

Artificial Flowers

It had been a while since Antonio Murado (Lugo, 1964) had been seen in Madrid, four years, to be precise. His last solo show was held at the previous venue of the same gallery. Since he settled in NY, the artist has been spacing out his shows among us, though never completely disappearing; an inescapable reference being the ample retrospective that the CGAC in Santiago de Compostela dedicated to him in 2002.

Our painter coincided there with Richard Tuttle. Not a simple coincidence, at first sight, as Murado's absolute compositional awareness was thus brought to the fore. Such awareness had been developed through the use of elemental partitions and, especially, through his never-abandoned preference for the construction of diptychs or for dividing the painting's plane with one simple horizon line.

Everything fits

Murado is thus settled into the vast tradition of late modernity, which understands the canvas's boundaries as a random cut-out within a limitless, or at least undefined, extension that repeats the motif within the frame, its figures, rhythms and modulations, in the manner of industrial patterns. A move as elemental as fitting two of those pieces together in a suggestive manner generates many of his achievements as far as images go.

What he now shows us at Alvaro Alcazar's new gallery is almost a complete review of an older series, dated around 1997-98. The latter is one the artist's most beautiful and lyrical, where loose blotches of color, blown over creamy, flat, empty background surfaces suggest flower petals that have fallen or are floating in mid-air. In his first modulation, Murado combined this series with others that were reminiscent of *marañas*, veins, or vegetable stems-fibers. Here he abandoned himself to a wide combination which, on the one hand, established his technical prowess (each one of them requires a specific kind of pasty consistency, scratches and transparencies that he had to overlap and balance) and on the other led his work into a certain mannerism that was complex and perhaps impoverishing.

This means therefore that there is a second chance for this series, where the artist reached one of the peaks of his sensitivity and captivated us with his ability for lyricism without corniness. It is true that between the figures and the background one could at times see something from Sicilia, Uslé or Richter, among others, but in his *Murder Ballads*, Murado comes back in his best shape, elegant as always, and more muscular as a painter that ever.