

PRELÚDIO

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*“Each period has its peculiar image of man. It appears in its poems and novels, music, philosophy, plays and dances; and it appears in its paintings and sculpture. Whenever a new period is conceived in the womb of the preceding period, a new image of man pushes towards the surface and finally breaks through to find its artists”*¹

Paul Tillich

The idea that a new image of Man emerges to the point where we can see ourselves in it is almost as unsettling as the idea that we are the ones searching for that image. Still, not only both are true, they require only one resolution: expression. And because an image is a reflection, the image of Man is a mirror of himself, his time, his space, and his experience. Image and Man seem to have an irrevocable tension and an inevitable encounter; for this very reason, this image will always invent and adapt itself to satisfy the egoistic needs of those who communicate it.

We are aware that the image of Man in painting and sculpture has already been treated extensively, as the most classical theory of art is mimetic, based on the attempt of a faithful apprehension and representation of nature. The mechanism of copying landscapes, people, objects, with a strong focus on the artist's ability to dominate the medium in order to create real representations, reached its pinnacle at the end of the 19th century. With the emergence of photography, a mechanically handled medium with no apparent artistic intervention and a documental result - an exact and unmediated copy of reality -, the artist as a faithful interpreter of nature is no longer necessary. At this point, there is a radical change in the role of the artist as a creator of non-figurative works, once the space for greater expression and abstraction is made available. The New Figuration emerges in the continuation and “womb”, as Tillich tells us, of these previous movements and as the investigation of a new image of Man; it is not a purely mimetic exercise, nor a purely abstract one, but rather a figurative (re) vision with elements of the artist's expression; the works are reconciled with the artist's life, reflect (their) reality, moving away from the natural form and giving space to interpretation and formal experimentation.

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It is true that this return to figuration is a movement that is over half a century old, and which has already been succeeded by others, but, as Philip Pearlstein states, “there will always be those who want to make paintings of the human form (...), in spite of Progress”². What we see is that this tendency to express the “figure of Man”, or His reality, is detached from the artistic tide, in the sense that it is intrinsic to it in such a way that it continually returns, or never completely disappears, only being influenced by time itself. Even so, just as the emergence of New Figuration in the 1960s filled a gap in artistic expression, the present moment seems to call for a return to figuration, as a re-approximation to the human, to the figure, to form, to matter, to humanity. And yet, abstract expression and its aesthetic advances have never been abandoned, but rather integrated and reconciled with the current zeitgeist.

¹ Tillich, P. (2012). *Each Period Has Its Peculiar Image of Man: Figuration*. In K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

² Pearlstein, P. (2012). *Figure Paintings Today Are Not Made in Heaven: Figuration*. In K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.



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