

HECTOR DIAZ

Javier Arizabalo
Interviews

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Javier Arizabalo The legacy of realism

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By: Héctor Díaz

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Introduction

As one of Javier Arizabalo's gallerists, I have had the privilege of closely observing his remarkable journey as one of the world's foremost realist painters. Working with him has allowed me to witness firsthand not only his extraordinary technical skill but also his unwavering dedication to capturing the nuances of the human experience through his art. His approach is meticulous, his process deeply thoughtful, and his work consistently reveals layers of meaning beyond the surface.

What truly sets Javier apart is his masterful ability to blend precision with profound emotion. He creates pieces that are not just visually stunning but resonate with a quiet intensity, allowing viewers to connect with his subjects on a deeply personal and even visceral level. This interview aims to offer a deeper look into the mind of a master, shedding light on his artistic philosophy, his journey, and the creative discipline that has made him one of the most respected figures in contemporary realism on the global stage.

Arizabalo's art invites us to pause and reflect on the beauty and complexity of the human condition. His capacity to elevate realism into something transcendent speaks not only to his technical mastery but also to his deep understanding of the world around him. For American readers and collectors who appreciate the power of art to connect us to our shared humanity, Javier's work stands as a powerful testament to the timeless relevance of realism.

As Javier continues to push the boundaries of his craft, we look forward to seeing how his art evolves and the lasting impact it will leave on the global art scene.

–Héctor Díaz

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The interview

1. ***What drew you to realism initially, and how did you begin developing the highly detailed, precise style you are known for today?*** I began with a training, in my youth, very focused on drawing and frequently with a live model, which allowed me to acquire a foundation and a certain ease with realistic representation. I approached every new work as a challenge, on one hand to understand how this idea of reality was constructed, but on the other, to reach the emotion of the painting.
2. ***Are there any specific artists or artistic movements, past or present, that have significantly influenced your work?*** Throughout my artistic life, I have taken from here and there. I have been attracted to Impressionist painting, in terms of the way they simplify reality into quick brushstrokes. Velázquez, who could be considered the first Impressionist, and Singer Sargent, Sorolla, are the artists I have liked the most. On the other hand, I have also been captivated by the work of realist artists like Gabriel Morcillo, and the more contemporary Antonio López, who has so strongly influenced recent generations of Spanish artists. In fact, a high school professor I had, who was a student of Antonio López, helped me greatly in the way I approached drawing; he left that germ of influence in me.
3. ***The human body plays a central role in your work. What fascinates you about depicting the human form, and how do you approach capturing its complexities?*** There is a recognition of my own nature, there is a cult of the body derived from the Greco-Latin tradition, the thousands of figures retained by the retina, the mythification of the body, the presentation of vitality, the persistence through time beyond mortality, the trace that time and effort leave on the body. On the other hand, yes, the body is complex and ever-changing. Instead of intimidating me, this motivates me and poses a challenge to its comprehension and representation. Each fold of the body is a challenge, in terms of correct proportion, and also the capture of light, its color, its characteristic—that understanding and retention is what makes me insist and insist when it comes to capturing the idea of reality.
4. ***Many viewers are moved not just by the technical precision of your paintings, but by the emotion they convey. How do you balance technical accuracy with emotional storytelling in your work?*** Technical precision comes from years of learning and practice. On the other hand, the strong luminous contrast, the chiaroscuro, the essentiality and the elimination of the superfluous, the unembellished figures, the expressiveness of the model in terms of gesture or posture, and my admiration for expressive moments in art, like the Baroque—all of this helps in rendering these emotional states.

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5. ***Could you share what a typical day looks like for you in the studio? Do you follow specific routines to stay productive?*** Indeed, I do not extract a personal mood to pour it into the painting; rather, I place myself in a state of concentration and analysis. For this, I start by choosing the area I am going to work on, depending on whether it is more or less complicated, and I think about how I am going to resolve it. Next, I prepare the main color mixtures I will use during the work session, which lasts about three or four hours. The first half hour or hour of each work session is for introducing myself into understanding the form, the color, the tone, with an initial block-in, and then I polish and refine this approximation.
6. ***Your paintings are known for their attention to detail. How do you manage your time while working on such intricate pieces?*** Do you find yourself becoming more patient as an artist over time? Detail is something like an anecdote; it is deceptive. It doesn't require special attention from me. What is truly difficult for me is achieving a general unity in terms of volume, space, and the handling of the brushstroke, as they must be kept harmonious across many work sessions. The work on which I have spent the most time is a painting of two people on which I worked for up to nine months, because I inserted a lot of detail and it was an exceptional piece of work. I have not managed to become more patient over time. Typically, my attention span for a work drastically reduces after a month and a half of focusing on it. For many people this may seem like a long time, but it is relative.
7. ***How important is the use of light in your compositions? What techniques do you use to control light and shadow to enhance realism?*** Light and shadow are fundamental in my painting; they reinforce the drama and personal characteristics. Their importance stems from a process of decanting from my photographs, and from the way of making volume emerge from the plane of the painting. I make sure that the light creates a wide shadow area. Without shadow, mid-tones, and light, there is no subject volume. With the light, I focus on the elements to be highlighted, and I try to apply it in a grazing way to elements of the anatomy to enhance their characteristics.
8. ***How do you select your models and subjects? Do you seek specific qualities in your models to achieve the emotional impact you're aiming for?*** Three aspects interest me when conceiving a subject: the environment in which I place the figure, the subject and what they want or what I want them to say, and finally, the way of "dressing" it, supporting it, or welcoming it. Yes, I look for specific aspects in a model, attending to their beauty or proportions, youth or classical typology, their physique, their features, the pose.

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9. ***Realism requires precision and dedication. What are the greatest challenges you face when working on a piece, and how do you overcome them?*** The greatest challenge is maintaining the state of concentration during the execution of the work. In the course of the process, one must be especially analytical regarding the drawing, the tone, the color, constantly paying attention, comparing the parts. All of this requires programming, method, consistency, and sometimes containing expressiveness and emotion.
10. ***Over the years, how has your technique evolved? Are there specific skills or methods you've developed to push your work to the next level?*** Over time, it is normal to increase the degree of complexity of the paintings, with each work serving as training for the next. Likewise, the most optimal materials for the desired results are being refined: the sufficiently smooth canvas, brushes with the precise elasticity, the ideal palette, the sufficient but not excessive range of nuances, the unexaggerated amount of thinner, the application times of the paint, the sufficient ambient light and a measured environment—all of these are the conditions that make the work easier.
11. ***How do you feel about the ways people interpret your work? Do you enjoy hearing the different emotions and thoughts your art evokes in viewers?*** The simple fact that someone dedicates their time to seeing and expressing their opinion is already gratifying. Generally, these are positive, simple opinions, without major analysis, which leads me to wonder if I should stir consciences a bit more, and not focus so much on technical skills. In any case, I am the first critic of my work, and the important thing is that I consider my objectives to have been achieved.
12. ***As a French artist, do you feel your cultural background has had an influence on your art? How does being part of a global art community impact your creative vision?*** I was born in France, but only circumstantially. French culture has not influenced my formative process, but rather the pictorial environment of the region where I grew up, and subsequently, the Spanish environment. The globalization of art has indeed helped my way of producing. I would not be working the way I do if I hadn't been influenced by the contacts that have come to me from galleries, artists, collectors, and projects arising from this. In this sense, what it provides also obligates me to enrich and perfect my work.
13. ***Realism is often viewed as one of the most demanding styles. What advice would you give to young artists who are trying to master this approach?*** Realism requires an extensive learning curve, which is why, when asked for an opinion, I always advise doing what one is most passionate about, as that is where the greatest amount of effort and energy will be invested. It is necessary to keep in mind adapting our work to our personal characteristics of vitality, capacity for concentration, opportunities, and other conditioning factors.

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14. *In an age where contemporary art trends lean toward abstraction and conceptualism, how do you view the relevance of realism in today's art world?*

Abstract art, or conceptual art, have been with us and have spread for several decades; the time when they were novel has passed. There are reasons why they continue to have a strong presence, one being economic: they are easier to produce with modern techniques and technologies, and their economic return for the involved actors is greater. The containers of art have transformed over time; now the architecture of the space is as much or more highlighted than the work exhibited. These spaces have expanded towards monumentality, and the works or projects must follow suit, which means much figuration has been displaced because the old rules of scale no longer meet these requirements. Many figurative artists, by being left aside due to producing less quantity and less quickly, are forced to focus on private clients, who appreciate more careful, less standardized, and more personal work. Realist art, figurative art, photorealist art, or whatever you want to call it, has not disappeared, nor will it. It is part of the human concept of reality.

15. *Are there any specific goals or milestones you hope to achieve in the next few years as an artist?*

I want to create some works different from what I have done until now, searching for the limits of my abilities, some composition with figures, along with some social commentary, something political. Some paintings by artists I have admired also come to mind, who have dealt with the human figure, such as Claudio Bravo, Gabriel Morcillo, Caravaggio, and I would be interested in giving my contemporary interpretation of some human being in their maximum fullness, as well as in their decadence.

16. *While your work is grounded in realism, do you ever experiment with new techniques or explore other artistic styles outside of realism?*

I have occasionally tried to do some abstract painting, but I cannot work in a vacuum; I need references, I need an object and an objective to aim for. Perhaps this is easier for me with graphic design techniques, which I do in a more intimate and playful environment.

17. *What does painting mean to you on a personal level? How has your connection to your art changed over the years?*

Painting, on an emotional level, means concentration on a part of the physical aspect, although it also means effort on the more economic side, it means enjoyment on the spectator level, and it means socialization on the collective level. In the years of learning, it meant challenge and experimentation, and over time it transformed into refinement and harvesting the fruits of all the previous work.

18. *How do you balance the demands of a professional art career with personal life and other commitments?*

It is a complicated issue; we all do what we can. The way of seeing, being, and appreciating the world is not the same for everyone; we have a way of

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approaching reality or the social based on developed abilities, and sometimes it is difficult for me not to be thinking about art, about aesthetics, all the time. Having had a previous professional experience, I have assimilated certain routines, to the point where my practice is almost understood as any other profession, but the compartmentalization of time is not complete. There is always an extra to contribute, as if everything could be perfected or improved, due to the very demands of creation, competition, or incompleteness.

- 19. *What have been the defining moments in your career so far, whether exhibitions, awards, or personal breakthroughs?*** I don't yet perceive having had something that has significantly decided or changed my work. Obviously, there are events that mark milestones along the way, influencing your experience and, sometimes, affirmation. Perhaps the IBEX Masterpiece experience, a project to create a masterpiece, has been one of those notable points, both from the positive point of view, for its difference from the rest of the artistic experiences I have had, but also negative, due to the lack of continuity. Individual exhibitions have served me to receive responses to what I have been developing, and they have always been very positive, although I also regularly receive that interest through social media. In this way, I don't feel particularly pressured to achieve typical social recognitions, but rather to pursue more personal and intimate goals.
- 20. *As one of the leading realist painters today, what legacy do you hope to leave behind for future generations of artists?*** For now, I only think about being a continuator of realist and figurative painting, of techniques that should not disappear, that are important for the appreciation and perception of the world, for personal health itself, mental work, and the attitude of effort. Perhaps I don't think I will change the world, but it seems to me a creative way of being in the world.

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Javier Arizabalo The mastery of contemporary realism

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Introduction

It is an honor for me, as Javier Arizabalo's gallerist, to be able to present and work with an artist whose level of mastery in realism is internationally admired. From the very first moment I saw one of his works, I was impressed by his incredible ability to capture the essence of the human figure, and how through light and shadow he is capable of generating a deep emotional connection with the viewer.

Representing an artist of his caliber is not only a privilege but also an opportunity to bring the public closer to an artistic proposal that challenges perceptions and elevates realist art to a new level of excellence. Javier is a creator with a clear vision and exceptional technical mastery, but also a person with admirable sensitivity and dedication.

In this interview, I hope you can learn more about his creative process, his philosophy as an artist, and the stories behind his impressive works. His ability to transmit beauty through his art has made him an indispensable reference in the contemporary realism landscape.

–Héctor Díaz
September 2024

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The interview

Creative trajectory

- 1. *You are recognized as one of the best realist painters in the world. How did your trajectory in realism begin, and what initially attracted you to this style?*** My trajectory in realism began with a focus on drawing, often working with live models, which allowed me to develop a solid foundation for realistic representation. Each new work represented a challenge: on the one hand, understanding how that idea of reality is constructed; on the other, experiencing the emotion that painting provokes.
- 2. *Was there a moment when you realized that realism would be your primary form of artistic expression?*** It was a process that began during my training period and solidified into a daily habit, a way of constructing reality. Although I occasionally tried to create non-representational painting, I found it difficult to work without a solid reference. I feel deeply connected to the sensibility of the real, and that emotion allows me to observe indefinitely, making me feel fulfilled and conscious.
- 3. *What artists or movements have influenced your work over the years?*** During my initial training, when the internet did not yet exist, my references came from direct contacts. First, from the commercial landscape painting that was done in my environment. Then, from my teachers, both in high school and university, where realism predominated, influenced by artists like Antonio López. Later, I was attracted to painters like Claudio Bravo, and also by the post-impressionism of Sorolla or Singer Sargent. Observing works live, such as those by Edward Hopper, Gabriel Morcillo, or Velázquez, profoundly marked me. With the arrival of the internet, the influences multiplied, from samples of photorealism to styles where the materiality and expressiveness of the brushstroke are highlighted. I also found inspiration in the Baroque, especially in its handling of light, although I do not fully subscribe to that style.
- 4. *How has your style evolved from your earliest works to today?*** My perspective as a photographer leads me to observe color and light, while as a painter I focus on representing three-dimensionality and volumetrics. Although photorealism is popularly appealing, I have learned to modulate my brushstroke, making it more expressive and loose when I deem it necessary. My first works were more linked to classical and Baroque painting, but over time my technique has evolved towards greater meticulousness and detail, approaching photographic realism.

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Artistic process

5. ***Your works stand out for their precision and detail. How do you describe your process from the first sketch to the final work?*** My process begins with an idea, generally focused on representing a body or a face and turning it into something exciting, with all the ambiguity this may imply. It is a kind of adoration of the flesh and corporeality, and of the accessory elements that situate the scene in a timeless time and space. The sketch is the photograph, where I make quick decisions guided by my intuition. After establishing the compositions and compositional adjustments, the execution follows a mechanical process, albeit with varying results. I start with a wash of basic colors, and in the following layers, the paint becomes more opaque, reaching the desired tone and color. At that moment, I decide whether to emphasize the expressive brushstroke or the minute detail.
6. ***Do you use photographs, live models, or other references to create your works?*** I mainly use photography, since working with a live model imposes time limitations. Although the perception of color and tone is ideal with a live model, the conditions for doing so are complex. Historically, artists spent years studying the human body and environments, but over time those works tend to look contrived or mannerist. In the end, all human productions are an interpretation, a way of creating fiction.
7. ***What specific techniques do you use to achieve such detailed realism in your works?*** I use techniques derived from different artistic periods, from the Renaissance to the present day. I concentrate on approximating the exact color, applying the paint without excessive impasto, directing the brushstroke correctly, and contrasting tones to create the sensation of volume. I also use the depth of field blur from photography, which, being culturally accepted as truthful, allows me to create an overlap of objects and planes, adding depth to the scene.
8. ***What is the most challenging part of your creative process?*** Although I usually have clarity when visualizing and composing the image, what challenges me the most is creating a narrative around the work that does not fall into surrealism or obviousness. I seek to transmit something significant without resorting to strange symbols or forced interpretations; I want the work to stand on its own.
9. ***How do you decide when a work is complete?*** Unlike other artists who work on the entire piece uniformly, I resolve each area in specific sessions. A work is complete when all areas have a coherent treatment and the focal points are duly resolved.

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Philosophy and themes

- 10. *Realism often requires a deep connection with the subject. What do you seek to transmit through your paintings?*** I seek to transmit emotions and reflections. While the abstract can lead to reflections on spatial or metaphysical concepts, realism, I believe, is more focused on emotions through concepts, stories, myths, and symbols that develop in the culture in which we live. My figures usually unfold in warm environments, conducive to being enjoyed, with tactile qualities that evoke spiritual beauty through formal beauty. This beauty is not limited to ideal proportions but includes maturity and expressiveness.
- 11. *How do you select the themes and models for your works?*** I am very interested in the environment, natural or artificial, where I place the figure. I also focus on the subject itself, analyzing how to present it in the most impactful way. Finally, I pay attention to how I dress it or how I support it in the composition. Regarding the model, I select aspects such as their beauty, youth, strength (in the case of young men), marked features (in older people), and the way they adopt the pose.
- 12. *In an era where abstraction predominates in many spaces, how do you see the place of realism in contemporary art?*** Realism can also be abstract; if you get close enough to a realist painting, you will find abstraction. At the same time, abstract paintings also create spatial and three-dimensional sensations, although they focus on conceptual or chromatic issues. For me, the distinction between realism and abstraction is circumstantial and one of preferences, as there is no objectivity behind these categories.
- 13. *What emotions or reflections do you hope to evoke in those who observe your works?*** On the one hand, I want to provoke admiration for the real, and on the other, a reflection. Stopping in front of the representation of an elderly, sick, or young person invites reflection on this, in addition to appreciating the aesthetic aspects. However, the emotions triggered depend on the viewer, their experiences, and knowledge. I believe I facilitate the development of sensitivity towards the real, helping to discern it better.

Current work and exhibitions

- 14. *Could you tell us about your latest collection? What inspired it?*** In the paintings I am currently working on, I want to insert the subject into a landscape. For years I worked in graphic design, in front of a computer, which prevented me from enjoying nature or even noticing the passage of time. When I left that job, I began to capture moments with a camera. That task is still incomplete. I live in a privileged area, where the greenery

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surprises visitors. I recently visited a space in nature that amazed me, and I decided to do a series of works that capture that sensation of freedom and connection with life.

- 15. *What upcoming exhibitions or projects are you enthusiastic about?*** With more experience than at the beginning, I want to create some paintings in which I can give my best. I would like to work on the representation of the male body, both in its splendor and in its decline. I want to create a painting of a man in his last moments of life, in an imagined and symbolic space. The loss of family members has left a lasting impression on me about the importance and emotion of those moments. I am also thinking about nature, which continues to fascinate me. I am planning immersive natural or celestial spaces, like those that once impacted me when I saw views of Madrid painted by Antonio López. Additionally, I have the project of sharing my knowledge about pictorial techniques and processes, as many people contact me on social media. I would like to help those who, for economic, cultural, or religious reasons, do not have access to traditional pictorial training, but who do have access to the internet.
- 16. *How do you see the evolution of your work in the coming years?*** I see it as a distillation of ideas and paintings that do not seek to satisfy commercial demands but rather to work on aspects that generate emotions for me. Although reality is admirable, I always make a conscious selection to emphasize something particular. My paintings are not a direct denunciation of issues such as working conditions, religious ideologies, or wars; instead, they present a more contemplative attitude towards society, freedom, and nudity. Although my work is not openly political, some of my works have been censored on social media, which reflects a trend towards ideological cancellation. My goal is to continue exploring the beautiful, the social, and the emotional, always from a non-conformist stance, with the idea that the world can improve, and that my work can invite reflection on it.

Mastery and technique

- 17. *What role do light and shadow play in your work, and how do you use them to give emotional depth to your works?*** Light and shadow are two opposing forces that reveal reality. I love the drama they create, as in the paintings of Caravaggio. This drama was not something I had in mind from the beginning but something that arose from my photographic work and how to make volume emerge from the pictorial plane. A grazing light reveals the imperfections of the skin, and without tonal differences between the background and the figure, there is no depth in a painting. Tonal difference is what creates the volumetric sensation, much more than color, which is visually striking but more complicated to master.

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- 18. *How do you continue to challenge yourself to improve as a realist painter?*** I am always looking to improve my works and make them as attractive as possible. Competition in the market also pushes me in this direction. Besides, I cannot keep doing the same thing over and over again; I always need new motivations to continue investing so many hours of work. In terms of technique, I always use the best materials and, from time to time, I make improvements to my process.
- 19. *Is there any technique or method that you have not yet explored and that interests you to learn or implement in your work?*** I am currently experimenting with image generation using artificial intelligence. Although this technology is still in its early stages and it is not possible to control all parameters, I believe that in the coming years it will be a good starting point for testing complex compositions. Art, like many other trades, will be radically transformed with the evolution of these tools.

Legacy and vision

- 20. *As one of the main references of current realism, what legacy do you hope to leave in the art world?*** For now, I only think about continuing the tradition of realist and figurative painting, techniques that should not disappear. They are important for the appreciation and perception of the world, as well as for mental work and the attitude of personal effort. Perhaps I won't change the world, but I believe it is a creative way of being in it.

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Javier Arizabalo

“In art, we will never reach the perfect; the obsessive look for it”

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Introduction

"Art is not its economic value, nor its complexity; I see it as an experience, from my point of view as an actor in it, but I do not rule out that, for many, being in the Sistine Chapel looking at the frescoes of Michelangelo, or having a unique painting by Leonardo in a room of their villa, is what makes them feel and appreciate something," expresses Javier Arizabalo García, considered one of the best artists in the world.

In life, as in art, nothing is perfect, but is everything perfectible? I ask him, and he responds with his reflective sense:

"On one side, there is what is, and on the other, what we perceive and think it is, and it is in this internal world of thought where the illusion that something is perfect or not, pleasant or not, of projections, of opinions, appears. We will never reach the perfect, because otherwise everything would be still, there would be neither time nor space, and we would not think. Only the most obsessive people would tend towards that search for the most perfect.

—Héctor Díaz

The interview

1. ***What is Realism?*** I understand that it is that vision or representation that tries to get close to what we believe is the real—the things that happen, the people we name and give characteristics to, etc.—but which, being immersed in a determined environment and interpretation, we take as natural, as real.

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2. ***How do you decide what to paint?*** Sometimes it is a matter of the dynamic you are immersed in, of what you usually do; sometimes they are things, people, and situations that you encounter on the path of life and that you are discovering. Finally, there would be what I would consider challenges and mythifications that I try to achieve.
3. ***What is not seen in a photographic session with models for your works?*** In a photographic session, you see with the photographer's technique the idea of what you want to achieve in your painting; surely there are many things that are not seen and others that are found. The photographer is a hunter who sometimes does not know what he is going to hunt, and the painter is a farmer who does not know how his harvest will turn out.
4. ***How important is composition?*** If there is no composition or it is badly done, the work is not understood; it is like a sentence where we place the subject, verb, or predicate wherever we feel like it—well, there is something you see that doesn't fit. Composition is the basis for understanding what we want to say and emphasize.
5. ***How important is the theme?*** Any work, and depending on the context, can lead us to a thought. Would we pick up a book with white covers to read if we saw it displayed on a shelf? Surely out of curiosity, we would open it, but yes, we have preferences, and as spectators, we sometimes need that theme we connect with.
6. ***How important is the palette?*** It is relatively important. Our brain has the plasticity to believe or create realities; we can watch a black and white movie from the mid-20th century and immerse ourselves in the context. In art, this leads us to be able to interpret a black and white drawing as realistic. If we think that we must represent "reality" in full color, yes, we must have a thoughtful color palette, but as the limited palette of Anders Zorn, for example, teaches us, we can give that sensation with four hues.
7. ***How important is the play of light?*** Without light there is no vision, and as I already learned, tonality is more important than color for giving the sensation of volume, space, and dimensions. The color is dependent on this, and on the reflection capabilities of the different materials, of the different wavelengths that make up white light. Probably ancient painters placed greater value on light, as they were more limited and conscious of what it meant to have good light; they did not have all the artificial light sources we have now and take for granted. In all this, the painter must reflect on what light is, the points of light, its characteristics, whether it is punctual or diffuse, its color temperature. My experience in photography, drawing, and design has helped me to be conscious of light. All of this helps me to appreciate, and as I have said, to be more conscious, endowing my works with more richness.

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8. ***What are the most complicated works to paint?*** That must be said by each artist, according to their knowledge, training, and risks they assume. If I stick with the word "complicated" from the question, the most complex are those with a number of characters and their composition, when working on figuration. We can also see it from the side of efficacy in the expression of some concept, objectives, or even the simplicity of the work. We know that this simplicity can help the efficiency and retention of the image in memory. Finally, we have the influence of the current cultural moment; if we believe in the alternation of classical and baroque eras, it would seem that the baroque style would imply greater difficulty, but as I said before, achieving effective simplicity can also be complicated.
9. ***"A painting is a poem without words," said the poet Horace.*** Just as there are different literary styles, there are different pictorial styles, and that leads me to think that Horace's phrase only sticks to one. A painting can be descriptive, or informal and not have the characteristics of a poem. I would stick to the idea that a painting is a language of the relationship of forms, which we associate with concepts and images, just as with words.
10. ***Are works—apparently—simple, actually the most complex?*** As I commented before, achieving simplicity can also be complicated, because you have to stick to the essential. If, by eliminating adornment and the superfluous, modernity reaches the essential elements, for example, in the construction of a building with a shape that is a reflection of its constructive essence—columns that support the weight of the floor plans—this has come from reflection. I could give a concrete example: the Brno chair designed by Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, of tubular style, seeks to economize and simplify, through industrial processes, the construction of this furniture element, which fulfills its function and at the same time we can say is beautiful.
11. ***Not all realistic, hyperrealistic, or photorealistic works express something, why?*** For me, it is about a pure contemplative attitude towards reality, which can have the same value as a whole discourse, why not? Does reality express itself, or is it only an interpretation of our mental discourse? Is silence not necessary and meaningful as a pause from any sound?
12. ***Is it necessary for a work to tell a story? Why?*** I really do not see it as necessary. In the ultimate limit, I understand that anything can be re-presented, even the most absolute vacuum, like "White on White" by Kazimir Malevich. The story is a discourse over time, and the minimum unit of that story is like an atom and its particles stopped at one moment; that instant, that minimum unit in time, exists from our position as an observer and does not need to be justified; the element exists, and the observer observes. Sometimes it

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seems that the artist needs to justify his work with words; it is also a comfortable way in which a certain current belittles another. The same thing happens with photorealistic painting, which some interpret as lacking interest, from the side of those who explain an empty work with a discourse that is sometimes falsely intellectual, and the reverse occurs as well—figurative artists who do not value what is not representative.

13. ***Can a drawing be as good as a painting?*** I believe we can give the same value to a drawing, of course. A one-minute musical piece with one instrument can be as moving as a symphony. I remember, years ago, some ink strokes on an antique Chinese fan that moved me; I felt as if the artist had done it masterfully at that moment, remaining there eternally—the person, the movement, the moment, the atmosphere, everything. I think I am explaining where I place the value. Art is not its economic value, nor its complexity; I see it as an experience, from my point of view as an actor in it, but I do not rule out that, for many, being in the Sistine Chapel looking at the frescoes of Michelangelo, or having a unique painting by Leonardo in a room of their villa, is what makes them feel and appreciate something.
14. ***What do you believe in spiritually?*** Does your work express it? My works are the moments materially fixed that I spend with them, from the instant I act alongside what is represented, when I take a photograph, until I am executing the painting in a concentrated manner. At all times I believe in the marvel that reality is, perceiving it, analyzing it, and I am sure that sometime, someone, in front of one of my works, will give it an interpretation.
15. ***What is the difference between European and Latin American Realism?*** Our formative bases, I even dare to say that the differences are expressed in each country. I notice that difference in the cultural history that Mexico has, for example, its symbols, its interpretation of reality, its history, the spaces it is destined for. I do not see putting all Hispanic American countries, with their differences, within the same set, although there is a certain cultural transfer from Spain to Hispanic America during the period of the Spanish kingdom and the viceroyalties. European Realism is not homogeneous either, no matter how much we are part of that so-called European continent. Although due to globalization, including cultural globalization, art is increasingly becoming indistinguishable from the origin of its creator. In Spain, the influence of the Royal Collections of painting during the Golden Age and later has weighed heavily. We also receive influence from European movements, Italian influence, we have the Impressionism of Sorolla, and more recently the realism of figures like Antonio López, with his great weight, all of which has meant that we have received varied influences, which have made the Spanish realist movement great and attractive, even for Hispanic American artists.

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- 16. *Is classical painting overshadowed by contemporary painting?*** Contemporary painting would not have existed without the previous ways of working. If we consider Picasso one of the hinge artists between tradition and modernity, he never separated himself from a certain classicism. Nor can we appreciate contemporary painting without the teachings of traditional painting; the tectonic fault that separates these supposed two times is unreal, perhaps created by trying to sell novelty and fashion. Ultimately, the two play with the same materials, obey the same constraints, and work with abstract elements, depending on how far and where we observe them.
- 17. *Do you paint for pleasure, for solitude, to make a living, to transcend... why do you do it?*** When I was little, I took refuge in painting and drawing because of my lack of communication; now it is the way I relate to the world, on the one hand, and also isolate myself in the concentration of my work, which prevents me from being dispersed. I feel good achieving things that before doing them I don't know how they are going to be, it is as if they arose.
- 18. *What is the difference between an artist and a painter?*** I would say that in the artist there is the comparison of him with a creator, a modern idea that we can change or create the world instead of adapting to it, someone who has developed a mastery compared to those who have not, and who creates something new where there was none before. On the other hand, the painter would be reduced to a simple mechanical activity, and his proposals would have less value. But who would have the capacity to discern between what is art and painting? Who would claim such a capacity? The intellectual, the master, the wise, the expert? Each one of us has our opinion within our capabilities.
- 19. *I consider your works eternal moments of beauty; what do you think of this opinion?*** Beauty is not something tangible and even less eternal, but changing; it is mediated by a social ideology and by judgment and sensitivity at a particular level, but yes, my works are imbued with an idea that reality is beautiful. To see and feel is a gift in a positive sense, except when one suffers and is not in harmony with the world, and the fixation in the pictorial matter is a desire, sometimes vain, to eternalize that beauty.
- 20. *In life as in art, nothing is perfect, but is everything perfectible?*** On one side, there is what is, and on the other, what we perceive and think it is, and it is in this internal world of thought where the illusion that something is perfect or not, pleasant or not, of projections, of opinions, appears. We will never reach the perfect, because otherwise everything would be still, there would be neither time nor space, and we would not think. Only the most obsessive people would tend towards that search for the most perfect.

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Javier Arizabalo

“The artist is made in the moment of action with the matter”

Media outlet: El Economista

By: Héctor Díaz

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Introduction

“My work is the confluence of a current moment, the material I have, and my abilities, and that is unrepeatable and new, and it may seem to someone that they are discovering something new, otherwise they would pass by.”

–Javier Arizabalo, painter.

For a visual artist, belonging to the IBEX Collection is the equivalent of the Nobel Prize. Arizabalo has achieved it.

If winning the Nobel Prize in Literature is the highest distinction for a writer, belonging to the IBEX Collection is the equivalent for a realist or hyperrealist visual artist. Javier Arizabalo, a master of masters, has achieved it. If it could be defined with a single idea, it would be with a phrase by Gabriel García Márquez: “I have learned that the world wants to live on the mountaintop, without knowing that true happiness is in the way you climb the steep slope.”

The Spanish artist Javier Arizabalo (Saint-Jean-de-Luz, France, 1965) enjoys worldwide fame as one of the most prominent in his style, realism. Despite this, his humility and nobility as a person continue to characterize him.

“I have never been, nor have I tried to be, a storyteller or a narrator; instead, I want the story to be the image itself. After some time, the work is no longer yours; it is alien to you. You don't know how the material came to be that way. It is the material that has organized itself. We resignify or turn reality—the image, time, space, volume, color—into an intelligible sign through art; we could say we would not have consciousness of life without it,” the artist shares.

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His work invites reflection on the fragility of the human being and the importance of time, but it also provokes deep sensations about the innate beauty in almost imperceptible daily moments, which Maestro Arizabalo immortalizes with exquisite mastery.

He perceives himself as "a person who has been defined in relation to art, or to the image. His friendships, his hobbies, and what he has done with his hands and his head."

—Héctor Díaz

The interview

1. ***What was your childhood like?*** It was a normal childhood; from primary school, I already took refuge in manual work. Spanish society at that time, the truth is, was difficult, a little dark, and it permeated everything. It was in my adolescence that I began defining myself regarding my abilities, and it was also the moment when Spain was taking off from its most negative recent period.
2. ***Does an artist make a work or does a work make an artist?*** What is a work and what is an artist? At some point, we define their perimeters, but it is the artist who is made in the moment of action with the material.
3. ***Does it require madness to be an artist?*** Stories have been created around characters; they have been novelized, they have been mythologized. Crazy artists are useful for having an entertaining time in a reading or a movie.
4. ***Why is art important in our lives?*** We resignify or turn reality—the image, time, space, volume, color—into an intelligible sign through art; we could say that we would not have consciousness of life without it.
5. ***Why does your work contribute something new to art?*** What is novelty? It is difficult, with all the past interactions of people with matter, to say that something is new. It is enough for it to contribute something to me—a small thought—and to find the person or people who feel reflected in front of the work. I want to continue thinking that there are people who, in front of a painting of my authorship, recognize the exceptional nature of the moment, the space, the person, the light, and who value them. My work is the confluence of a current moment, the material I have, with my abilities, and that is unrepeatable and

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new, and it may seem to someone that they are discovering something new; otherwise, they would pass by.

6. ***What has been your greatest satisfaction in the art industry?*** Art is something that arises separately from industry; whether there is an industry or not is another matter, art is not for it. The best thing I have been able to have is meeting people and establishing bonds with them; it's not even about making a masterpiece or not.
7. ***What is your goal as an artist?*** To keep surprising myself every day that I paint or draw, where things just happen. Awards, resumes, or money are aspects that interest society; as a person, my experiences interest me.
8. ***What advice would you give to someone who wants to be an artist?*** As with anyone, I wish them to make the best decisions in their life, and to seek the best way to be a moderately balanced being, to balance as much as possible their emotions and what they desire, with what they think, with what they are allowed to do, and from there to work and strive, since personal formation will not be given to them.
9. ***What do you consider your legacy will be?*** My goodness, what a question! I picture myself there in a 19th-century bronze sculpture with pigeons defecating on my head. My legacy will be small, but it does make me curious. It makes me want to look through a peephole, a hundred or two hundred years from now, to see where some paintings are located and how people will behave around them.
10. ***How would you like to be remembered?*** I would like to be remembered for a little while, to serve as inspiration for someone—it's a pity that we are nothing more than an atom in the infinite, where everything that matters to us will be lost and everything will change.

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Javier Arizabalo

“It is people who give meaning to the works; we live in art”

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Introduction

“The apprehension of the moment, living reality and its retention in time and space as if it were a tribute, an altar,” is what Javier Arizabalo tries to express in his work as a hyperrealist painter born in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, France, on April 6, 1965.

Javier found his meaning in life when he decided to traverse and embrace the path of art, freeing himself from his daily job. This is how he remembers it: “During the years I worked in advertising, I felt like a slave, and I only wanted to feel the passing of days, the air on my face, and see the sky.”

Reflecting on finding a vocation, he considers that “it is difficult for a vocation to be consciously built; nor is it something that is found without seeking it; I see it as an exchange with reality, until one comes to feel comfortable with what they aspire to, with what they have available, and with their energies acting in concert with the real.”

Regarding what he tries to express with his paintings, he states that “I relate the most primitive thing to an anguish: that of living, the passage of time, and death. Based on this feeling, the apprehension of the moment, living reality and its retention in time and space as if it were a tribute, an altar, knowing and apprehending the person represented, in their case; each person gives me what they are”.

–Héctor Díaz

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The interview

1. ***Is vocation innate? Is it found? Is it built? Is it pursued?*** It is difficult for a vocation to be consciously built; nor is it something that is found without seeking it. I see it as an exchange with reality, until one comes to feel comfortable with what they aspire to, with what they have available, and with their energies acting in concert with the real.
2. ***How would you describe your work to someone who is unfamiliar with it?*** It is difficult to describe something visual with something written because images are constructed with reference images, and words also lead to images we have had. Then one would have to have visual references to Baroque art, Impressionist painting, and current photography. I work on my pieces using parts of these keys: the photography I work with, which represents a certain idea of objectivity; the aspiration of Impressionism to capture the moment and light; and the poses of the bodies in the Baroque style.
3. ***What does it mean to be an artist in the 21st century?*** To create in the complexity of our time. This is a moment in which art is sold as art, where speculation causes certain products to be sold at outrageous prices and their value is solely because of that. That is why it is difficult for artists who work with our skills to have enough peace of mind to work amidst all this noise.
4. ***Why did you choose your style? Is it necessary to differentiate oneself with one?*** One, in the interaction with reality, finds their way; in that way, one is always different from others, because they hold the brush differently or because they illuminate in a certain way. Logically, one has certain predilections and wants to resemble something, but they do not do it identically, but as they can and know how to do it. It is not something one chooses entirely; you do not choose to be born into a culture, you do not choose to have opportunities, they are either offered to you or they are not.
5. ***What are you trying to express in your paintings?*** I relate the most primitive thing to an anguish: that of living, the passage of time, and death. Based on this feeling, the apprehension of the moment, living reality and its retention in time and space as if it were a tribute, an altar, knowing and apprehending the person represented, in their case; each person gives me what they are.
6. ***What artists have influenced your work?*** In my youth, some high school teacher. During my studies, a painting I could see in a provincial museum by Aurelio Arteta, who seemed to me an excellent connoisseur and synthesizer of the body, or Gabriel Morcillo, whom I was able to see on a trip to Granada. Subsequently, I couldn't help but be

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impressed by Antonio López, Claudio Bravo, Edward Hopper, Velázquez. In any case, I have not had mythologized artists, but it was the works that impressed me, whoever they were by, because an impression must occur at a specific moment and circumstance.

7. ***What is the most difficult thing when painting?*** Having clear thoughts. In my practice, knowing what I want to do, not feeling pressure, and then I have the capabilities to do the most complicated work, since concentration is required in some aspects; it is an analytical job.
8. ***What is the most satisfying thing when painting?*** That the work flows. There is a manual aspect, like when one plays an instrument, and it is reaching that level of concentration where you do not realize that time is passing. I do not think it is even reaching a concrete achievement; finished paintings are already corpses, sometimes of a thought.
9. ***Why do people buy art?*** Why do people collect things? Or why do they keep books they have read? I do not think it is very different. There are basic ways of functioning: you can feel something again if you can reproduce what provoked it, and on the other hand, there is the possession of the object as something personal and private. I am convinced that very intellectualized explanations are not valid, although I would also buy art for the exclusivity of a product, which a copy or print does not provoke. Almost everything is related to sensitive perceptions, linked, on the other hand, to each of us, as our own experience.
10. ***What gives value to art?*** Trajectory, quality, theme, format, gallery, market? Of course, multiple factors, and none of them is totally objective. A cultural product probably only has value for those who know how to appreciate it and is also linked to their emotions. Personally, due to my involvement in the making of my work, I highly value the sensitive qualities of the pictorial matter, and also how appropriate it is in a given context. For me, the value that the rest of the world gives to any work of art or object is their business; I can only change my mind if they offer me convincing arguments.
11. ***Do you prefer your works to be in Museums or private Collections? Why?*** I would like my work to be in Museums or easily accessible places. Any cultural product should be freely accessible, as it does not belong to us, just as a language does not belong to one person or group, because before us, there has been someone who transmitted and taught it to us, and let's say they "invented" it for use. In small steps, with the passing of centuries and millennia, our societies are becoming more shared (and human).

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12. ***Do artworks find a home, or do people find artworks?*** Since artworks do not have consciousness, I believe that people give meaning to the works.
13. ***Is transcendence an important theme for you? Why?*** Given that all of us who are conscious know that we are going to die and disappear (our self will disappear), and this is distressing because it breaks the meaning we give to our lives, I believe we all wish for what we create and experience to survive, just like children. Otherwise, what would be the meaning of the effort? I imagine we are talking about the transcendence of our works. We are a somewhat more transitory phenomenon, depositing in the works another transformed reality that resembles transcending.
14. ***What is the role of a Gallery?*** The first function is to reach a wider audience. The second, and no less important, is to collaborate in the sustenance of the artist, and perhaps, to share a common action and objectives external to these basic functions, such as producing thought and change.
15. ***What is your opinion on Auction Houses and Art Fairs?*** They are other formats for the exchange between art and collectors. Thinking, for example, about the ARCO Art Fair in Madrid, it causes me rejection, as it only serves the interests of a certain type of art and the business of a series of galleries. Certain power circles are created regarding the direction of the advertised art and the reception of public money, but this also happens with Art Centers. I don't have much of an opinion on auction houses because I haven't had contact with any, only that they are another channel of exchange, and that is not bad.
16. ***How to stand out in a globalized market?*** By being oneself, thinking about what one has close by. Only from our particularity and circumstances can we offer something different, or so I believe at first.
17. ***Should the artist's private life be kept private?*** Of course, or are we going to believe that the artist is a celebrity? I understand that the mythologization of an artist can serve to amplify their work, but I prefer that only what is related to their work be seen; that is what is important at a social level.
18. ***Is there anything you haven't been asked yet that you would like to share?*** Can one live without art? No, we live in art.
19. ***What is the most important thing in life for you?*** To feel, and to be conscious to the extent of my possibilities. During the years I worked in advertising, I felt like a slave, and I only wanted to feel the passing of days, the air on my face, and see the sky.

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20. ***What could be the title of a book about your life?*** I have not considered having a written book, and even less a title, but if we were to imagine: "The child who started to dream and became an artist and a man at the same time."