogs, seascapes and sunsets is playing with nitroglycerine. Oscar Tusquets knows this and faces the risk coldly. At no time does he recur to irony, parody or citation, except in his self-portrait, where he uses at least two of these resources, although the resource is justified because of the subject matter. The rest is not hidden behind any ideological presupposition nor does it appeal to any complicity. As much as he is an art theorist, when Oscar Tusquets paints he does not respond to a precept but to a conviction. I have already said that Oscar has daring and often critical opinions about events, people, ideas and fashions.



But he is not an irate or bitter man, nor does he pretend to be so. The historic, social and professional circumstances in which he has lived do not justify a resentful attitude. With regard to the adversities and personal afflictions that everyone experiences, including him, they have not left a dramatic reflection in his painting but they have left a slight patina of melancholia, which can be found in all his work and particularly in his recent work: the idea that beauty is inevitably accompanied by fleetingness. Oscar lives the moment with pleasure and also with gratitude. Three small paintings, like a triptych, the so-called *Predella Veneziana*, have his children as protagonists. Here the schemes are broken to make way for a painter who is less serene, more subjective. On this occasion, the painter's view includes the gaze of the people painted. What he shows us is not the world of the artist, but of the children. They occupy almost all the space and what is attracting their attention occupies the rest of it. Venice, with its stunning architecture, is a dim stroke in the background of the canvas for visitors concentrated on the water and on the enjoyment of going for a boat trip. In another of the paintings, the children turn their back on the spectator, absorbed in feeding the pigeons. On the grey pavement, the grains of cereal shine like treasure.

I will finish as I started out. Oscar Tusquets is not an amateur, but he is a new artist in this arena and this makes the balance difficult: for obvious reasons he

should be judged as a painter, however, the spectator is, in some way, lacking the reference that his career would provide. I imagine that shortly a retrospective of his pictorial work will allow this gap to be filled. In any case, as I have already said and now repeat, even though he has painted in a non-professional way, he is not an amateur. The amateur senses or knows from experience the limit of his possibilities and is always on the other side. The non-amateur insists on crossing these limits and converting what started out as pleasure into an authentic torment. In Oscar's work, we find these two factors along with a third one: satisfaction in the face of a problem solved, a fair idea, a well-finished job; something that is clear in some works of the great masters (it is the first impression that one gets when looking at a Velázquez or a Vermeer) and which Oscar cannot avoid on some occasions, although modestly, as in the *Ocho vasos romanos y uno mío*, with its relieves, its shadows and its plays with light, not forgetting the joke of adding one of his own pieces together with the representatives of classicism. However, I insist that the exhibitionism is modest, starting with the subject matter: beautiful but humble ornamental objects.

Anyway, Oscar Tusquets' painting aims to be something more than a set of beautiful but humble ornamental objects. Each piece of work flows in its own life space and the whole set reveals the painter's world. Nothing more and nothing less.

Oscar Tusquets Blanca

Arquitecto por formación, diseñador por adaptación, pintor por vocación y escritor por deseo de ganar amigos, Oscar Tusquets Blanca es el prototipo del artista integral que la especialización del mundo moderno ha llevado progresivamente a la extinción.

Nacido en Barcelona en 1941, acudió a la Escola d'Arts i Oficis (Llotja) y al Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluc desde los trece a los diecinueve años. Se graduó como arquitecto en 1965 en la Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona. Socio fundador del ya disuelto Studio Per, realizó junto a Lluís Clotet la gran mayoría de sus proyectos hasta 1984..

Socio fundador de Bd Barcelona Design. Con esta productora se inició como diseñador de muebles y objetos. Más tarde ha colaborado con prestigiosas productoras españolas, italianas y alemanas. Algunas de sus piezas forman parte de las colecciones de importantes museos como el Moma de Nueva York o el George Pompidou de París.

Entre otras distinciones ha recibido, la *Medalla de Oro al Mérito en las Bellas Artes*, el *Premio Nacional de Diseño*, la *Palme de Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, y la *Creu de Sant Jordi*. Además tiene dos premios *Ciutat de Barcelona*, y varios *FAD de Arquitectura* y *Delta de Diseño*, entre otros.

En 1994 se reveló como ensayista con *Más que discutible* (Tusquets Editores). Desde entonces ha publicado en Editorial Anagrama varios libros con notable éxito de crítica y público.

Aunque pinta desde hace cincuenta años, por primera vez expone en una galería y se da la posibilidad de adquirir sus obras.

An architect by profession, a designer by adaptation, a painter by vocation and a writer because of his desire to make friends, Oscar Tusquets Blanca is the prototype of the integral artist that the specialisation of the modern world has progressively made extinct. Born in Barcelona in 1941, he attended the School of Arts and Trades (Llotja) and the Sant Lluc Artistic Circle from the age of thirteen to nineteen. He graduated as an architect in 1965 from the Barcelona Technical School of Architecture. A founder member of Studio Per, which no longer exists, together with Lluís Clotet he carried out most of its projects until 1984.

He was a founder member of Bd Barcelona Design. With this production company he started designing furniture and objects. He later collaborated with prestigious Spanish, Italian and German production companies. Some of his pieces of work are included in the collections of important museums such as the MoMA in New York or the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Distinctions he has been granted include the *Medalla de Oro al Mérito en las Bellas Artes*, the *Premio Nacional de Diseño*, the *Palme de Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* and the *Creu de Sant Jordi*. He also has two *Ciutat de Barcelona* awards and several *FAD de Arquitectura* and *Delta de Diseño*, among others.

In 1994, he proved himself as an essayist with *Más que discutible* (Tusquets Editores). Since then he has published various books with notable success among the critics and the public with Editorial Anagrama.

Although he has been painting for fifty years, this is the first time he has given an exhibition in a gallery, where people will have the possibility to acquire his works.

