

Exhibition: **Ignacio Pinazo. The smoke of love**

IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
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Organized by: IVAM Institut Valencia d'Art Modern

Curator: Francisco Javier Pérez Rojas

"Ignacio Pinazo. The Smoke of Love" presents 56 works including paintings, photographs and drawings. The exhibition layout has a central piece, "Cupid lighting a cigarette", that was created in 1892 and now, borrowed by a private collector, it is presented to the public for the first time. This singular canvas represents the god of love accompanied by an attractive girl who lights a cigarette for him. It was among the works that Pinazo presented at the National Exhibition in 1895.

This exhibition highlights, by means of a selection of artworks, the important turn that the artist took from 1886, when he moved to Godella (Valencia). There he was isolated from the official art scene and, taking creative codes derived from costumbrismo and realism as a starting point, Pinazo undertook a new trajectory by himself, doing very complex and innovative artistic research that was crucial for the later development of painting during the 20th century.

On the occasion of this exhibition a catalogue has been issued reproducing the works on show and including texts by Consuelo Císcar, Francisco Javier Pérez Rojas and Aida Pons Moreno.

The composition of *Cupid Lighting a Cigarette* (1892) cannot be understood if we do not pay special attention to the changing process of decorative painting that the painter was going through at that time. In this period he placed Eros as the main character of his allegorical theme. The scene takes place in a springtime landscape that highlights the fertile lands in which multiple plants and fruits grow as they can be seen in a wide outlook. Exuberance, greenness and colourful nature are signs of Pinazo's familiarity to Valencian rural environment.

We can mention a few predecessors of this painting such as the canvas *Catching Butterflies* (c. 1880), *Portrait of María Jaumandreu* (1885) and the large format canvas *Beauty Wounded by Cupid* (1889) (Museo Nacional de Cerámica y Artes Suntuarias

González Martí) that was painted by him on one of the decorative panels of the El León de Oro Bar in Valencia and which is another key piece of the exhibition. These works are unquestionably representative of aestheticist theme series that celebrates nature and the splendour of youth, the strength of love and passion. In spite of the fact that the collection selected for the exhibition gathers works of a different nature, landscapes and feminine iconography are common characteristic among them. This female iconography is fully integrated into the cultural coordinates and the erotic vision of that period between centuries and allows the appreciation of artistic values, psychological depth and the originality of these paintings as singular creations of this time.

Flowers are included in Pinazo's paintings and they are frequently placed in main positions as they highlight the aesthetic and bucolic intention. Plants and flowers are the elements that integrate with the characters in the canvas *Cupid Smoking*. Every feature of this young character is refined and delicate, this urban nymph has no trace of rusticity. She wears elegant clothes and shoes surrounded by a springtime field full of flowers in order to meet Cupid. Maybe this canvas would not be so disconcerting if the symbolist topic was represented in a different stylistic language, more idealist and unreal and more appropriate to the fantastic nature of the issue, but on the contrary, Pinazo uses a realist and descriptive way of expression, that turns fantasy and invention into a contemporary and real experience.

A remarkable group of pencil and oil sketches of this canvas is also presented in the exhibition. Pinazo used to draw many studies of his compositions, especially drawings, in order to work the idea out and to section the different details. For this purpose he would draw the same figure as many times as necessary. The painter used to dissect every detail of the composition. His works are very developed and meditated, nothing is left to chance nor improvisation. The different floral and mythological paintings he created until 1891 are also experiences that summarize and enrich the new style of painting.

Cupid themes are tackled with an evident touch of humour, but it is difficult to make an in-depth analysis of this kind of painting nowadays in order to decipher its highly erotic content, apart from the studies on feminine iconography published in the last years. If we take a closer look at the image and clothes of the girl accompanying Cupid, at her hair, at the atmosphere, we go back to earlier paintings and can make up an imaginary story altogether. The image and landscape of Cupid's young friend resembles many details of the *Portrait of Maria Jaumandreu* (1885) as an allegory of spring. Even the country house appearing in the *Portrait of Maria Jaumandreu* (1885) is the same that the one that appears in the scene of *Cupid Lighting a Cigarette*. Maybe Pinazo used this portrait and other earlier experiences, such as *Catching Butterflies*, to compose this idyllic and nostalgic spring landscape. But if we analyse some other details of *Cupid Lighting a Cigarette* we can see that the girl is wearing the same dress as the woman in the large format painting in the El León de Oro Bar in Valencia representing *Beauty Wounded by Cupid*. In this painting in the El León de Oro Bar Cupid has butterfly wings and shows his quiver full of arrows. On the contrary *Smoking Cupid* has an empty quiver, he is unarmed and defenceless. In short, the topic is a fantasy of which a precise and logical interpretation cannot be made because of its capricious and arbitrary nature but the mentioned painting has many characteristics, connotations and symbolic elements of turn of the century paintings.

The Smoke of Love, not as an emanation of the cigarette that Cupid smokes, but as a metaphor of sensual ardour that his arrows unleash, is linked with other paintings by Pinazo in which the son of Venus is still represented in some way. The iconographic universe of Pinazo was very rich and assorted. In spite of his preferences for more concrete themes such as landscapes and figure painting his decorative paintings and the way he carries them out is also very interesting. This kind of commissions stagger between 1887 and 1900. Pinazo was not a decorative painter in a strict and traditional sense, but he deals with it in a very personal way where both iconography and style are signs of the modernity that his paintings represented for Valencia.