

## "NIGHT JOURNEY AND THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL" / FASIM INTERVIEW / LUCÍA GÓMEZ LISON

*"The dark cave where you fear to enter is where your treasure is." Joseph Campbell*

“An existential state of transcendental maturity, certain, sharp and profoundly dark is the instigator that has united writers, philosophers and mystics from the East to the West. The dark night of the soul -although originally in St. John of the Cross, the dark night- unites and disunites his free will. In the group exhibition Pléyade - curated by Lluís Masià, featuring the work of Lolo Caminosos, Vicent Cardá, Paco Dalmau, Jacobo Eid, Raquel Garin, Marcos Juncal, Pedro Kouba, Lluís Masià, Lucía Moya, Roice183, David Sánchez, Oscar Seco and Walter Wail- one of the most profound creations by Germán Bel / Fasim (Barcelona, 1972), Travesía nocturna III (2022), is on display at La Merceria gallery. This piece, which is part of Travesía nocturna -twin series of a previous one, Claros del bosque-, symbolizes the inspiration that lies behind this creative and human phrase of the artist from Barcelona.

Being able to be defined as an energetically abysmal pseudo-catharsis, the dark night is perceived as a state prior to reaching a phase of divine encounter and superior wisdom. Through these works on paper, decidedly more cryptic, minimalist and dense than those previously exhibited by Fasim on the same walls months ago, we witness a window into his spirit, vital and creative. Reduced to a minimal chromatic palette, symbolizing almost a cosmic struggle between light and darkness (or rather an encounter?), the urban artist, who has jumped between lyrical abstraction and pure pictorial visual poetry, offers us revitalized hopes about the artistic horizon; conceptual claws to grab hold of, and a tough and steep nocturnal journey. Rationally and theoretically, these creations by Fasim are related to Perceval or El cuento del Grial, María Zambrano's Claro del bosque or the figure of Cagliostro and his connections with alchemy.

We talked with Germán Bel / Fasim about impulses, the dark night of the soul and the process of transmutation, his latest creations and the turning point that these works have meant in his career, among other things”.

### Lucía Gómez Lison

#### 1- To this day, do you still consider yourself an urban artist?

I consider myself an artist who resists formal classifications because I am constantly evolving. I have contributed to generate and establish several urban movements since the mid 80's in our country. I am currently part of 'contemporary urban art', one of the most recent international movements that is composed of urban artists with a pictorial interest towards contemporary art.

I started painting in the street at almost the same time as I started painting on canvas, only about six years apart. My work on canvas has evolved in parallel since the 90's when I started to have a great interest towards painting. I signed up for a fine arts school in the center of Barcelona, very close to Las Ramblas, with the intention of painting "like Velázquez" or something like that I told the teacher (laughs), it was called "Academia Cucurulla" and it was a very bohemian academy, a punk model full of bruises who fell asleep during the sessions because she took heroin came to pose, she looked like a figure of Egon Schiele. I lasted only three months, at that time I was visiting the best galleries in Barcelona of modern, postmodern and contemporary art, I visited them quite often because I lived in Corsica street, very close to the whole circuit of galleries, like the Joan Gaspar which was my favorite and which was certainly my first school, there I was facing all those mythological artists: Clavé, Tàpies, Miró, Picasso ....

A few years earlier I had spent a few days in Paris, in the studio of Jonone and the BBC, the Hôpital éphémère in the Saint Denis district, which was one of those studios where the passage of graffiti and urban art to museums and art galleries in Europe and later to the world took place. That trip was initiatory, something stirred inside me and I returned to Barcelona profoundly changed.

## **2- At this point in your career, do you think there is still vindication in your work?**

In painting, as in literature, one transmits everything one has lived, life experience filters through to the support, consciously or unconsciously. My painting always vindicates something, some emotional state I have had, an event that has impacted me, some social injustice... Also part of my life soaks the works with a patina, sometimes it is not very noticeable and sometimes it is more evident. Working in an improvised way, the themes emerge from the subconscious with poetic and often very cryptic language, I do not plan the work in advance. I like to work this way, with great freedom of realization and content, I can talk about a very hard subject like a war or about the rose bush in my garden. I am an artist who often claims something, but not always.

At the beginning I was more dramatic in my works and they were very emotionally charged, but I have modulated. With the passage of time these stages have led me to work with a totally unpredictable poetic language and although sometimes it is not perceived at first glance, there is still a cry, more mature, more tonal, less sharp, more subtle.

I remember a phrase of Joan Miró during the mythical exhibition "Miró, otro" (outside the Colegio de Arquitectos de Catalunya) during the intervention in which he painted all the exterior windows (and which was possibly the first intervention of 'urban art' in Catalonia and in Spain), an exhibition in which he vindicated a series of questions. At the end of the exhibition Miró wanted to erase the mural, when asked about it he said something like; "a scream, if it lasts too long, becomes a howl".

## **3- What do the series *Travesía nocturna* (2022) and *Claro del bosque* (2021-2022) mean to you at this point in your career?**

### **Could you contextualize these works within your own previous path?**

A year before the pandemic I lived a complex personal situation from which arose one of my most extensive series that has different readings, 'erased landscapes'; a contemporary review of the landscape, a denunciation of climate change, the destruction of natural space and a vindication of the limits of freedom of expression by the obsessive and constant erasure of the 'signs of existence' that humans have left everywhere since the Paleolithic and that we continue to leave in today's cities.

In parallel and already in full pandemic arose other variants of this series of landscapes within some experiments that I have been doing for a long time to create works with great economy of means and colors, I do them as an exercise or as a search. Almost all the works that have influenced me the most, most of the time are painted with a single color or with a single line, like the giraffes, elephants and various animals of the Sahara desert, in Tassili N'Ajjer (Algeria), for being some of the paintings that are painted with the greatest freedom that can be found on this planet, some with just a line scratched on the rock, those paleolithic sgraffito are of an outstanding artistic purity and there are thousands of them. They are very animistic paintings, they were painted when it was a rich jungle.

"Art, in one way or another, always seeks to express the soul", says my admired Carmelo Ríos and it is this kind of freedom that I am constantly looking for, although we are already very contaminated by a great saturation of images, paintings, influences or movements... It is difficult to paint with that freedom today.

One of the series is titled 'Forest Glade', because the paintings were configured in the center of the paper and from there images emerged similar to a clear area in a forest, from which some forms and figures seemed to emerge without being defined, suggesting more than revealing, like the needle of Vermeer's *Lace Maker*, which suggests but is not painted, it is perceived.

## **4- Has your work method been altered with the creation of these series?**

My working method is always to apply to the work the research and experiments that I discover, it is due to this search that new relationships arise between ideas and works. In this case the search led me to combine experimentation with the vital moment I was going through and it crystallized in a series of works where painting became a kind of very intimate diary, so my work was not altered, but was complemented with new variants of the game. My painting can vary a lot from one series to another and also from one work to another.

## **5-Where is the pictorial gesture -so present in street art- in this series of paintings?**

The pictorial gesture is always the same in painting, regardless of the moment or the movement to which they belong. It is the same from the Tassili giraffes to Monet's water lilies. I believe that the intention is what differentiates this gesture from

another. A gesture from Goya's brush to one from Mondrian's brush, both are the same gesture, but the difference in intensity from one to the other is abysmal.

These works are the result of a physical and psychic 'transmission', that is why I call them 'impressions', it is a technique to which I arrived looking for a maximum expressiveness with very few means, not to save material, but to try to force myself to give a very high note with very few means. In truth we could call it body painting a little because it is painted with the whole body where the movement and the maneuver of impression are fundamental.

**6-If we analyze your journey from your beginnings as an urban artist until now, we can glimpse that these last series that these last series -Claro del bosque and Travesía nocturna- are pure suggestion to the spectator taken to the Where is the formal definition here?**

For some years now I have been working much more with intuition, I let myself go without any intention, although I continue to move within an 'oniric classicism'. I realized that I expressed more the less I defined, in previous years I was looking for and forcing a series of figures and landscapes, but I ended up exhausting myself. I discovered that, without controlling the process so much, it flowed much better and shapes, figures and landscapes appeared again, but within a new poetic context that forces the viewer to interpret, to play and to be part of the work.

A text by María Zambrano from which I have been inspired many times for the 'Forest Glade' series says: "Some figure in this remoteness is about to show itself at the limit of corporeality, or rather beyond it, without being a scheme or a simple sign. Figure that vision craves in its blindness, never surpassed by the vision of a luminous figure or by some splendor. Some animal without fable looks from this distance. Some tatter comes from an unseen whiteness, something, something that is not sign.

Nothing is sign, as if glimpsing a realm where sense and meaning are one and the same, where love does not have to hold on nor nature wanders like a lost or surprised sheep that appears and hides. And light does not reflect or bend or spread. And time without defeat does not pass, far away where the center is enunciated to which the clearings of this forest mirror in instants".

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**7-Claro del bosque and Travesía nocturna are inspired by the dark night (of the soul) of which St. John of the Cross spoke. Saint John of the Cross spoke of. This concept unites a multitude of literati, thinkers and mystics from Maria Zambrano, Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell to Ahmad Al-Shahawi.**

**What part of you, as an artist, have you transmuted into these works and how has it influenced your work?**

A year before, during the whole 'pandemic' and until today, after a series of events, I lived one of the most profound episodes of my existence and although I don't think it is completely over, it has diminished in intensity. The truth is that I do not remember well how it came about, but one day I found myself immersed in what I would later learn was called 'the dark night of the soul'.

There are initiations that are sought and there are others that find you, life itself is the one that subjects you to it and as Nicolas Bouvier said: "One thinks he is going to make a journey, but then it is the journey that makes him".

From this period arise some of the deepest series of paintings on paper that I have painted. Series that I still do not consider finished and that are twinned with other previous series.

It began with a series entitled "Forest Glade" influenced in part by the initiatory theme of Perceval and the Grail story, in which the exit from the forest into the world is a metaphor for the exit from the maternal womb, which in the story is symbolized by the forest and by Perceval's mother. The 'forest clearing' symbolizes the coming of adulthood with all its consequences and once and for all.

This is followed by another series of paintings: "Night crossing", in which during this period I manage to capture something of the experience of transmutation that I am living, although on very occasional occasions. The process of alchemical transmutation, as I am learning, is not converting metals into gold as we generally believe, but an inner transmutation to a higher consciousness.

"God takes from you what you want most, to give you what you need most", says a Sufi Proverb.

According to Carmelo Rios in fairy tales, mythology and ancient traditions we find symbols of the search for the soul, represented by a imprisoned maiden. The knight, as an initiate, must overcome obstacles and defeat the ego represented by the dragon to free the soul and discover its true divine nature.

These paintings appear in the form of a diary or a logbook, subject to a multiple and difficult-to-precise interpretation, a kind of survey of one's own existence and of the space-time that surrounds us; the measurement of the completely dark cell in Poe's story 'the well and the pendulum' or a bottle sent with the desperate message of a shipwrecked sailor. Be that as it may, some of these works are directed in this direction, of which I would highlight 'Travesía nocturna III' which is the work that I have presented in the collective of 'Pléyade' in La Mercería in Valencia, of energetic expressiveness in which the intensity of the mystery makes this piece the cornerstone of the series.

It is one of the most representative works of the post-pandemic period to which I have a particular appreciation for its solidity and its resounding expressiveness with very few means, with just a few simple stains of white paint on a black painted paper that could well represent a cosmic drama, a battle between light and darkness.

**8-The work Travesía nocturna III (2022) is currently on display in the collective exhibition of Pléyade at the Valencian gallery La Mercería. Beyond the obvious metaphor of color, in what way does this piece allude to the existential process of the dark night, does this piece allude to the existential process of the dark night of the soul?**

The dark night of the soul is about how situations of loss and crisis can lead us to experience a process of transmutation and renewal through which we can grow personally and connect with our essence. It is a time to accept the darkness, surrender to the pain and allow it to transform us. Jung said that "darkness and chaos always precede an expansion of consciousness". They invite us to give space to the soul, to trust in transformation and surrender to the divine will. The dark night is presented as a sacred and solitary journey, where we cross the unknown to discover new personal resources.

In this period the soul reveals itself and invites us to rethink our life, where we must step into the chaos and trust the process. Losses and crises destroy our small will to connect with the Great Will and become wounded healers. We can choose to learn from experiences or fall into bitterness and victimization. Failure helps us mature, while continued success can keep us superficial. We must surrender and allow life to transmute us; each experience of death and rebirth takes us to new levels of consciousness.

The work 'night crossing III' symbolizes for me the highest note in this process, the black pearl of the works I was painting in this period.

As Thomas Moore said: "Perhaps he learns in his dark night a secret which as a rule is hidden from modern people, the truth of things can only be expressed aesthetically, by means of stories, images, films, dance, music. Only when ideas are poetic do they reach depth and express reality."

**9-The manifest darkness of Claro del bosque and Travesía nocturna, and especially of Travesía nocturna III (2022), contrasts with previous and recent works -also exhibited at La Mercería**

**Travesía nocturna III (2022), contrasts with previous and recent works -also exhibited in La Mercería in your previous solo show- such as Insinuación de paisaje II (2023) or Paisaje emergente II (2023). What does this change imply for you?**

The series I work on are usually very different from each other, I work from one to another, depending on the day. I have many open series and I like each one to be a different adventure from the other, so I can work without it all becoming a routine.

These works on dark light paper are a metaphorical game of the initiatory nocturnal journey that necessarily has to be done in the absence of light, because it is a search for it, the colors can represent light and darkness, or refer to the positive and negative energies of the universe.

The works of 'Insinuación de paisaje II' (2023) or 'Paisaje emergente II' (2023) are works of great vitality. The exhibition 'Under the light of Sorolla' was mainly about light because from the terrace of my workshop you are bathed by a very bright sun that is characteristic of the Valencian community, and I realized that one of Joaquim Sorolla's workshops was in the Cabanyal, a few kilometers from my house, so it was the same light under which the master painted.

**10-Has Travesía nocturna III (2022) been some kind of turning point for your future creations?**

A painter is a kind of Prometheus, I think it has been a kind of 'sounding with scandals', the tool used by ancient sailors to measure the bottom, an attempt to probe the depths of my existence and space-time, the surprise has been to find an answer as an unexpected greeting of the great mystery of which we are part and that surrounds us.

As Einstein said: "The most beautiful feeling to have is the sense of mystery. It is the source of all true art, of all true science. Whoever has not known this emotion, whoever does not possess the gift of wonder and rapture, would be better off dead. His eyes are closed.

<https://sirocomag.com/en-conversacion-con-german-bel-fasim>