

NEW ERA

There are artists who look at a landscape and try to make an exact copy, others who look inwards from where their own world arises and others who look at the History of Art to reinterpret other pieces of work under the prism of their own look. Without a shadow of a doubt, Marco Veronese (Biella, Italy, 1962) is one of the latter.

Veronese's work, of which a sample could be seen at Ana Serratosa's art gallery in November 2010, feeds from the portraits of the Renaissance and the still life paintings that arose in Holland in the 17th century. The images of portraits by artists such as Bronzino or Raphael are constant throughout his work, icons which are often accompanied by ominous skulls.

These skulls refer to that sub-genre that is characteristic of still life known as *Vanitas*. This is a Latin term originating from the Ecclesiastic phrase: "*Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*" ("vanity of vanities, everything is vanity"). With this phrase, we are reminded of the futility of mundane pleasures and the fragility and shortness of life. A thought that has been constant throughout the History of Art and is also known as "*Memento mori*" which in turn has its origins in that curious custom of the ancient Roman Empire consisting of, when a General entered triumphant in Rome, he was accompanied by a servant in his carriage who continuously repeated: "*Hominem te esse memento!*" ("Remember that you are a man!"). Likewise, Veronese's skulls remind us that we are human, that time passes and death awaits us all.

These human skulls appear in the still life paintings of the "*Vanitas*" genre accompanied by other items that also indicate the ephemerality of time, such as fruit, flowers or sandglasses. Veronese turns to butterflies. A living being that is also destined to perish, but at the same time we are capable of desiccating to prevent their bodies from decomposing. When we see Veronese's butterflies, we do not know if they are alive or desiccated, if they are acting as a living being to be effected by the inexorable passing of time to end up decomposing, or, if they have been desiccated and are acting like his skulls, having adopted their final form.

And it is true, to some extent, that the look of an artist and that of the spectator work in a similar way to that of an entomologist who observes insects, and both art and entomology are practices belonging to human beings who sink their roots in the origins of man himself.

Proof that artists are the ones who observe the world surrounding them resides in Veronese's new line of work that can be seen at this exhibition consisting of a series of rugs.

Marco Veronese has recently changed his native Italy for the mythical city of Istanbul. Gauguin was perhaps the first artist to leave Western civilisation in search of the primitivism of the Polynesian Islands. That escape to more authentic worlds was later followed by many other artists who abandoned the comforts and security of Western societies for the exoticism of other, more primitive cultures. Istanbul on the one hand symbolises the exoticism of the ancient Constantinople and the gateway to Asia, and on the other hand, represents that change of economic paradigm that has sunk Europe

in an unprecedented economic crisis compared to the emergence of new economies such as Turkey.

The exoticism of Istanbul is found in its palaces on the banks of the Bosphorus, in its impressive Mosques such as Saint Sophia or its spice markets. But at the same time, it is a modern city belonging to an economy undergoing continuous growth.

One of the age-old traditions in Turkey is the manufacturing of rugs. Not by chance was the oldest known rug discovered in the Paznik valley dating back to the 5th Century BC. The term rug (*al-jumbrain* Arabic) originates from Central Asia, from where it extended across the whole world. Whilst in oriental cultures rugs are more functional (they are used to take the cold out of the floors and for praying), in the Western World they are used more as decorative items.

Veronese mixes both cultures in his work, and uses rugs as a media for his creations. They are woollen rugs, like the Turkish rugs, in which his characteristic skulls appear in conjunction with geometrical patterns. But at the same time they are pieces of art that work in the same way as the tapestries that were so popular in the Royal Courts in the west and which were the products of artists such as Raphael, Rubens or Goya. These tapestries also came about with the original purpose of warming the walls of the palaces, but with time became an industry committed to making them as pieces of art, such as the famous tapestries in Flanders, the Gobelins in Paris or the Royal Tapestry Factory in Madrid.

This media has been used throughout the 20th century by artists such as Joan Miró or Eduardo Chillida and is still used by contemporary artists such as Marc Quinn, Grayson Perry, Alighiero Boetti or Antonio Giraldo.

Therefore, these rugs by Veronese symbolise that crossing of cultures, that Istanbul represents. They unite a media pertaining to the Orient, i.e. the woollen rugs with geometrical patterns, and the imagery proper of the West, the *memento mori* that was already present in Ancient Rome. This is a true example of all art denoting authentic dialogue with the past.