

BALTASAR LOBO

Conversation with María Elena Ramos.

París, 1989.

Childhood fragments.

“I was born in a small town. No-one talked about sculpture there. Sculpture was making saints. I played with clay. Herds of sheep passed by, groups of cows and bulls. But above all, it was making saints. I made saints, and wax candles for imagery. There is a sketch of Saint Jerome. Some of those works are still in churches, some are still taken out in Easter processions, such as a recumbent Christ in Palencia.

It was always a representation, but great detail was not required for processions, so much as the overall forms.”

“Someone made the model and it had to be followed. But another boy and myself were allowed a lot of freedom.”

“A sitting virgin, with the child in her arm. That was solemn. In the other sculpture, more human freedom is allowed, not according to a dogma. But even so, I liked monastic art, Baroque, ancient art very much. Old Castile has wonderful examples of Romanesque art, and earlier, Visigothic art, as well. Santa María la Blanca was first a mosque, then a synagogue, then a church. The Cristo de La Luz was built by old Arabs and is religious, as much so as those made by Christians. There are many churches built by non-Christians, but you feel good in them.”

“My father was a carpenter. When I came home from school, he made me make handles for farmers' tools.”

“I only did portraits of my friends, never to order. We would be talking and the model would be moving. They were busts. I was very small, I was 10 or 11 years old.”

Work in the studio

“There is an idea, a force driving you to work. But there is no plan.”

“I begin something. Along the way I give up. I go back to it when I have done other things. There are no rules. I feel freedom of action. There is no plan of work, it is the desire to make something and nothing else.”

“I work plaster as if it were stone. With a chisel and work and work...”

“You add plaster or you remove it. For marble, I don't draw a design. I begin to carve and what I think might be something with very specific details, which changes along the way by incitement of the work itself. “

“You mark the marble. You draw. You use anime. To mark, you change the position, or you can do it with newspapers.”

“In Italy they have sharpeners. You measured up. Nowadays they use compressors. They don't work with hammers.”

“If I discover something I'm not happy with, I look at what doesn't work and I change it. The model evolves. It isn't a question of destroying, I am never severely self-critical.”

“When you work plaster by hand, the elements are very simple, it follows your speed of thought. It's like writing by hand instead of that *tack-tack-tack* of the typewriter, which isn't the same. It isn't as intense.

Abstraction

“When one starts work, it isn't all decided. I'm not fully aware of it either. I can stop it and it will be nearly abstract.”

“There have been times when I have hurried so much I have reached abstraction.”

“Some kinds of marble are more abstract and others more realist. The red marble from Carrara, for example, lends itself to things with a certain violence.

“Some churches have a spiritual absorption which is also abstract...”

Words.

“Not everything I say is true. I am not in the habit of talking.

If I talk, it depends on a great passion.”

“Poetry? I get home after work. I rest and read: Baudelaire, Rimbaud.”

“I'm not fond of war poems, to tell the truth.”

“I met García Lorca, but I was not friends with him. He was Andalusian, witty, amusing, I am Castilian. Lorca is a fountain of images. Machado can be better.

War

“When men go to fight voluntarily, you feel people's enthusiasm, their spirit.

“A civil war is worse than anything.

“I did a lot of drawings during the war. Mercedes and other women produced a magazine. I published in *Los Libertarios* as well. It was the battle, but not to exalt it.

“During the war, I was moved by dead children (and did drawings of them).”

“There are subjects which repeat themselves. Motherhood repeats itself. During and after the war, it inspired me greatly.

“During war, it is the tragedy of a mother to embrace a dead child, either she saves it, or she runs away to hide.”

“That was the atmosphere in the war. And the drawings were like that. Later, it was more the mother's expression, not so much the atmosphere.”

“I have not done sculptures of that tragedy.”

“I never agreed to work for the Nazis. I didn't accept prizes during the occupation, either.”

Picasso. Paris.

“When the Republicans began losing, hundreds, thousands of us arrived here [Paris]. Then we went to the Mediterranean, where the people went after five years of war.”

“Coming to Paris was an adventure. We had tickets for the ship to Mexico. We made friends, the poet León Felipe and his wife as well. He couldn't get papers at that time. I went to see Picasso, he saw the drawings, we went to the police, they gave me a residence permit.

“The art in Paris at that time was far more important than now.”

Self-criticism. Salvation.

“I could never learn arithmetic.”

“I have never been good at anything, and that has saved me. You can do what you feel... when there are not thousands of people doing the same. I am lucky like that. But I came to that conclusion later.”

