

Pedro Cano and the Maritime Theatre in Hadrian's Villa*

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In 1989 the Spanish artist Pedro Cano [1] designed the stage set and costumes for a performance to be held in Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli. The play entitled *Hadrian's Memoirs: portrait of a voice* [2] was based on excerpts from the novel by Marguerite Yourcenar, interpreted by actors Giorgio Albertazzi, Eric Vu An and Maria Carta, and directed by Maurizio Scaparro [3]. Cano's very intense and meaningful painting of the Maritime Theatre in Hadrian's Villa is part of his 160 x 100 cm series of watercolours of Greek and Roman theatres and amphitheatres. Although the artist executed this particular painting in 2016, he had already painted the site many years earlier when he created a notebook of paintings of Hadrian's Villa and a series of twelve aquatints in which he included not only the theatre, but also other architectures in the complex. His interest in theatres developed during the journeys he has made throughout his life; theatres are difficult places to portray due to their intimacy with history, with the vicissitudes experienced by communities, art and architecture. In the first part of the performance focusing on *Hadrian's Memoirs* the public waited in front of the Maritime Theatre and only later entered the huge baths where the event took place. Although the painting faithfully depicts the architectural structure of the theatre, it is a personal artistic interpretation balancing measurement, force and geometric precision. The artist wanted to avoid creating a didactic image: his intention was to produce a neutral representation; he initially drew a sketch to study the light sources and define the chromatic contrasts between the browns and grey-greenish sky. He

had examined the most important parts of the shadows and analysed how, by projecting the sky onto the surrounding walls, the colour would have toned to a lilac-violeous shade while in the more intense parts it was possible to achieve a very distinct reddish hue. Cano emphasised the columns in the foreground so that the parts to the right and left of the canvas would be more intense. The painting's perspective is precise and impeccable; the force with which its composition has been organised captivates the spectator, just like its architecture mesmerises visitors to the site. The round shape of the hemicycle and the water reflected on the columns and openings captures onlookers and recreates the impression of the embracing space. The very slight, geometric line of the railing reveals the enclosure, the enclosed space. The colours are elegant, precious and austere and there are many cultural citations and references to history. The conciseness of the details, for example the marble columns, contains the essence of the architectural order; its plasticity and severity. Cano uses an intense, disciplined method to hatch and paint the various parts. Every pattern is filled with content, nuances, traces, and interlocking elements while the seemingly casual brushstrokes are the end result of skilful expertise and a strict geometric discipline. The use of brushes and the ensuing vibrations turn the painting into a powerful, informative means of expression. Shades of greens, browns, ochre and black; everything collaborates organically to empower the painting. The lightly sketched objects take on a complete form because every small, proportioned, and well-drawn part recalls what's miss-

* Articolo a invito a commento dell'immagine di Pedro Cano, non sottoposto a revisione anonima, pubblicato con responsabilità della direzione.

ing. This is the incredible power of the watercolour technique, so loved by architects because it gives them the possibility to rapidly create coloured areas, recording not only what is visible and tangible, but also what is invisible and implied; it clarifies the details and complex links, and Pedro Cano takes this technique to the highest levels of embellishment and subjective complexity. His brushstrokes study matter in order to discover the points and planes where light meets essence and reveals the organic nature of the volumes, alterations and even the diverse stratifications of the architecture. The technique exploits layers, superimpositions and omissions; the

rapid spreading of colour merges with the transparencies, the games of light and shadow, and the mysterious atmospheres. The painting reveals the tonal variations between the parts in the foreground and background; the colours coagulate into blemishes, the elegant graphic effects sometimes ripple and shatter and at times look like spray. All onlookers objectively and personally interpret the image; everyone puts into the painting their own critical ability to select, summarise and construe, and so everyone completes their own interpretation. The painting conveys the balance that is inside the image that goes beyond what is actually depicted.

Notes

[1] Pedro Cano Hernández, a Murcian painter, is one of the most representative artists of Spanish pictorial realism on the international stage. His works, created using every kind of representation technique, have always been characterised by strong artistic expressivity, but with the versatility of a plastic artist. His works are closely linked to the Spanish landscape of the Murcia region, but with an obvious interest in Mediterranean light and the portrayal of the atmosphere of places. His famous travel notebooks, true caskets of ideas, are magnificent drawings that narrate the story of fantastic journeys and communicate creativity, balance and harmony. Pedro Cano is a self-taught painter who began to paint at the age of ten; he studied at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando de Madrid and then at the Spanish Fine Arts Academy in Rome. He lives in Spain, Latin America and the United States and has exhibited all around the world. He is a member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de Santa María de la Arrixaca and King Juan Carlos has honoured him with the Encomienda de l'Orden de Isabella Cattolica. Since 2013 he is a member of the Accademia dei Virtuosi del Pantheon. In 2010 the new Museo y Centro de Arte de Blanca (MUCAB) was inaugurated in Blanca, his native city, and dedicated to him. The Foundation hosts his works and continues to promote an international artistic, cultural debate.

[2] The French novel by the writer Marguerite Yourcenar, published for the first time in 1951, was awarded the Prix de Critiques. The book de-

scribes the life of Publius Aelius Traianus Hadrianus, emperor of Rome in the second century; its new and original text is written in the first person singular, in fact it takes the form of a letter written by Hadrian in which he describes his private and public life.

[3] Pedro Cano repeatedly visited Hadrian's Villa with the director to choose the best place for the various scenes and to be inspired with the design for the costumes. The idea was to create a minimalist stage set and, for the first part of the performance, build sand-coloured tiered seating for the spectators. The public arrived before sunset and was urged by the musicians and actors wearing Roman masks to sit on tiered steps in front of the huge baths. In the second part of the performance the spectators faced the Canopus and were seated on a stepped, dark green platform on the left side of the lake. A wooden raft painted with concentric circles to create the impression of drops of water was positioned in the centre of the Canopus. The earthy colour of Hadrian's Villa inspired Cano with the colour of the actor's costumes making them look as if they rose out of the earth like columns or architectural objects. Only Antinous wore different coloured clothes: a bluish white tunic and a red velvet cloak with black stripes which Giorgio Albertazzi wore at the end of the first part of the performance when he pronounced Marc Anthony's monologue from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

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