

BENJAMIN FRASER, *Antonio López García's Everyday Urban Worlds: A Philosophy of Painting*.

Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014. 131 pp.

This new book from Luso-Hispanic publishers, Bucknell sees East Carolina University's Professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Benjamin Fraser work with a multifarious palette in depicting the everyday urban worlds of grandee of Spanish art, Antonio López García (b. 1936). That palette comprises colours from history, philosophy, art history, urban studies, architecture, film studies, cultural studies, critical theory and geography. The ambitious picture created by Fraser's ambitious method is neither an artistic biography nor a definitive analysis of López García's oeuvre, rather, it is designed to 'critically explore the urban and philosophical issues raised by his unique approach' (p. 2). Whether or not López García does indeed offer a unique approach to the plastic rendering of urban contexts is of secondary interest to this reader: it is likely a red herring, albeit one I wish to return to.

What matters most is that the significant work of López García is respected, illuminated and enhanced by Fraser's impressive endeavour: to make López García's paintings perform as 'catalysts that move us to reflect actively upon our contemporary urban world' (p.2). Fraser succeeds - conspicuously - in enabling the pictures to perform in this active way and the result makes for a hugely stimulating and enlightening addition to discourse on urbanism, the city of Madrid, the work of López García and the painting of pictures: in actuality, in that methodological order.

Fraser's enquiry centres chapter-by-chapter on three of López García's major painted works: 'Gran Vía' (1974-1981), 'Madrid desde Torres Blancas' (1974-1982), and 'Madrid desde la torre de bomberos de Vallecas' (1990-2006). All three works are connected by geographical situation but also by virtue of being fine examples of López García's two-dimensional photorealist artwork - beguiling and extremely accomplished examples of super-*verosímil* to readily emulate or surpass any U.S. equivalent of the same vintage.

In the first chapter, Fraser places López García's iteration of the legendary Madrilenian streetscape in a lineage of artistic and poetic treatments of the Gran Vía - the via that is so intimately connected to the projection of Madrid as a truly grand, Modern capital city. To unlock the narrative potential of López García's picture, Fraser borrows Carlos Ramos's observation (from the 2011 'Construyendo la modernidad: escritura y arquitectura en el Madrid moderno, 1918-1937') that the Gran Vía was for Madrid and thus for Spain 'a road toward the modern and a process of mental opening' (p.16). This citation as much as anything in López García's picture licenses Fraser's detailed analysis of Madrid's

urbanisation as both a triumphal journey into an internationalized Modernity as well as a running challenge to the latent pastoral traditionalism of conservative 20thC Spain.

Whether propagated precisely by the plastic specifics of López Garcia's artistic endeavour, or steered by the discourse on urbanism that must inextricably accompany diligent consideration of Madrid's genesis and transformation, or generated chiefly by the author's innovative intellectual method of critique, Fraser's chapter on 'Gran Via' is strikingly comprehensive in its layered interdisciplinary embroidering of an urbanscape and attendant cultural meanings. From his analogising on fantasy and reality with reference to Alejandro Amenábar's 1997 film, 'Abre los ojos', to his intimation of Georg Simmel's poeticisation of the psychology of the metropolis, with variety of pictorialisation in between, the reader (but now the fellow transtemporal *seer*) is treated to the vivid synthesis of a range of discursive tones, with López Garcia's 'Gran Via' celebrated in its correct place amongst a portmanteau of imaginative engagements with the city and its physical evolution.

Fraser's analysis of both 'Madrid desde Torres Blancas' and 'Madrid desde la torre de bomberos de Vallecas' follows the same approach as the persuasive chapter 1, similarly revealing much about urban context while offering insight into López Garcia's practice. Torres Blancas allows Fraser to chart the origin and trajectory of López Garcia's singular use of the panoramic view, for example, and, for another, Vallecas facilitates a grounded discussion of the class histories at work in Madrid's gestation and in López Garcia's oeuvre.

Finally, back to the red herring. Fraser is indebted to the form and content of the three outstanding pictures, of course, and López Garcia is respectfully an ever present across the three chapters. Without embarrassing Fraser by destabilising the hierarchy of attention, and still profaning the trope that is *uniqueness*, it might be said in conclusion that his consistent and powerfully imaginative method of portrayal of an evolving Madrid, notwithstanding its considerable debt to López Garcia, is as singular a contribution to understanding the subject as the painted one: this prospect brought about by Fraser's own particular and apposite form of panoramic forensic and creative attention to the fluid complexity of the urban phenomenon.

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