

Teaching Spirituality Through Art

Margarita Sastre de Balmaceda
Catedrática-Departamento de Humanidades
UPR-Ponce

Spirituality for our soul is as air and food for our body. Intangibles can be essential. In our modern society where materialism is rampant and values have deteriorated or are non-existent, art teachers are called to foster in our students transcendence in mind and behavior. How can that be done? On the one hand, we can emphasize the dematerialization of art making its elements —line, form, space, color— most important in creation. The elevation of the spirit, for example, can be taught through ascending lines or the use of different tones of blue. We may also suggest themes in our drawing and painting classes which encompass solidarity, equality and respect for each other —no matter the gender, race or national origin— and for this world we live in, sickened by pollution and global warming, weakened by disappearing species.

I believe art should be sublime but, at the same time, it should awaken consciences and strive so our life here and now is enhanced by spirituality expressed through responsibility. Only then we shall become better human beings. We shall be uplifted spiritually, take a glimpse at creation, become aware of the power of God, the endless pursuit of true happiness.

Odilon Redon, in his book *To Myself*, his journal from 1867 to 1915, writes on May 7, 1875, “*What a pleasure to read in a quiet room with the window open onto the forest. I came back to old Dante, he will no longer*

leave me. We are moving towards a serious friendship”. Here we see Redon’s deep involvement with nature and with the spirit of one of the greatest writers of all ages, Dante. Among the mystical artists, Redon shines with a special light. His work transcends the corporeal, and even though we apprehend it through our senses it propels us well beyond material existence into the world of the spirit.

Writing on Millet “...The poet was never absorbed by the painter, he had his vision. He looked for one found in the ‘plain-air’, an absolutely new world. He gave moral life to clouds...” Redon quotes Schumann —“Be a noble artist, and all the rest will be given to you”. He translates his attitude towards the spiritual in these words: “...the love of beauty and the search for beautiful patterns must always maintain our faith”. Presenting the work and thoughts of artists such as Odilon Redon will no doubt strengthen the student’s sense of the spiritual.

Sir Herbert Read, in his book “*A Letter to a Young Painter*” tells us about the hazards of public education. He says “...there is no doubt that most systems of education might have been deliberately designed to stultify the aesthetic sensibility of a child...My own view...is that the psychic imbalance of prevailing systems of education is directly responsible for the moral delinquency of our populations and their inevitable drifts to annihilating wars...” (p. 196)

It is essential in the teaching of art to discuss the act of creation. As we artists know, this is something which goes beyond explanation. It makes us reach towards diversity, taking us into another sphere of existence. It goes beyond the self. We go around and around, delving into solutions until we finally reach the light we search for so anxiously. Creation gives us peace after much struggle and unrest. We strive towards a perfection which is unattainable. No matter how much of the yearning subsides in us, we still rest in the certitude that what we have given form to has our own soul in its midst—the best of us, the whole of us. We must instill in our students the importance of creation, a *sine qua non*, without which there is no true art. Composition, joining together all art elements, can transform a realistic painting into an abstraction in essence. All good art must enhance the sublime, the supra-natural, the spiritual.

Projects involving the crucial issues in our 21st Century should be presented as challenges to the students. How can we control pollution? How can we help solve global warming? Famine? How can peace prevail over war? How can we stop abuse in the family, towards minorities, towards the deprived? How can we stop drugs? How can we become better human beings? Students must sense, think, rethink, express their visions.

Herbert Read (Op. Cit.) quotes Conrad Fiedler “On Judging Works of Art”: “...although the artist’s creation has been made possible only on the basis of an extraordinarily intense feeling, nevertheless this artistic creation has been made possible by his still more extraordinary power of mind, which even in moments of the most intense

sensory experience preserves unimpaired the calmness of objective interest and the energy of formative creations”.

These are some suggestions given to me by my *Art Appreciation* and *Drawing* students:

Wendolin Abraham writes “Nature is the source of inspiration for many. We are constantly searching to discover in it elements we could use in our art work, involving ourselves in the conservation of nature. Such great responsibility makes us become one with nature because it is part of us and we are part of it. This communion contributes even more towards the search for our identity and our purpose here on earth”.

César, a Drawing I student, wrote: “Art goes hand in hand with spirituality, since you can express much through a work of art thus allowing you to reach tranquility”.

Ilean, another Drawing I student, expressed herself saying: “Each person uses her own perspective to give significance to that which is incomprehensible. The same happens with art. In art, you must have vision and imagination to express what we feel and think...”

Francheska: “Being in contact with nature you may feel and appreciate spirituality.”

Anonymous: “Using nature for artistic creations”.

Yaritza and Angelic: “Transmitting a positive image through a drawing or painting. You may also transmit a thought, a feeling, such as love, sadness, joy”.

Marangely: “...in art...we can’t help but reflect and meditate on its significance”.

Melissa: “Art is the best way to express God’s love towards us human beings. Through art we can show the

beauty of life, emphasizing nature which we destroy. We can realize what we have and what we waste. Art helps us forget materialism, war, hate, violence and reminds us of all the beautiful things we have”.

Reproductions of paintings by artists from Ponce (such as Miguel Pou, Epifanio Irizarry, Miguel Conesa, Wichie Torres) show how they put in practice the principles expressed above. Many are inspired by nature, so rich in its greens, lush in its contrasts, embracing in its warmth in the tropics. Imagination goes beyond contemplation.

The spirit is exhilarated. It surpasses sensations. Somehow, we want to be better. We become fulfilled in plenitude. “A day of beauty is a joy forever.” (Keats – “Endymion”).

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Flamboyán – Miguel Pou



Virgen de la Altagracia - Miguel Pou



Fano Irizarry



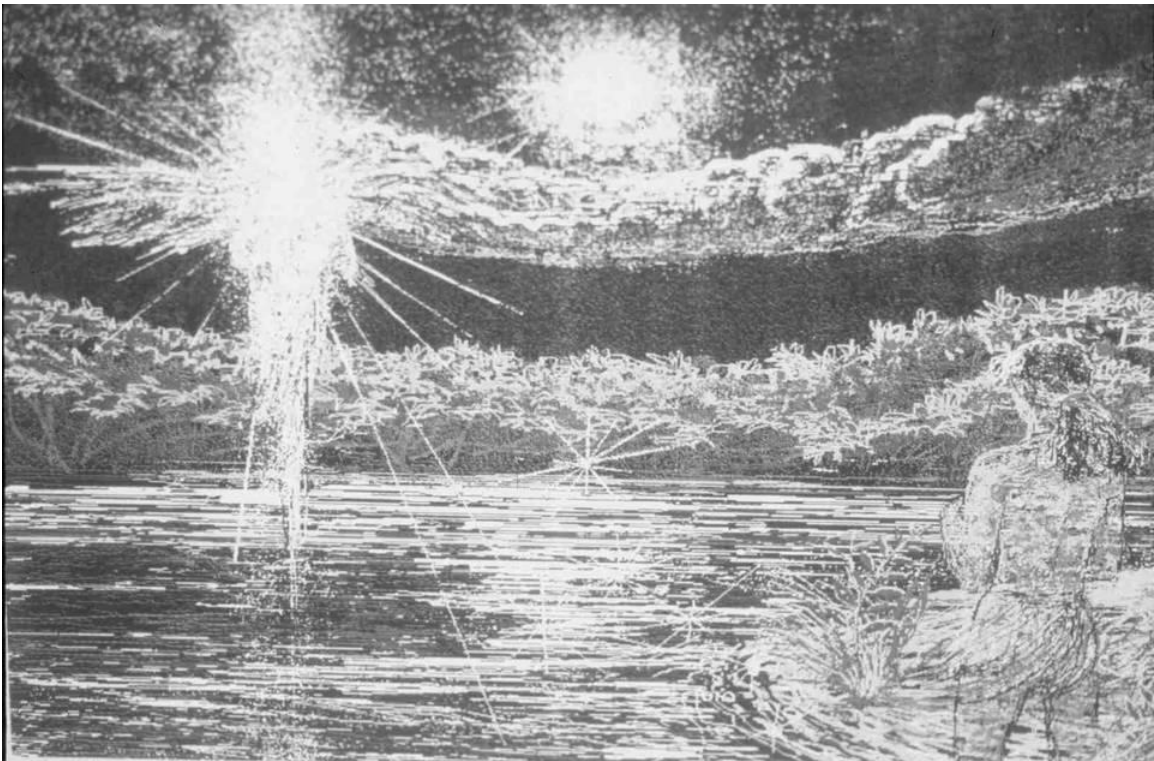
Pobre Gaviota: José Alicea



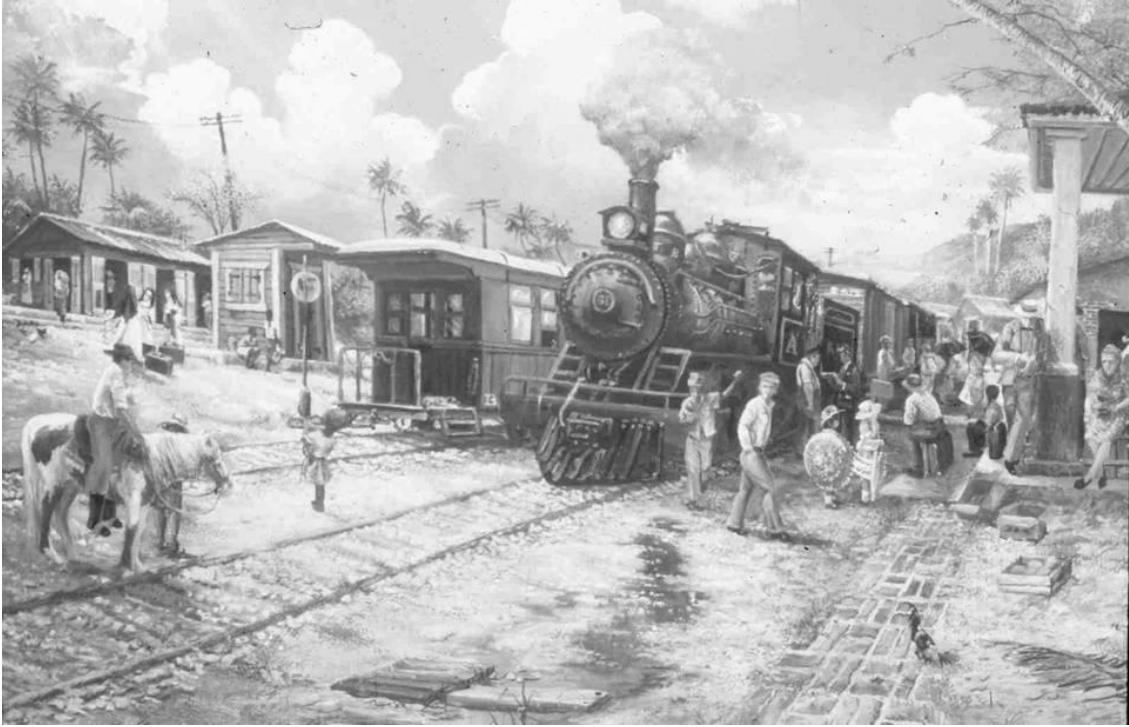
Catedral – Jesús Ortiz



El niño y el Viejo Sabio: Miguel Conesa



Ritual bajo la luna llena – Miguel Conesa



Remembranza – David Medina Feliciano



Río Tibes – Luis Villafuerte



Casida de la promesa - Jorge Morales



Yo soy la paz – Enrique Morales



Crisálida – Carmen Rita Cebollero



Adoración al Santísimo – Flor de Castro Carlo



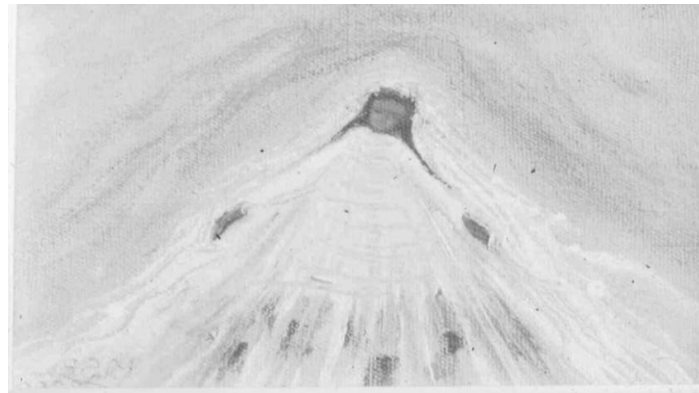
Cristo de los milagros – Ángel Miguel González



Los Reyes de mi Pueblo – Frankie Soldevila



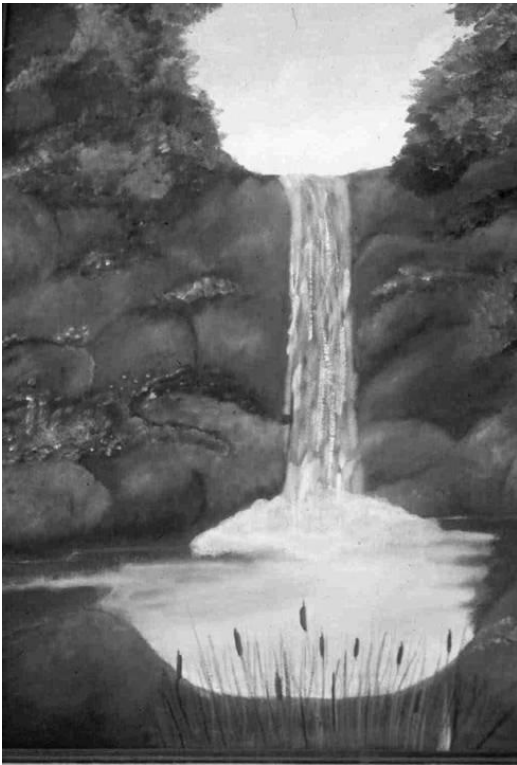
La sombra del Altísimo – Enrique Morales



Madre – Margarita Sastre de Balmaceda



El pájaro de fuego – Margarita Sastre de Balmaceda



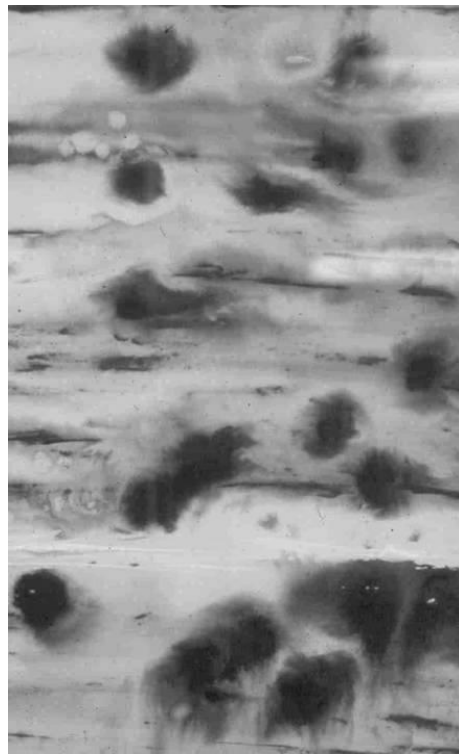
Enid Acevedo Collazo



Caracol – Onix Rivera



En el claro de la luna Alfredo Santiago



Japón – Jackeline Pagán