

The painting of Morela Avilán

Morela Avilán (Caracas, 1956) is a Venezuelan artist whose career has spanned more than twenty-five years. She graduated as a civil engineer and has developed a distinguished reputation in that profession. Her love for literature and poetry, her insistent study of art history, her musical tastes, and her interest in deep psychology have helped her to build a complex artistic personality. This has also been nourished by her persistent inclination to the occult, to the knowledge of the unconscious, and her assumption of interiority as a transcendent dimension of the human being.

Likewise, her travels have marked her sensitivity in a decisive way, not only because of the cultural and cognitive richness that they have brought but also since they have connected her with other realities that extend to the spiritual realm. The inner enrichment that her numerous trips have given her has propitiated in Avilán a thorough understanding of the cultural and artistic climate of each visited region.

In this regard the artist has said: "I try to have an inner approach to each city I visit, attending to its light, its people, its music, its cuisine, poetry, literature, air, flora, language [...]. This has allowed me to better understand the work of the artists of the place. To understand Rembrandt or Vermeer, for example, you must know Amsterdam or Rotterdam, mysterious cities whose permanent mist propitiates an incidence of light that modulates an almost unreal atmosphere. We can recognize it in the pictures of these masters. In my travels I appreciate, therefore, a substratum that goes beyond the "cultural" and that is, so to speak, retinal, olfactory, audible, tactile and also mystical. »

From her beginnings as a painter, Avilán opted for lyrical abstraction, a language that for its freedom and expressive force has allowed her to formulate her vision of the world, life and art itself. For the artist, color has been an element of permanent inquiry. At the beginning of her career and influenced by her studies with the Venezuelan artist Víctor Hugo Irazábal, she worked the chromatism from an expressive drive linked to the symbolism. Some pieces from her first solo exhibition, "Expresiones del signo" —Expressions of the Sign— (such as *Strong Flame IV* or *Water Ark I*, both of 1999), show her vehemence in the application of color through free brushstrokes that

nevertheless allow a glimpse into some simple forms, close to primitive signs. In this exhibition the language of Avilán revealed its radical expressionist roots, given not only by the profusion of colors and the mixture of the forms-symbols with the stains of color, but also by the exuberance of the *impasto*. For Avilán, color is unfailingly bound to the pictorial matter; this means that in her work the canvas ceases to be a space for representation and instead becomes a field for the corporeal plasticity itself.

During the early 2000s, the artist struggled between this deeply expressive and definitively pictorial need and the construction of some forms with real or symbolic references. However, as it could be observed in her exhibition entitled "Zahorí" presented in Caracas in 2007 – in pieces such as *Zahorí I* and *The Night of the Corals*, for example – the lyric side linked to the use of bright and contrasting colors predominated in most of her works of that moment.

Color Fields

In 2015 with the exhibition "Sonata en sol" —Sonata in G—, Avilán decidedly adopted a language based on color fields. In paintings of this stage, such as those of the series *Untitled V, VI, IX* and *XI*, tonalities appear, forming surfaces that expand in a vibratory current that transcend the limits of the canvas. The color-matter acquired a joyful star role. Following the technique of the impressionist and pointillist masters, the artist applied the pigment by juxtaposition, putting the colors together on the canvas and not in a previous mixture made on the palette. Tonalities were formed at the retinal level, the work being completed when it is seen, involving a more dynamic aspect of perception. The painting becomes then, a fabric of vibrating and changing surface. For this reason, the paintings of this stage acquire an ascending sense, an expansive movement similar to a surge. Although these pieces are abstract, the game of colors and the technique used to mix them refer to the widely popular Impressionist tradition. The vibrational representation of the landscape and the natural forms characteristic of this pictorial school come to mind when observing these works which look like fragments of a picture of that tendency. In fact, the artist conceived them as representations of flowery fields seen from a low flight. This approach, which draws attention to the way the pigment is applied, stimulates visual memory nourished with data from the history of art, and takes the pictorial act to the estate of a stylistic grammar.

Solar Paintings

In her most recent series, "Solar", Avilán elaborates pieces of square, rectangular and circular shapes in which she uses only one color: yellow. In these works, the pigment is applied with brush strokes of differing thicknesses, superimposing several layers utilizing different nuances and tonalities. Each work has a particular mixture of colors that appear as the picture is executed and which gives each one a unique flavor.

The monochrome is a radical deepening in the color that emphasizes its enormous expressive possibilities, submerging the viewer in a total chromatic field, without thematic or formal handles. "In monochrome," says Avilán, "color acquires an absolute presence and becomes the materialization of sensitivity."

The procedures used to make these works - derived from the "impressionist" juxtaposition of the previous series, but without the material load in the *impasto*, establish a subtly-vibratory field that acts as a plastic terrain to settle images of the *quanta*, small particles of energy that form light, according to the postulates of quantum theory.

Avilán seeks to transpose these small suspended points of light onto the canvas, juxtaposing different shades of yellow to create depth and agitation. The superimposition of several layers of paint allows her to create these dense fields of color and form iridescent atmospheres similar to those observed in the images of the solar surface taken by high-power telescopes.

The solar theme in Avilán's works updates several connotations. The artist connects with the luminosity of the Caribbean – the geographical area in which her life has passed – not only from her paradisiacal and joyful images but also by honoring the deep mystical meanings of the African-descent religions practiced in the nations throughout the basin and that Avilán has investigated for years.

More broadly, these "solar paintings" have been an appropriate field to capture the mystical concerns that have been constant in the artist's personal spiritual search and that have led her to study religions, mystical schools and, more recently, spiritual philosophies of ancient cultures including those that developed in what is now the American continent.

The old mystical religions and doctrines have points of connection with the discoveries relative to the quantum field. Experiments in this area have shown that at the level of elementary particles of matter everything is energy, so matter would be, so to speak, condensed light. Also, under the principle of wave-particle duality of quantum dynamics, the observer is part of reality and affects it. Therefore, at quantum levels, consciousness is an integral part of reality. As in mystical doctrines, quantum reality is not objective, since consciousness co-creates what we observe. The universe is, then, a living entity, a vibrational and interconnected whole of pure and conscious energy¹.

Morela Avilán's "solar paintings" appear as images of this field of energy and luminosity that is, at the same time, both interior and macrocosmic. The radical chromatic synthesis that is evident in the "Solar" series has allowed her to explore widely the connotative potentialities of color, which acts here as a symbolic pivot to a myriad of relationships with mythological, ritualistic, religious and spiritual contents.

In these "solar paintings", the symbolic-plastic relationship between the existence of the human being and the cosmic and transcendent experience of existence becomes relevant, which serves the artist by articulating a creative universe full of questions about God, being, life, death, nothingness and infinity.

Katherine Chacón
Curator
February 2018

¹ Cf. HUNTER, Brad. (s/f) «Física cuántica: reconciliando ciencia y espiritualidad» [Blog post] in *Liberación AHORA* (Blog). Recovery from: <https://liberacionahora.wordpress.com/informacion-alternativa-y-nuevos-paradigmas/unicidad/fisica-cuantica-reconciliando-ciencia-y-espiritualidad/>