

Of Darkness, Light and the Golden: Forget the Metaphorical. Juan José Olavarría's *The Golden Blood Sausage* [*La morcilla de oro*]

March 15 – May 23, 2023

"When I speak of iconography I am speaking of how one works. The iconographer goes from darkness toward light. That's what I want to do," Juan José Olavarría told me in an interview I conducted with him in 2020, in which he was responding to the question of how his works come into being. Even more obscure was the exchange we had in 2010 in a Syrian restaurant in Caracas, when he brought to light the theme of "cuts" and of "counter-death" while we relished eating kibbe, undoubtedly raw kibbe: "it is the flower-vase cut, which is when they empty the stem for you and place the feet and the arms in the upper section, where the neck would be." Flowers that still weigh on one's memory.

Juan José Olavarría is an artist as technical as a forensic physician, obscure in his drifts and his practices, as studious as certain painters who saw the light in the 16th century, such as Caravaggio and Francisco de Zurbarán. His figures and models - drawn, cast and painted - seem to emerge out of the deepest darkness - even that of printing presses - and to shine between one's eyes like the very title of his installation *La morcilla de oro* [The Golden Blood Sausage], which opens with the dances of letters, acanthus leaves and decorations by the porteño fileteado lettering studio of Miguel Ángel Polizzi, master *fileteador* (the colored *filete* lettering tradition of Buenos Aires signs).

From there we can witness the theatrical tavern-like still life workshop of products and possibilities, of meats, of parts and cuts: pieces hung up, stretched out and served, which move between the dissimulation and the simulacrum of one who parodies the market and violence, the brightnesses and the opacities that mortify the flesh and 'put it out to tender.' "We are as weak as we are violent. We flee death embracing it with all our power," writes Angélica Liddell in *Una costilla sobre la mesa* [A Rib on the Table]. These could easily be kindred words of Olavarría's when he states that "the human being is the only animal who does damage to itself, and the more damage it can do to itself without killing itself, the better."

Whereas in earlier exhibitions Juan José Olavarría regaled us with the Goyesque chapters of our continent through the loose and dusty medium of his stretcherless canvases and his "exhumed," drawn-on paintings, in this show he presents - tensing his materials - edible pictorial pieces, oils ready to be bought and devoured, trays with laid-out portions, fileted and finely chopped by a *facón* (a long gaucho's knife -- trans.), hung up like aching "strange fruits," delivered up to some future fire of inquisition. Pieces like the one which simulates Zurbarán's *Agnus Dei* in the flesh of an Orwellian pig. Image and iconic counterimage of revolutions.

The Spanish words for "raw," "cut," "violence," "slung up," "meat," "slicings," "open parts," "green bladder," are just some of the terms that people and haunt Olavarría's visions. The darkness that illuminates, the evidence that is served up on a gilt tray and the money god that is hidden behind the curtains of art. Where can one find the altar of those who consume its faith? God who illumines, who blinds, who yields to bedazzlement, venal god of the golden blood sausage: beast god, money beast. "Take ye all, and eat thereof."

The mediocrity of the market and the meanness, the miserliness of power coexist within this staging, as they do in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Fox and His Friends* [*Faustrecht der Freiheit*, in Spanish *La ley del más fuerte: The Law of the Strongest* -- trans.] in which we hear - put into German and set to music - the poem *Píntame angelitos negros* [Paint Me Some Little Black Angels] by the Venezuelan Andrés Eloy Blanco: finally, in a play of analogies, there arises a painting of black angels in this contemporary baroque, full of screens and simulation, in which we don't want to see what is obvious. Thus, this exhibition seems to be saying to us, with all the violence that art can unleash: "forget that business of metaphor and look."

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