

Art and anthropology. The Sapiens Collection: One race. Interview with Paco Dalmau

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Summary:

Art captivates the human being, as much with its outer appearance as in the depth of its emotions and feelings. The latest work of Paco Dalmau seeks to demonstrate that biologically all humans are unequivocally equal, and gives a personal and intimate view of this reality as an allegation of the fundamental unity of mankind. To do this, the artist from Vila-real, Spain, has traveled to Rotterdam. In an in-depth interview he talks about the evolution of his work, the progress of his project, his experience in Rotterdam, and many more things that show this artist's dedication to his work.

Article:

Paco Dalmau (1978) is an artist from Vila-real whose most recent outstanding work, *Polyptychs*, was exhibited in 2010. Throughout the last decade he has presented his paintings and participated in exhibitions in galleries all over the world: hopping between Castellon, Japan, Barcelona, New York, London and Canada. The human face in *Polyptychs*, his abstract painting in *Fractions* and his work on movement and textures in *Dance* make up a lively, inquiring and incisive work in modes of pictorial representation.

For his new work, **Sapiens**, Dalmau has traveled to Rotterdam, settling in the residence of young artists, the Hommes Foundation CK 12. Genealogy, work on the human face and the different races as defined by the anthropological classification of Henri V. Vallois were used as a starting point for this novel and interesting project that will not be presented until 2017. It is an ambitious work that requires a great deal of documentation and dedication, and is on its way to become one of the most important creations by an artist from the region of Castellon. That is why **Nomepieroniu** did this in-depth interview with [Paco Dalmau](#).

Interview

Your previous work "Polyptychs" already worked on the concept of the generational portrait. Do you think of this new project as a continuation of that work? Had you already thought of this project at that time, or did it occur to you as you developed "Polyptychs"?

Without a doubt, the two collections are closely related. Both *Sapiens* and *Polyptychs* have as a common theme the role of the human species, the passage of time and its consequences. We can say that *Sapiens* was born during the construction process of *Polyptychs*. I would say that *Sapiens* is more a consequence of *Polyptychs*, rather than its continuation.

Polyptychs was a clear exploration of the technical and aesthetic realms. The collection had a very thorough preparatory stage and led to a voluminous work, both in treatment of images and artisanal work. I worked on the expression and the psyche of the subject and I distorted both image and colour. The colour was key in this collection, as the entire photographic archive was made in black and white with the intention of eventually interpreting the pigmentation of the chosen image from basics, without departing from an established chromatism. It really is a collection that needs some time to grasp the peculiarity of its work. I worked a lot on the language of colour.

Sapiens is distinguished by its narrative aspect. This collection delves deeper into

the realm of the lyrical, fantastic, even futuristic or science fiction. It is a project that clearly supports an accompanying literary discourse, as a complement or just as a parallel to the graphic composition. One reason may be that the fracture and evolution of the works, at each stage, differs in a progressive way from its predecessor, taking from it and becoming a consequence of it. This is one of the paths along which I wish to focus all this literary component of the project.

> How do you portray the anthropological classification of Henri V. Vallois? What made you use it as the framework for your project?

Personally, at the beginning of a project, I always look for ways to organize all the information I have in mind, I make an index, and from it, I develop each point.

Sapiens is a project about humans, about what it means to be human, about the reason for our existence and especially the consequences of this existence on our own bodies, our genes and our psyche. Anthropology is the social science that studies human beings in a holistic manner, and while I was looking into this area, looking for answers and collecting information necessary to complete the collection, I found a way give order and a starting point to the whole idea I wanted to develop.

Actually, as you say, the racial taxonomy established by Henri V. Vallois, just served as a framework, a starting point, as a reference to ethnic and geographical order. And although it has great prominence and is the vertebra the project, its original meaning is irrelevant to the meaning of the collection. This anthropological classification catalogues and differentiates, while Sapiens combines and unifies.

> Why Rotterdam and the Hommes Foundation CK 12?

Of course, the choice was entirely conditioned by the project, I first thought of Berlin, London, cities that I valued, and in my case, particularly New York. I have been fortunate enough to have exhibited several times in this city and have visited it frequently. Undoubtedly, New York brings together all the elements necessary to move forward with Sapiens, and is likely to be my next destination to continue with the documentation, but hey, we're in Rotterdam, and I'll tell you why.

This city has the largest foreign population in the Netherlands. Out of its 600,000 inhabitants, 280,000 are non-Dutch and these are made up of more than 100 nationalities. Considering that we are talking about a medium-sized city, this record is extraordinary, and in a Dutch city, whose culture I consider a European paradigm! Here people with such diverse origins and so many different cultures live together without any major problems. In our country we need to reflect a bit about what's wrong with our society, but this is a subject that has already been spoken about a lot.

As for my choice of the Hommes Foundation CK 12, the first thing to say is that it was them that chose me: they approved the Sapiens Collection project after a selection process, and let me know their decision to invite me as resident international artist to develop the project. It was a pleasure for me, as the facilities are excellent, I work and live in a private studio with natural light all day, and I receive continuous support and endorsement of my practice from the foundation, and Jannie Hommes and Leo van Die (directors of the artists program) are entirely dedicated to the activity of their artists and are, of course, a cultural landmark in their city.

The foundation is located in one of the southern districts of Rotterdam, Charlois. It is a multiethnic working class district, and one of the artistic focuses of the city. Many artists of different nationalities and disciplines have their studios and are

based in this area. The foundation and the Hommes gallery have a very active programme with visual arts, music and drama. Culture is consumed regularly and this is great for people of our profession.

- > What point is the project at now?

The project is in phase two, the first was thinking about it and putting order into it. I am now in the fun part, working with people, the models who are to be the protagonists, photo shoots, life drawing, selecting images, and especially interviews: small conversations on topics related to their countries of origin, personal anecdotes, nothing intimate or very personal – that's not really my interest. I weigh up their personal vision of what and how they think their society is structured, how they perceive other cultures and their relationship with these differences. It's lovely to see how the perception of a Japanese person or a Turk vary on the same subject. I don't talk about important issues, just about how to sit at the table to eat, it's extremely revealing.

- > What is your working method? How do you make this project advance artistically?

I work according to an established script, I burn through stages one by one. In this line of work, as in any other that is to be taken seriously, there is not much room for improvisation. Possibly there are certain moments when we interpret or reorient certain specific nuances in the process, but there are never any drastic changes or about-turns. This would be sloppy and in the end it would be noticeable. If a new idea comes up by chance while carrying out a task, I note it down, and calmly analyse it, I weigh up whether it can be included in this collection or else keep it for future projects.

- > What is your ultimate intention with the Sapiens Collection? I mean what are you most keen for your public to capture? What are you most interested in transmitting?

There is talk of evolution to a whole, towards a genuine entity that is a result of a mish-mash of decisions that each individual adopts at any particular time, towards a single entity brought about by unification. These actions walk the path, over generations, of the consequence that brings together all the genetic and metaphysical information that makes up the collection. More than anything, it is my personal view; I make the decisions in all aspects of the work; there is no outside interference or influence in terms of planning and project development. This really is the aspect that I wanted the public to see. I'm not saying that this is what I wanted to transmit, what I'm saying is I put this thought to the spectator. The public is the most subjective aspect in art. In the end, as an artist, it is out of my reach and outside my field of action to try to communicate in a consistent manner with the public. I could explain what I would like to convey to the viewer, but I really don't know what to say. Just that, as I said before, I intend to put my intention to the public. In my experience, and to be honest, my job is to capture a reflection in painting, photography, drawing, graphics, writing or any other support for myself. Beyond this, it's difficult to know what can happen.

- > Why oil painting? Have not you thought of any another artistic approach to this project? For example, video art would allow greater (infinite) temporal fusion of the different races in the same body.

Exactly! This is exactly what I mean when I talk about not being able to have a consistent communication with the public, but this is normal, artists live with this

constant questioning of our approaches, but I have to tell you, it has to be so, because this is how we can see that our work produces a reaction in the viewer. It is an interesting question, and for me, as the author of the project, a beautiful and rich one, to ask me about my choice, and to suggest a tool, in this case video, with such self-assuredness in your choice. It makes me think that on reading my project you have felt something, and that according to the visual culture you find most attractive, you proclaim that it would be the right choice. It's nice that you use your imagination. I like that.

> When I see your work and read about it, it is evident you have a strong interest in the face, the physicality of the human body, its flesh, as well as fracture and (re)composition. The different parts of "Polyptychs" and "Fractions" are like Rubik's cubes that could be constructed in different ways endowing the work of other meanings. What is it that brings you to work on these concepts of physicality and fragmentation?

Yes, it's true, the human aspect has a special intrigues for me, it is a very malleable subject in that it gives you endless options for ways to work; the human body aesthetically provides movement, color, light, shadow, curves, lines, perspective, dimensions. We must remember that the human world is designed to our proportions, and though this is logical, it never ceases to be interesting. And the psychic component is brutally stimulating: a certain look, gesture, sound, or expression! You find all these things are on the same continent but none is like another.

Fragmentation is the counterpoint, it separates, differentiates, even destroys something as perfectly designed as a human being. Well, personally I think its design is extremely genuine; and within my conceptual framework, it made me, an makes me, look for that counterpoint and somehow, without being an overly traumatic trance towards the figure, distort this perfection and include this game that you hint at, that could give the work additional meanings parallel to the conventional interpretations.

> This project seems to be the culmination of a stage. It is ambitious and all sorts of characteristic themes and styles present in your work up to now converge. Are you planning to continue along this line? What other artistic aspects, themes, etc. are you interested in working on?

You never know, but you're right, it does meet all the conditions for closing a stage. I think it will. It is the opportunity I give myself to try to end this period of study of the Human condition, a complex issue to understand, and that will no doubt always be niggling at me and obsessing me.

Other aspects? Yes, many, many ideas in my head. Well, to do justice to my experience, Fractions works on abstraction, it really liberates me, I use it to clear my mind and I think I'll be combining it with other projects for time to come.

I can tell you that I'm going to work on the field of installation, I have already got lots of notes and sketches that just need developing. The project is called Circuits (the title does not define the content). I am interested in building structures, in applying mechanics to art and in including sound, smells, digital images, video, interaction with the audience. I would like the audience to be the protagonist and the necessary element for it to make sense. This will be my next experiment.

> Are you happy with your experience in Rotterdam? What is it that attracts you most to the place? Does it inspire you? Did you consider it a good place to work for an artist?

Yes, particularly happy, for several reasons, I consider the Dutch society and

lifestyle one of the most well-established in the world. It is the authentic stereotype of European culture that many of us have in mind, cities are designed to seamlessly bring together different ways of looking at life, public transportation, bike lanes, services, shopping, social and cultural centres, art galleries, museums, everything is built and located in a very balanced way so that everyone feels comfortable in their daily lives. Rotterdam, certainly is a big city with a very interesting multiethnic community of artists. In a short time, I have met, without exaggeration, about twenty artists working across a range of disciplines, all relating to each other as friends and colleagues, and this is the aspect that most excited me.

As to whether I consider it a good place for an artist to work in the conditions, in my case you have to remember that I have come to Rotterdam to work specifically in my practice. It is quite another thing to come to a city and have to set up your own business and immerse yourself in the artistic community, that is more a matter of personality.

- > Has the Sapiens Collection already established its place of exhibition in Spain?

No, because the Sapiens collection will be ready to be shown in 2017-2018. In the coming month of November, I will be exhibiting photographs, drawings, paintings, interviews, notes, essays and all the documents produced to date in The Hommes Foundation CK 12 in Rotterdam.