



SANTIAGO NAVARRO

Mulhouse 021

LA BIENNALE DE LA JEUNE  
CRÉATION CONTEMPORAINE

## The space of the journey

*“A traveler carries with him the sign of impermanence, of transience; everything that is expressed during his journey will be subordinated to the pace and context of his experience”* Santiago Navarro

Travel has always had a strong influence on man and artists. It leads to a continuous change in the perception of space and time which adapt to personal experience and become fluid. During the journey we establish new relationships in new environments that alter our perception of time and allow us to get in touch with other ways of perceiving it. The change is felt primarily by those who travel but, through their experience, also by those who witness that moment as spectators. Diaries and journals, which for centuries have spoken of and recounted travel, end up being, in some way, a part of the same journey; the part that can be transmitted, the part that from physical becomes mnemonic, reaches even those who have not directly experienced it.

The experience of traveling lies at the base of many of Navarro's artworks. The large triptych created on paper was in fact created during the artist's stay in Germany where he was blocked for weeks due to the outbreak of the pandemic. During that time, in the company of some friends, he lived in close contact with nature, which in fact becomes the protagonist of the pieces.

The three large paintings are presented as mirrors through which the journey and the experience of the artist transport the viewer into a dreamlike dimension. During a trip, just like during a dream, time and space dilate and each of us have different perceptions as we lose contact with the “real” one. *“These pieces may seem in some ways to be surrealistic,”* Navarro recounted, *“but they are not. Surrealism is the dream; what I try to do is to stop time and ideas that relate to a specific moment in my life.”* As much as it may seem to be a dream dimension, what he depicts is actually always born out of concrete, lived experience. *“It is not a dreamed dimension; it is a real dimension”* - in this sense each depicted element is an actual part of his life and by uniting them in the same piece, he creates another dimension in which there is no longer a single space and time. The oneiric sensation that one perceives while observing these paintings is therefore not a fantastic and imagined dimension but a series of real dimensions that are linked to experience but without their precise references of space-time. In this case, as during the journey, the normal perception of space-time is replaced by

a suspension that allows the viewer to relate his sense of space-time with the one depicted.

And here we return to travel, which is often at the center of Navarro's research. In his artwork, a bond with "the other" is created because it is closely dependent on experience; traveling, moving, and even simply living, inevitably create a comparison with the people around us. I recall the warning that the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote more than a hundred years ago in his Florentine Diary: *"Know that the artist creates for himself, only for himself. [...] But only because he knows no other substance than that of your world does he place his works in your days. They are not for you. Do not touch them, and have deep respect for them"*. Without arriving at Rilke's peremptoriness, which ends up being too severe in its extreme veneration for art, the work of the artist is indeed something very personal that must reach the viewer. It is born as a moment of reflection and only later can it open itself to a public, letting the public take possession of it.

Returning to the three works on display, the artificial-human and natural-animal appear to be joined; they have become two sides of the same coin. Man is contaminated by the animal and the animal is partly assimilated by man as if nature were his/her reflection. The young woman is reflected in the eagle; the Virgin in her consistent transparency seems to be born from the trees and reflected in the bear. The little girl joins the deer by riding on it. Finally, we are reflected in this nature through our perceptions.

The face of the woman in the work on the right is drawn with extreme delicacy; her features are barely hinted. At a first glance, we are perhaps captured in a more decisive way by the eagle that stands out for the strength of color and line while the face emerges only slowly. Likewise, the softness of the Virgin in the central work creates a contrast with the precise line used to draw the bear. The brightness of the animal's eye makes it look intensely alive. He alternates between strongly expressive moments in which the painting is decisive and the color is deep, and moments in which it seems that the brush has only caressed the paper.

One intriguing aspect of Navarro's artwork is his use of paper. A year ago, the choice of using paper was something that grew out of necessity. *"It was practically the only thing I had at home during the pandemic."* The artist's interest in this material has developed from this experience. There is in fact a sort of desire to return to the first element of art, to that support on which artists have always made the first sketches to record their ideas. Paper is the material of travel diaries, sketches, notes. Navarro's decision to study and work in Florence was partly based on a search for the origins of painting and art in its broadest sense.

It was a courageous move in an artistic system such as the contemporary one, in which there is an ever-increasing search for new materials and objects.

The study of the concepts of space and time assume a more scientific character in the other artworks exhibited in the room. The geometric paintings originate from a study that conceives numbers as images; the artist represents space in the form of rigid quadrangular lines and time through horizontal, diagonal lines and circles that represent its continuous flow. The pieces in the room are conceived as an uninterrupted discourse in which the artist addresses the key themes of his research in different ways and arrives at different results.

The last piece, also on paper, is a travel notebook/sketchbook in which the artist jotted down moments and thoughts. Realized during 2021, between fantasy images and moments of life, it records the passing of time and describes the spaces of the artist's life. It closes the circle by bringing us back once again to the experience of the journey in which the choice of paper as a material is not at all random. Paper is the first element upon which memories are recorded, whether they are written or drawn. Paper is the material on which the memory is blocked.

The path concludes in *The Departure* in which the figure in the center moves away, reflecting in a lake like a modern Narcissus. It is not, however, a vain and static search that ends up absorbing the ego in an apathetic way. It is an itinerant search - the search for the space of the journey. It is the search for time, which in Navarro's artwork starts from a scientific study that leads to an imagination of time in relation to nature. Space is no longer linked to matter but to the person. Time, similarly, is made by the observer the moment in which it is experienced and is diverse according to who experiences it.

Arianna Canalicchio



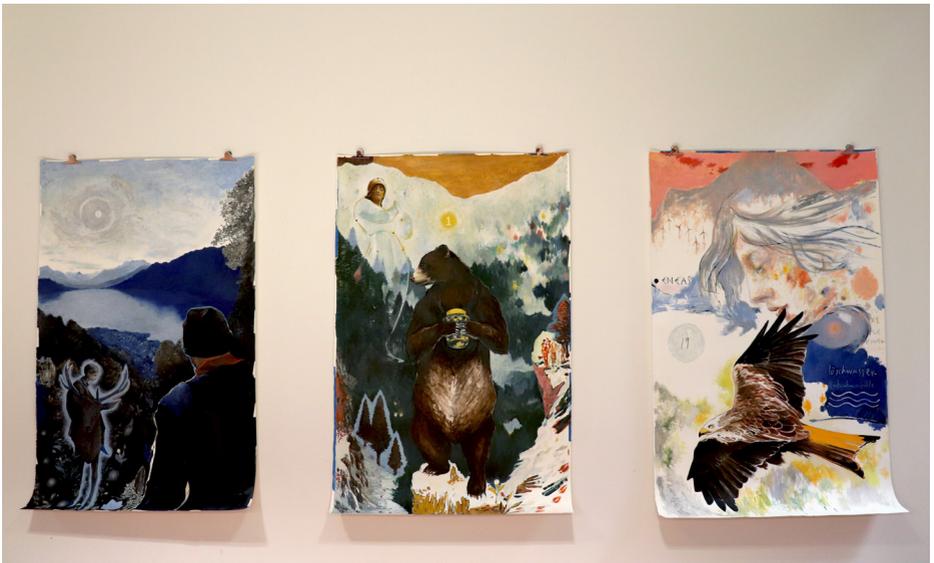
*The departure*, 2020. Oil and charcoal on Fabriano paper. 200 x 125 cm.



*The bear and the snow*, 2020. Oil and charcoal on Fabriano paper. 200 x 125 cm.



*The flight*, 2020. Oil and charcoal on Fabriano paper. 200 x 125 cm.



## Santiago Navarro

Santiago Navarro (Uruapan Mexico, 1991) studied at the National School of Painting, Sculpture and Etching “La Esmeralda” in Mexico City between 2011 and 2015. In 2021, he finished his Master’s studies in Visual Arts and New Expressive Languages at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. He has mainly dedicated himself to painting, graphic arts and photography, approaching themes related to the relationship man-nature and the cultural conception of space and time.

## Arianna Canalicchio

Born in Florence in 1996, she graduated in Art History at the University of Florence with a thesis about the protection of artistic heritage during the Second World War. She has always been interested in the study of contemporary art and its evolution. She currently works at the Roberto Casamonti Institute and writes for several art magazines and blogs.

