



EL TIENTO

Introduction

Despite my Parkinson's illness, I was able to make the series of paintings exhibited here. This would not have been possible a few years ago.

I am here now thanks to the effort of individuals devoted to Parkinson's disease research. Day by day, their thriving work brings us hope for a cure in the near future. In the meantime, it is up to us to live in full as much time as we are given.

From my tribune of canvas, color, brushes, spatulas and paper, I would like to raise my voice and say:

The more resources that we give to the institutions working towards the cure of neurological diseases, the more people that will be granted that moment of life needed to make it on time.

Juan Mallol Pibernat
November 21, 2005

THE MAULSTICK

- One, two, one two – he repeated, taking three deep breaths. He had just finished his morning workout. He looked at his wife from the corner of his eye; she was stretching her arms with satisfaction, and like every day, she jumped out of bed, did a little workout too, and disappeared into the bathroom.

The day that had just begun was very important for Mr. Young; it was his birthday.

He showered, rubbed his face and body with his favorite lotion, polished his white beard, and then looked in the mirror. He felt grotesque at the sight of his toothless mouth. With great skill from daily practice, he proceeded to put on his denture, which seemed to be smiling at him with irony...perhaps because today he was turning 85 years old.

Young was not his name, nor was he a "Mister", but that was how his wife and children had nicknamed him twenty years ago, at his return from America. They had thought his American look was more updated than that of the average men of his age in Europe, where they were living.

- Possibly in response to an indiscrete question, someone once said to me: "We elegant men do not follow fashion, we deal with it." I have been able to certify this statement throughout the years. I am not made of flesh and bone; I am an invention of the writer of this story, and I am programmed to remain on Earth beyond my time of decease. As you

know, they call me Mr. Young. I was created as an exact copy of a certain portrait painter, the only difference between us being that while I enjoy good health, his condition worsens day by day due to the effects of Parkinson's disease. I feel sorrow for the painter's condition, as I know well how he feels from my own experience. In 2006, before I was operated, I had to make myself a maulstick in order to control my tremor and be able to paint.

"The sentence giver", that is how my children used to call a sixty-five-year-old man whom I painted about five years ago. Year after year, this man would claim that his friend the painter was in such bad shape that he would not make it to the next. But I go on; today we are in the year 2013 and I am getting ready to attend the inauguration of a retrospective exhibit of my work. It is taking place in a portrait museum that was founded in 2007.

- This white linen shirt is appropriate – my wife advised.

It looked just like the one I was wearing the day after my operation. On that day, I had returned to my studio eager to get to work. I remember I had the sensation of having opened a trunk full of glistening treasures. Everything was ready. The rainbows, dragged by the sun and packed with different color shades projected themselves on the walls playfully, and embracing my white shirt, they welcomed me.

There are twelve kilometers from my studio to the portrait museum. I could get there with my eyes closed, as I used to take this path four times a day while working on the restoration of the building that houses the museum. But this time I was driving slowly, with my eyes wide open, contemplating landscapes whose wondering clouds I had once painted. I remembered how I used to order the sky to leave those clouds "right there!", as a gift to the surrounding trees, mounds and prairies.

I cannot and *must* not forget the times when it seemed that finding a cure for Parkinson's was impossible. I had accepted the fact that my skills would worsen day by day, irreversibly. I began to save my energy and focused on painting. This attitude yielded a positive outcome; to the point that often it felt like the illness was not advancing. But it was, and the tremor of my mouth revealed the reality.

- It's a matter of time - I said to myself, and I started to paint more objectively, seeking the essence of the human expression. Instead of spending time and energy on aesthetic details, the portrayal of true discoveries became an urgent need. I did not wish to live a long time, but to fully live the time granted to me at each given moment.

A person's time is so important that I have the obligation to tell you what I did and what I do with mine. This is the task that my inventor laid upon me.

Since 2005, at the advent of a chain of tragic ecological and biological changes, societies throughout the world began to make better choices of their political leaders.

We walk on a round planet, aware that we will encounter those who come and those who go at some point along the way; knowing that those who run aimlessly on a flat world will eventually fall into the abyss of an erroneous past.

Indeed, the world has changed very much, and Mr. Young has seen many pasts. I am not going to narrate everything that happened during the damned dark age that he had to live through. What was afflicting humankind then was so bizarre that archaeologists of that time began to contemplate the possibility that the human values of Neanderthals were superior to those of our contemporaneous politicians. The times of the Technological Revolution entailed the loss of human values, and archaeologists were in the quest of rescuing them from amongst Neanderthal remains. Indeed, it was not thanks to the discovery of the missing link that their science had taken a leap forward...

It was a depressing view, but despite of the disastrous situation, or perhaps because of it, certain old crimes started to acquire judicial importance, and to be considered as crimes to humankind. Murder was no longer represented just by a knife with blood; paper that had been used to exploit and trample individuals was also considered a deadly weapon.

I, Mr. Young, must tell you about the events that will take place within the next ten years of your time, which I have already lived.

I will begin by telling you that what is today the portrait museum I mentioned earlier used to be a ruined house, at the end of an unpaved road in the top of a hill with a television antenna. Today, that road is an avenue with gardens side and side, from which you can contemplate the best views of the Catalan Costa Brava. The avenue leads to the front yard of a professionally restored eighteenth century mansion. The only guards welcoming the visitors are a series of sculptures made by several great masters. The panoramic view from the site is fascinating; large security windows without bars allow you to see the landscape in its full splendor.

The interior is restored with tiles, carved stones, and oak wood dating to the mansion's times, carefully selected from the demolition debris of similar buildings.

The success of this museum cannot only be explained by its location and the grandiosity of the building. The concept underlying its function has great social and cultural significance.

In the museum, portraits are presented to the public along with the history of their creator, of the model, and of the events that took place around them. Two of the museum's halls are devoted to temporary exhibits of portrait painters of all ages and all times, from around the world. There is an enormous library, digitally linked to all of the art museums of the world. The library offers various services, such as a do-it-yourself print-copying center.

In 2006, it would have been impossible to raise this museum. At that time, artistic and scientific projects were being blocked, or they remained stagnant. Some of them were

grotesquely plagiarized, or replaced by speculative ideas coming from extortionist minds. Nevertheless, things were beginning to change. Without knowing when or how, someone investigated the painter's professional past and present and one good day, he had the opportunity to place the cards on the table; finally, a table that knew well how to assess the content of his painting, understanding all the unfairness he had overcome.

To work and to live in a suitable place was the most urgent thing to a painter that had already restored several ruined houses professionally. Hence, this was the first thing he was granted. He was able to obtain an old house in a beautiful valley, he restored it and since then, he was again living in a suitable place. There, with the help of his maulstick, he controlled his Parkinson's and made several important paintings.

One day, a violin virtuoso appeared at the painter's home. He also suffered from Parkinson's disease. With the help of Mr. Young, the violinist acquired and restored an old mill. Together, they accomplished the task with such skill, that the acoustics in the place generated total silence, modulating the violin's chords as it allowed one to listen to the subtle sound of a stream of water running nearby.

Mr. Young was very optimistic about his future health. He was certain that the cure of Parkinson's was soon to come. Contrarily, the violinist was pessimistic. He faced and accepted the effort of scientists, but argued that it was too late for him.

- We have another irreversible illness – he said, - old age.

The virtuoso also suffered from heart failure, and he carried a pacemaker.

- The portrait of my life is incomplete. Perhaps I only need a moment to finish it, and this moment may come today, tomorrow, unsuspectedly; I need to be alive when it comes! You, - said Mr. Young – violin virtuoso, you are able to pull out strong emotions at every moment. Therefore, you must live, and play, as much as possible.

The day the world trembled, Mr. Young said:

- This could be the beginning of the beginning.

We all remember all the disasters that started to happen then. They caused great ecological and economic changes, together with a subrogation of the ruling politicians. It was during that time that one day my neurosurgeon came to see me and said:

- Mr. Young, I have been given permission to implant stem cells. Do you want to be operated?

I said yes immediately. This was a question I had been waiting to answer since my first Parkinson's diagnosis.

- There are certain risks. – He warned.

- I am willing to take them.

And then I, Mr. Young, saw myself signing papers to authorize the operation. The result could not have been more reassuring. A week later, all the symptoms of the disease had disappeared. The first thing I did was to visit my violinist friend to encourage him about the operation. He said no. he said he had already told his doctor not to insist.

- I am very old, and I suffer from heart failure. Stem cells should be used on younger people.

I could not convince him. But one day, as I was listening to his attempt of pulling out key notes from the violin, I turned on my sound system and played “El Cant dels Ocells”, a song that he had recorded for me back when his hands were well coordinated. I walked towards his house with the sound of this music in the air.

I found him seating on the stairwell, holding the violin on his lap, his hands hiding his weep.

- I want to die. I am useless.

- Nonsense! I need you alive! I want you to sit for me tomorrow. I will be waiting in my studio at 5 p.m. – I said.

I had never painted a portrait with so many moments of full inspiration. It was finished after three sit-ins. It is oil on canvas, one meter ten by eighty centimeters.

- You may see it – I said to the model as I removed the protecting cloth from the painting. The violinist advanced three steps until he was in front of it. He leaned his head down. He started to raise his eyes and when his look was face to face with his painted self, he turned to look at me, he embraced me and said:

- I want to live! I want to play the violin! ...even if I am to die tomorrow.

It was sunset. My neurosurgeon and I were sitting in the balcony, contemplating the sun, which was blushing and hiding behind a forested hill, as if it had been naughty during the day. The bells from a nearby church were ringing every quarter and every hour, until dawn. Suddenly, the prolonged musical prayer of a string instrument called all ears to attention.

- Quiet! Listen to this, - Said Mr. Young.

Everything was silent. The only ones to defy the order were the violinist’s fingers, which started to slide through the strings obeying to the impulse of the depths of his soul. The hands of the virtuoso no longer trembled; they vibrated.

Then, I noticed the goose bumps on my neurosurgeon's arms and said, with a trembling voice:

- This is not a recording.

- No, it isn't. Remember, I told you I discharged him yesterday...

Every light from every window had lit, and silently, everyone joined our wives, children, and friends, who were sitting on the lawn listening with astonishment.

- Bravo! Bravo! – cried a steady voice.

- Bravo! Bravo! – Everyone repeated along.

Then, in the midst of the applause, I remembered the day in which the virtuoso had said to me, weeping:

- I want to live. I want to live even if I am to die tomorrow. I want to die playing the violin.