

**Joaquín Jesús Sánchez**  
**May I bother you a moment?**

Secundino Hernández  
Sure, why not?

JJS  
**You've hung a show of ugly paintings made with old paint. What are you trying to achieve?**

SH  
Who said they're ugly? Sometimes you paint with what you've got and engage with the painting without asking yourself whether it's beautiful or not. You don't have to please anyone. It's enough that they respond to what you need in this moment. Old paint warrants the same respect as a tube of fresh paint that's just been opened. It's like beginning to cook with what's left in the fridge.

JJS  
**It's a conscious choice?**

SH  
Yes. These are limits you set for yourself, the premises you must deal with. The idea of overcoming difficulties and learning from experience has always interested me. But... ugly?

JJS  
**It's not a value judgement. We've simply inherited an idea of beauty, one that you can oppose. I used a naïve expression in this connection. Don't get annoyed.**

SH  
Perhaps these are works that are unexpected. I could have made them more refined, given them a more digital finish or used a more appealing idiom. But I wanted to get back to a more overt materiality because painting is nothing more than a physical entity that covers a surface. I worked with miniscule layers ... microns of paint that dyes the canvas. Thereby the painting suddenly once again assumes the corporeality it has lost in recent years (with, of course, the exception of the palette paintings, which represent a different type of work that responds to other demands.)

JJS  
**The materiality of a fragile aspect.**

SH  
You think so?

JJS  
**Well, yes. Think of the folds resulting from rinsing. I don't know whether you apply a fixative that makes them harder than steel, but in any case, it gives them a brittle look.**

SH

The process of scraping creates these kinds of folds, which can appear fragile—but don't let that fool you. They are not going to move, not even a millimeter. But, for me, these paintings are not fragile at all. Quite the contrary; they're quite stark and savage.

You can also see that they're works produced using a determined approach, with speed and with a clear intentionality. They have an immediate quality; there are no sketches, no preliminary ideas. I try to see nothing beyond the painting itself: a line made with a brush and a splotch made by my hand. I get the sense that I'm reaching some sort of limit. I've never left such splotches of paint untouched before as I have now, nor have I ever left my paintings so raw. But it's working for me; I want to accept it for now.

JJS

**As spontaneous as you are, these paintings require at least three steps, right? Painting, removing paint, and dyeing. How does the final product reflect your initial intuitions?**

SH

The scraping away of paint causes accidents that are later corrected when the dye is applied to the back of the canvas. It's a meticulous procedure. It forces things to the limit, when you see they are about to drop, hold them back. It is like a cat sneaking along the cornice of an eighteen-story building; it knows that if it takes one wrong step it will fall. That's how it is. It's the joy you experience walking a line that is four centimeters wide. This is the only way I know how to take full advantage of these materials, the only way I can make these ideas work for me, and take them on new adventures in the future.

JJS

**These paintings evolved at the same time as another body of works that is closer to figuration.**

SH

I like to alternate, to apply my experiences as an abstract painter to the realm of figuration. You can't walk with just one leg.

JJS

**Do you notice much difference in time and effort when you switch fields?**

SH

Figurative painting has its own constraints. The most obvious is that it has got to be recognizable. An eye is an eye, a mouth a mouth. In abstract painting you don't leave any clues to make the forms recognizable, but you can establish a narrative between them. Nor pictorial genres. It's rewarding.

JJS

**I'd like to get back to the materials. Before you said that for you the old paint tubes have their own intrinsic quality. Over the past decade, I've seen how you have integrated remnants, odds and ends to the point that you let them play a leading role. I wonder whether this began for some reason linked to a work ethic that is so intrinsic to your**

**work or simply whether you let yourself be guided by merely material considerations or aesthetic reasons.**

SH

I've always been interested in knowing where the materials I work with come from: the oils, the stretchers, etc. etc. There's also an impulse: why throw things away? Furthermore, and I'll stress this again, it's about limits--imposing limits on yourself that are more difficult, more precarious. I never like painting if I don't have a material limit.

JJS

**Do you like to make life hard for yourself?**

SH

Yes, a bit. I prefer to suffer some for the materials than to swim in abundance. I never liked photographs of artists in their studios surrounded by an exaggerated number of tubes and brushes. I prefer to work with my five little mixed colors as I did for the Lowry exhibition [*Lowry I, Lowry II, Lowry III, Foresta Negra. Park life (forest)*. Reliefs # 1-10; Heinrich Ehrhardt Galerie, 2019]. It's an excuse to content myself with the few colors with which I've worked all my life. Cézanne, I believe, had a palette of twelve or fourteen watercolors. Why do we impose such limits on ourselves when we could have thirty-four?

Because it makes things more meaningful. It's very painterly--perhaps because we practice a discipline characterized by slow execution, we have to seek out stimulation.

JJS

**This reminds me of Bach. The guy who said: I'm going to take a form (a fugue, for instance) and I'm going to compose it in all possible tonalities.**

SH

Now that you mention a composer, the other day I was thinking about the story of Beethoven composing his Ninth Symphony while completely deaf. I think that right now I'm making the paintings I would make if were blind.

JJS

**You shouldn't talk like that.**

SH

Why not? One paints in one's mind all the time.

JJS

**Bobby Fischer said that to play chess you need neither the board nor the pieces.**

SH

At the end of the day, painting is simply the basic concepts that make up a painting: line, color, brushstroke, rhythm ... it's all there. With this in mind, you have enough.

JJS

**I think I get you, but at the same time, the process leads you to unexpected places.**

SH

Yes, luckily. But, over the years, you realize that sometimes you pass through the same places. As soon as you let your guard down, I suppose, certain things you have inside of you come to the fore. For me, this is what constitutes an artist's style--allows you to recognize his hand. There's a way of working in which your thinking manifests itself.

I do not make the same painting again and again. Once I have mastered the technique of painting these kinds of works, I jump to others. But the previous approach stays with me as I face the new thing. The truth is I can't explain what I'm doing very well. In the end, you do what you can with what you've got.

JJS

**Good. Perhaps you're not able to explain this because you don't relate to your work in a discursive way. Sometimes we try to force ourselves to express things using the language that does not belong there.**

SH

That's why I like these conversations, because they allow me to draw on my interlocutor's words. If I were forced to write an essay on my work, it would end up being like *The Unknown Masterpiece* (a story by Balzac). There could be many stories or many artists within me, which I had to assimilate to find a form that has allowed me to find my own way in life.

You know, in the end, it's exciting that art continues to guide me. That I continue to discover old and new things and that all of this inspires me and allowing me to create my work. I don't want to sound dramatic; in fact, I'm very pragmatic. Ultimately, a painting is a painting. You aren't saving anyone's life with a brush. Or at least this is what I tell myself at the end of the day. And I go home feeling a bit disappointed or totally depressed when I didn't succeed in making what I tried to.

JJS

**Do you have many moments of frustration?**

SH

No. But with age, I'm getting worse at coping with frustration.

JJS

**One would hope to become wiser the older one gets. You're disappointing me.**

SH

I've learned to be resigned. I even got out of bed at three o'clock in the morning to go to the studio. As soon as I've rested my head and body a bit. I have always been obsessed with painting.

JJS

**And once you've done that, did you succeed in making progress?**

SH

Hell no! I didn't get anything out of it. But I was lying to myself, succumbing to illusions. I had remembered a hand that I had to paint ... Who gets up at three o'clock in the morning to paint a hand?

JJS

**A madman.**

SH

But, in the end, you live your life that way. You follow your intuition. Like when you decided to stop painting a canvas. Why? I remember you once said to me: "If you continue like that, you'll end up without any painting at all." I often think of this.

JJS

**You're going to make me blush.**

SH

Normally, I keep at it--and I end up without a painting. But it's a step towards where I want to end up.

JJS

**Let's get back to the paintings. My impression is that the palette recalls a painting from the end of the 19th century. A bit bourgeois. This made me think of your show on the four seasons (*Four Seasons: Between Winter and Spring*, Galerie Krinzinger, 2014), inspired by a simple cliché, a bourgeois sitting room, which was enlarged to anti-domestic proportions to complicate matters.**

SH

In this case, it is the other way around. Here, the paintings have a stark and violent appearance. But when you stop to look at them, they capture your gaze. You encounter their tenderness, I feel. They are not endearing, but if you hold your look, you find a purely pictorial sensuality.