

Julio Fábres

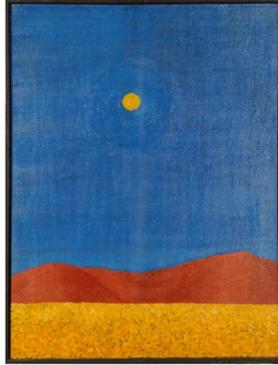
From Chile to

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Image: Jorrones y hojas



En el Camino:
Julio Fábres at CSB|SJU

To the loving memory of José Antonio Fábres

College of St. Benedict | St. John's University

2012

Julio Fábres Rivas was born on July 22 in 1928 in Santiago (Chile) to a family with British and Spanish roots. His father, Julio Fábres Eastman, was a learned and prestigious lawyer; his mother, Carmen Rivas Walker –also from European descent– died young in 1935.¹ Her son, Julio, could have only a few memories of her. She was a cultivated woman who had lived in Japan for several years with her parents.

Julio Fábres experienced a compelling attraction to art at an early age. Progressively turning into fascination, his deep-rooted interest in painting, architecture, sculpture and world-acclaimed masterpieces grew through the years. Yet, due to the lack of support that artists experienced in Chile at that time, he took advice from his father and began a career as a lawyer that he completed in 1955. He then accepted a grant from the French government to pursue studies on Commercial Law at the University of Aix-Marseille. Fábres keeps dear memories of that time (1955-1956). Impressed by the hospitality and congenial atmosphere of those around him, he made good friends and soon joined a group of intellectuals and artists. Over one year, he travelled extensively through France, Italy and Spain, targeting museums. This whole experience contributed to a thriving interest in the plastic arts that turned into a never-ending soul search and a source of inspiration in his entire life.

¹ She was 33 years old and her son Julio was only 7. The both names Fábres and Rivas come from Catalonia; Eastman and Walker from England.

Fábres worked as a lawyer in Santiago, but was unable to silence his passion for the arts and the humanities. Far from diminishing, his interest seemed to increase through the years. Finally, encouraged by friends like José Rokha –an acclaimed Chilean painter in the fifties– and Jaime Figueroa Araya –a painter and a lawyer– Fábres initiated his art adventure. He was then thirty years old.

Finding room in a tight schedule devoted to legal endeavors was not easy, but Fábres launched himself to discover a wide range of art materials. Working patiently and paying constant attention to color interplay, he managed to explore different techniques and by 1992 he was able to address his life-long passion: a full time career devoted to art.

As Fábres indicates in his interview with Claudia Donoso, trips have been a major source of learning.² He evokes with nostalgia the placid habit of letting himself be trapped by the magic of museums all over the world, or the way he immersed himself in city tours, wandering endlessly through streets, eager to discover the beauty of places, their charm at every turn, at every corner. “I have visited synagogues, churches, temples and mosques in both the Far East and Middle East; I have toured convents, cloisters, palaces and cities of overwhelming beauty, such as Toledo, or the marvelous temples of Assisi in Europe. . . That extraordinary world has shaped me to the point I cannot name a single influence on my art” (Donoso).

For the period of fifty four years, Fábres explored several art materials and techniques, accomplishing an abundant and meticulous production –over 400 oil paintings and other works, most of them in pastel. Emphasis on the soft, velvet appearance involved in pastel techniques shows a recurrent preference. He has also worked with graphite, Chinese ink and a few acrylics. His first exhibits date from 1960. They took place at the Court headquarters and also at the Law School, in Santiago. In 1977, his paintings reached the Art Museum in Santiago (*Museo de Bellas Artes*) and years later, in 1983, would travel to Japan, to the Ginza Art Hall, in Tokyo. His exhibits continued during the ‘80s and ‘90s at a steady rate.

In the year 2000, Fábres had a major exhibit in Aix-en-Provence. This was the second international exhibit, after Tokyo. Japan was no arbitrary choice in this artist’s career. His interest in Japanese culture is rooted in his family history. During World War I, Fábres’s grandfather, Francisco Rivas, moved with his wife and daughter to Tokyo where he accepted a diplomatic position from 1914 to 1920. The love his family had for the Japanese culture was engraved in the artist’s mind at an early age and has never abandoned him. One of the paintings at the CSB|SJU exhibit entitled *Kimonos* bares the mark of that interest.

² Claudia Donoso, the niece of acclaimed Chilean author José Donoso, is a prestigious journalist. She conducted the interview with Fábres in 2010. Fábres was an old friend of her uncle.

When discussing the genesis of artistic creation, one can easily perceive in Fábres a vast erudition in the humanities together with a fine appreciation for the arts. His critique conveys in the first place a keen distinction between *fantasía* and *imaginación*, thus highlighting two essential components in art. According to his view, imagination –linked to memory and rationality– is a complex faculty that brings up data stored in our memory and implements a structure in the composition. Unrestricted by empirical phenomena, fantasy however runs free. But it is not blind. According to Fábres, this faculty is not devoid of critical judgment since it can benefit from the light of reason. Fábres believes that both faculties coexist in one single process of creation and actually compose most works of art. In *Antropología literaria, una estética de la persona*, the poet and essayist José Isaacson (Buenos Aires, 1922) holds a similar view. For this author, whether in the realm of sculpture, architecture, music, or painting, the artist pours his/her whole being into the genesis of an art work.³ Devoid of both fashion and marketing demands, the artist surrenders to the dynamism involved in creation, exposing the soul's trends in an act of pure offering.

According to Fábres, a work of art is charged with vital meaning for its inspiration comes from ideas and feelings, as well as from existential and cultural experiences as a whole. In Fábres' case there is an invariable commitment to contemplative art, exploring the depths of light in monochrome ranges in which subtle and sharp contrasts coexist. A poetic finish emanates from a static, yet dreamlike scene where geometric objects –jars, vases, and leaves– evoke their colors through quiet and gradual changes of light vibrating in small strokes. Many of Fábres' works bear this mark, such is the case with *Mesa con flores amarillas*, *Frutero verde-amarillo*, or *Cafetera*. A delicate touch with harmonious contrasts of brightness and shades fills the atmosphere. In *Mesa con flores amarillas* the vase with flowers dominates the composition with a reminiscence of innocence and playfulness, rhythm and simplicity. In *Frutero verde-amarillo*, common and daily objects reduced to geometrical shadows question, like a mirage, their reality in the poetic vision of shapes. A fluid curtain of optical illusions evokes figures, perhaps dreams.

There is no doubt that Fábres is interested in pointillism, as he himself has declared on several occasions. In fact, some of his paintings not only build a dialogue with Seurat's technique, but also bare that relation in the title; such is the case with *Hombre puntillista*, and *Jarrones puntillistas*. Flowers in jars are recurring motifs. They appear in the series of works entitled *Hojas*. If a classification is needed, we may claim that these compositions fall under the pointillist category. However, as indicated earlier, there is no single trend that can account for this artist's entire production. Fábres finds inspiration in a variety of

³ This is also a core idea in Jorge Luis Borges's literary production. See the prologue he includes in his *Obra poética 1923-1977*. Isaacson's interest in aesthetics is elaborated in various writings; such is the case with *El poeta en la sociedad de masas*, his first volume of essays. For a summary of this position see Marina Martín's *José Isaacson y la poética del encuentro*, 1st chapter.

sources that contribute through the years to develop his own style. Some of his paintings go beyond any known classification. Such is the case with *Jarrones y hojas*. One could legitimately assume that the beauty and delicate touch of this composition defies all labels. Here, a patient and detailed technique builds a harmonious dialog of defined contrasts. A sense of balance and rhythm permeates the entire work.

At times, the stillness involved in contemplation is expressed using a completely different technique. In a series of works –*Alza del dólar, Dos jarrones, Jarrones amarillos verdes y lilas*, etc. – extended colors fill surfaces, delineating well-defined forms. Objects are reduced to their geometrical essence. The current approach achieves a highly balanced composition embodied in the differentiation of solid colors through geometrical figures and lines. His work *Hombre a cuadrados* illustrates this tendency. Delicate colors, sharply defined and calculated, dream their differences in a geometric chant of lines, rectangles and squares.

In his personal search to cancel reality's standard references, Fábres prioritizes non-representational motifs. His technique emphasizes color, the display of light and shades to stimulate perception. By eliminating referential elements and conventional standpoints in the composition, cognition is called upon activating the imagination as much as the senses to convey a reality deprived of common perceptual supports:

El arte no representativo -al eliminar los referentes reconocibles de la realidad y trabajar solamente con el color, la pincelada, la luz, la sombra, el fulgor, la materialidad propia de los oleos, grafitos, pasteles- permite al espectador una mayor libertad y estimula mas su imaginación, su inteligencia, su sensibilidad, pero la deja sin puntos de apoyo conocidos en los que afirmarse (Donoso).

Fragmentation, color division and luminosity play an important role in Fábres's technique. His interest in color takes him to discover a wealth of chromatic and monochromatic ranges to the point that he makes use of rhythm to translate different light shades in a given chromatic spectrum: "*Todo mi lenguaje plástico es el color*," he declares. Rhythm is implemented through a frequency of repeated motifs. It is no surprise that one of his paintings is called *Music*.

As a whole, Julio Fábres achieves a sense of balance through austere elegance. A humble and patient technique delineates, or evokes, objects standing in a moment that freezes time. This artist's compositions celebrate color. Either through the vibrant playfulness of small strokes, or through the stillness and shapes of dreams, Fábres's works reach a quiet elegance and simplicity that gives his entire production a distinctive poetic touch.

Marina Martín

Segovia, July 17, 2012

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