

Esther Villalobos

Text by Nicoles Minder

Curator Cantonal Cabinet of Prints, Jenisch Museum, Vevey

From the monotype to the mural work, Painting, printing and (re)creation

Currently, the monotype is Esther Villalobos' favorite medium of expression. Esther Villalobos. This procedure is located outside the world of printing. The very nature of this tends towards multiplication. A model is engraved or drawn with the intention of reproducing the motif by printing on the paper. Now, the monotype, as its name suggests, is a unique impression. It cannot be multiplied, since the model is not printed and, therefore, the image is not preserved. It is a single stamp obtained by pressing a freshly painted rigid support on a sheet of paper.

But why paint on a plate and not directly on paper? Because the same transfer from one element to another participates in the pure act of creation by modifying the image. The fact that the sheet of paper and ink experience strong pressure provides a very particular density. Without impression, this tension does not exist. The results obtained consist precisely of those small nuances that escape the brush. Esther Villalobos says she prefers metal to plexiglass to obtain better ink adhesion qualities. Their way of proceeding is positive or negative, adding or subtracting. Either paint directly with the brush or with the roller or remove the ink with which you had previously coated the plate using a spatula, paper or alcohol. Printing ink is the main material. Not the Chinese ink with water but a greasy ink formed by linseed oil and pigments. Its consistency closely resembles that of oilpainting. And only a good consistency, due to an exact balance of its components, and an excellent storage temperature, allow it to be worked properly.

For Esther Villalobos the black is enough. Isn't this composed of all the colors, for all the shades, both the cold and the warm? It allows you to discover the most infinite nuances of value, from the strength of the smooth colors to the transparency of the gouache. A constant back-and-forth between the two extremes. From white to black all grays are allowed, varied and exquisite. Some seeblack diluted with another color, often with red, to nuance and expand its range. The process that leads to the realization of the works of Esther Villalobos, passes, then, by an obvious task of painter. The manipulation of pictorial matter is the first stage, and it is very instinctive. The spontaneous gesture sometimes contains violence and sometimes, more often, joy. The two subsequent stages consist of measuring this passion, containing it, delimiting it. First of all, printing. The passage under the press will uniform the ink and make it penetrate the paper. In the monotype this process cannot always be controlled but is an element of surprise that becomes an interlocutor and with which the artist can dialogue. And in fact, it is not the only one, since sometimes a printer intervenes in this process through his own skills.

Esther Villalobos, who has had the great fortune to work in different workshops (Bobby's on 42nd Street in New York, in Monique Lazega, Aquaforte, in Lausanne), has recently enjoyed the talent of Raymond Meyer, engraver studio in Pully, also on the shores of Lac Lemman. The same one that already in 1992, made her discover engraving. The large formats with which she has been working since the autumn of 2002 involve a delicate manipulation. Paradoxically, paper is both solid and fragile. It is a material that you must have a lot of respect for. For Esther Villalobos it is not a mere support. It is part of her works. If you use Chinese or Korean paper, you know how to take advantage of its colors, its softness, its finesse and its different absorption capacity. To such an extent that, sometimes, her finished works shows nothing but

the reverse of the paper, the one whose transparency reveals the ink drawing in a sifted way due to the whiteness of the paste. It is then, when the monotype's finished. It is a print, a work on paper that can be shown as is or framed, more recommended because of its fragility. Esther Villalobos immediately rejected the frame, since it imposed the inexorable presence of a crystal between the work and the viewer. The stamp has not been created, because to be framed, it has always been preserved in drawers or portfolios. This is how you can read it, and, above all, you can see the relationship with the texture of the paper. Esther Villalobos has mounted her monotypes on panels, as if they were such lying on a frame. The work seems to come, literally, forward, to the encounter with the one who looks at it, instead of protecting itself behind a glass. It abandons the intimacy of the print to offer itself with the same vigor with which a painting does.

With the appearance of supports in modules, from the spring of 2003, it is when this operation is really going to become one more stage in the realization when it comes out of the press. No. That's when it becomes a creation. It is cut and pasted on different panels transforming it into a diptych or a triptych. It no longer occupies the entire surface, but now white delimits the printed part. A tension is created as the cut traverses and cuts through the blacks of the image in a direction often contrary to the movements of the brush. Verticality and horizontality they enter conflict to create a new balance. At the end of that year, increasingly dense blocks appeared that were sculpturally imposed on space. The work on paper appeared on three levels being in itself flat in nature, now it becomes volume. The image itself is surrounded by white and has been placed at a distance, like a window that opens in perspective on the distant horizon. It is a landscape, a piece of delimited universe, a contained passion. The splendor and power of gesture are contained in order to attain fullness.

The work of Esther Villalobos is in full bloom. Her lifelong interest in engraving now joins her soul as a painter. An act of resistance, her vindication in favor of paper has brought together a fascination with matter and sense of rhythm, whose premises were already found in her previous prints and paintings, formed by the juxtaposition of small plates or frames. From now on, her monotypes have become mural works. With this, Esther Villalobos energizes the art of engraving. She wishes that her search never wanes, since she loves movement, and the proof is that her work is constantly reinventing itself.