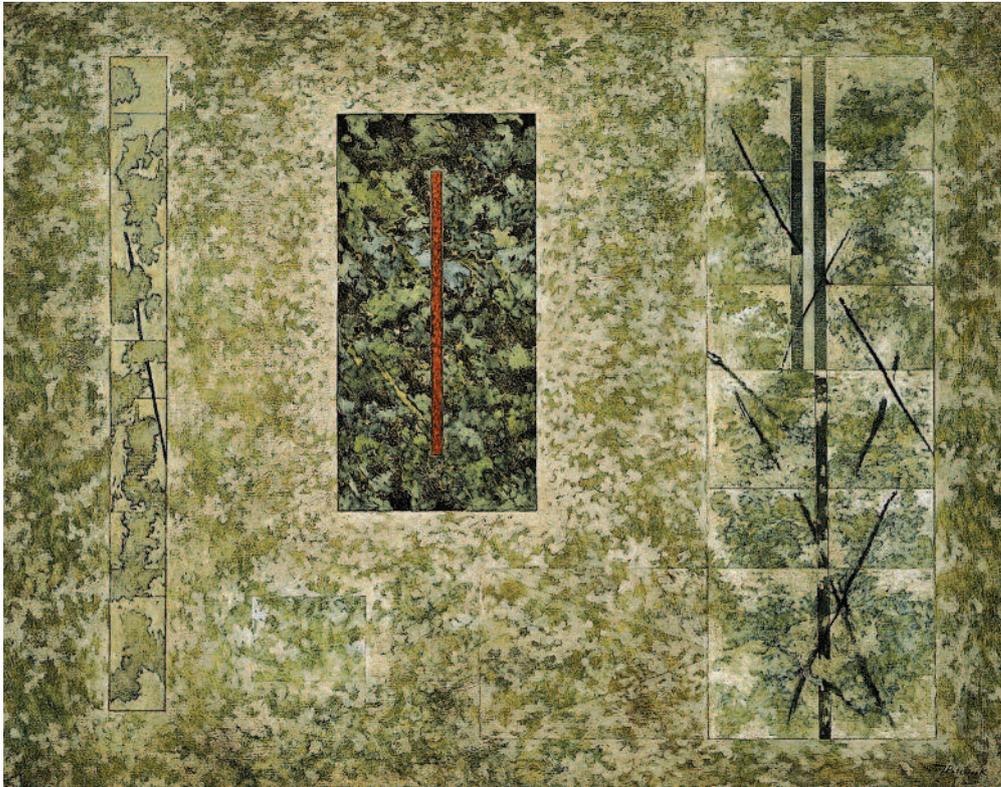


Mario Palacios

A Biographical Sketch

Sylvia Navarrete*



Theorem, 70 x 90 cm, 1997 (oil on canvas).

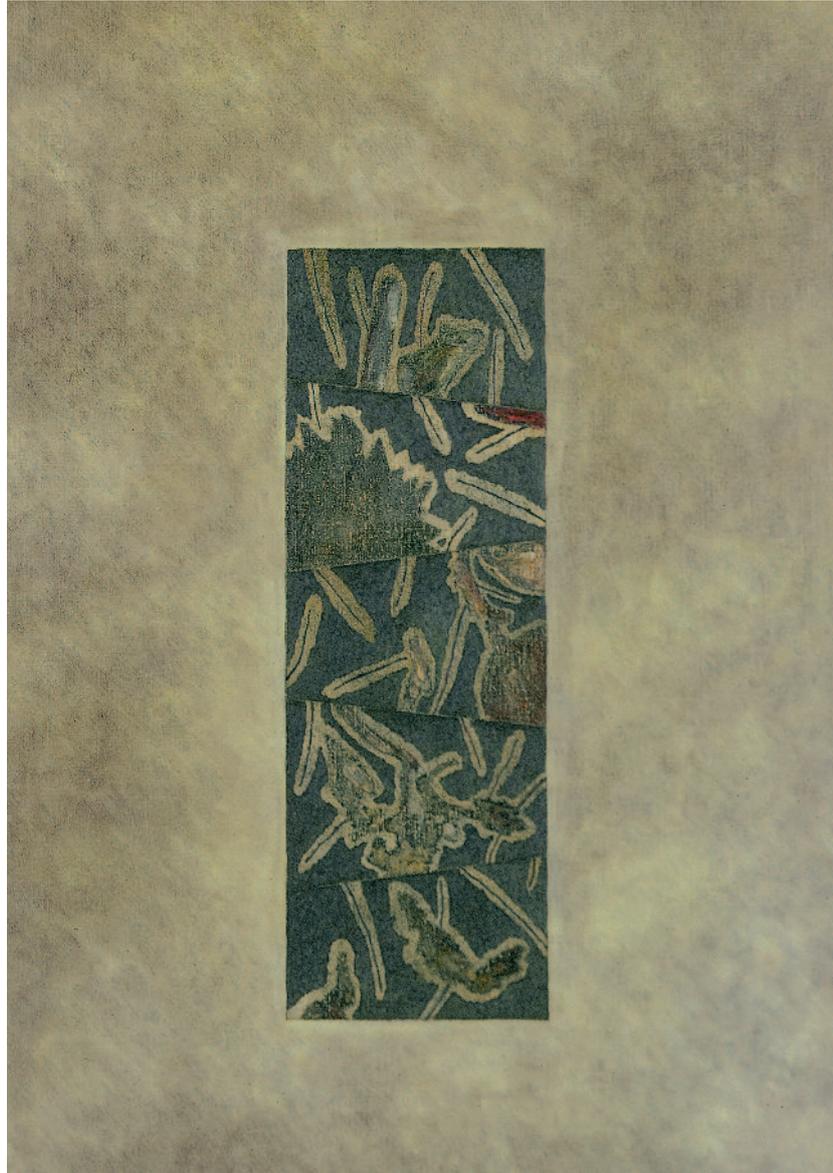
When I asked Mario Palacios why he had been self-taught, he smiled placidly. “Because I didn’t like school.” Clearly, however, his vocation and learning did not come out of nowhere. Born in Mexico City in 1953, from the time he was a small boy, he drew little figures and caricatures of his teachers, fellow students and relatives. Having a family

of businessmen and industrialists was not particularly conducive to a future as a professional artist. In the midst of adolescence, a friend gave him two books of Toulouse-Lautrec paintings. They were a revelation. From that time on, in an intense voyage of self-discovery that became a therapy in itself, he began to paint and visit book stores where he spent many afternoons sitting on the floor leafing through art books.

Aware that technical training was

essential, in the late 1960s, Mario went to different workshops to learn to draw from a model and spent time in Luis Nishizawa’s group at the San Carlos Academy. Without actually thinking of all this as a hobby, he still was not ready to admit to himself that it might be a life option. He enrolled as a business administration major at the Iberoamericana University, but continued to frequent museums and galleries. He traveled to Europe twice and

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May 1996, 70 x 50 cm, 1996 (oil on canvas).

visited the great museums there. A passionate devotee of art, he was consumed by the need to paint; but he would not really accept the decision unconditionally, and he continued to think of this growing need as research.

When his first son was born in 1984, perhaps as a catharsis, Mario gave in to his vocation and produced mountains of drawings and a canvas or two. He tried to enter the artistic scene. Know-

ing no one, he followed the advice of painter Ricardo Martínez, and presented his portfolios to the directors of different galleries. Patricia Sloane, from the Sloane Racotta Gallery, was impressed and in 1988 organized his first one-man show of drawings and collages. The show was named “Calesthenia” in reference to what would continue to be for him warm-up exercises. The following year he did large

minimalist drawings in charcoal on the walls of a white cube in an office of the Mexico City government Department of Culture, a piece of ephemeral art that anticipated the “Perishable Drawings” that he would do at the Sloane Racotta Gallery, a factory, a stable and on the walkway of a swimming pool in Oaxtepec, Morelos.

From then on, his work has been sought out for many collective exhibits



June 1991, 90 x 70 cm, 1991 (oil on canvas).

and been entered in national competitions like the Rufino Biennial and the La Estampa Biennial, both sponsored by the National Institute of Fine Arts. Then the Expositvm and A Negra Galleries offered two consecutive one-man shows for him. In 1992, Mario did a portfolio of engravings with printer Alejandro Ehrenberg and another of serigraphs at Pablo Torrealba's workshop. The engravings, titled "Other Senses," are like micro-

scopic close-ups, shadows in fugue, delicate alterations and rips on the surface of the paper that betray almost epidemic work on the copper plate.

The senses are both a tool and a language in Mario Palacio's work. In "Other Senses" this is revealed in the blending of forms that evoke throbbing matter in its brute, primal state. It is not exactly eroticism, but rather an almost mystical contemplation of creation. It should

be noted that Mario is highly knowledgeable in theosophy, esoterics, alchemy and Asian philosophy.

In his recent work, Mario goes further in his experimentation and has integrated all human capacities (emotion, instinct, the intellect and skills) to achieve what he calls "an efficient artefact." He composes his work in the simplest and most rigorous way around the research of universal, archetypal sym-



Theorem, Ninth A, 187.5 x 135 cm, 1998 (serigraphy and gold on paper).

bols: the cross, for example. What meaning does the cross have for him and the collective memory? The horizontal line refers to time, to the horizon, to circumstance: it is the expression of the landscape, of the representation of the world without including Man. The vertical line symbolizes Man's energy and, schematically speaking, is his portrait. In some paintings, this vertical may disappear, replaced by a reflection, a shadow. In

this way, his works are similar to systems. They combine strict, controlled geometry like scaffolding with backgrounds in the manner of freer weaves, made up of organic, gesturing figures. His palette is spare, almost austere.

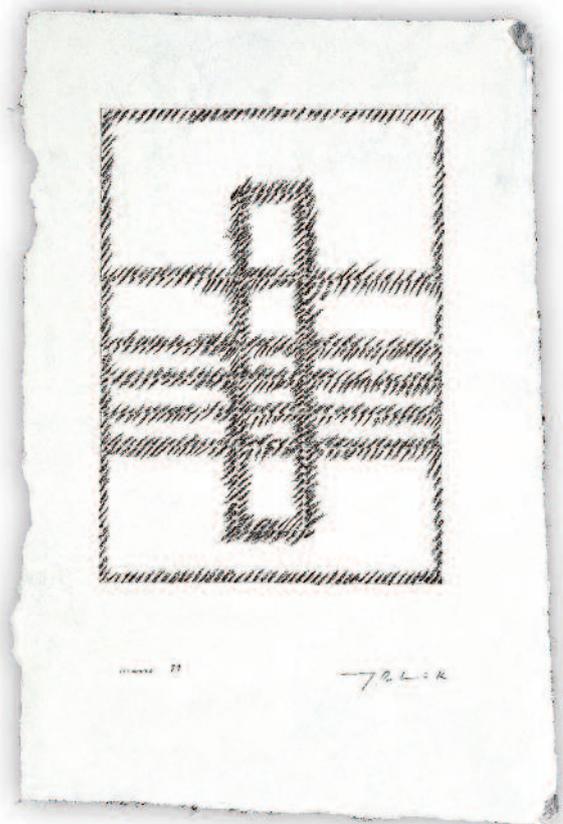
This unity of structure and figure reveals the power that the artist attributes both to geometry and reason, and to philosophy and spirituality. "The archetypal symbols are truths in

which one can read and learn in day-to-day living, with which one can understand more deeply the human condition," Mario told me.

He developed these new ideas about painting, drawing and serigraphy in the "Theorem" series, an itinerant exhibit shown in the Oaxaca Contemporary Art Museum, the Sinaloa Art Museum and the Risco House in Mexico City in 1999 and 2000. How Mario's work evolved in



Shadows in the Botanic Garden, 56 x 43 cm, 1997 (serigraphy on paper).



Theorem, March 1999, 37.5 x 25 cm, 1999 (carbon pencil on paper).

the eight years he did not exhibit is clear. He no longer intends to show its spontaneous, visceral aspect. Rather, he makes Georges Braque's phrase, "I love the rule that corrects emotion," his own. His intentions have changed: now he seeks visual purity, a language of certain classical characteristics and a permanent articulation of that language. A theorem is the statement of a provable truth. What Mario Palacios proposes is to

demonstrate his conviction that art is a way of approaching truth, just as scientific discourses are. For him, life and art are processes of transformation and continual construction of consciousness.

I asked Mario why he had taken so long to consider himself a professional painter, why he had voluntarily isolated himself from the artistic milieu. It did not surprise me when he said he was reluctant to push himself forward and

promote himself. Neither has he ever been enthused by the stereotype of the Bohemian artist. He is a "builder of machinery," a maker of "formative images that make sense, that work." Persevering, methodical in the extreme, far from all the noise, Mario Palacios has effectively found a poetic of the synthesis of forms and models of thought, in a process of maturation that leaves little room for improvisation and paroxysm. ■■