

Research Article

Semiotic Readings, *Postales De Orán* of Oran by Joel Jover and *La Peste* of Albertle Camus

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Abstract

The present investigation develops an unprecedented way a semiotic perspective study of the series *Postales de Orán* the Cuban Visual Artist Joel Jover. This series means the first point of aesthetic turn within the whole of its previous work. The repercussion of it has exceeded national borders. Carried out in the context of a socially and economically convulsed period of the country and therefore of the author. After the fall of the socialist field in Eastern Europe in 1989, the social and political economic repercussions in the Cuban people began to feel in the nineties, it was defined as a special period. The context of realization will ponder the relevance of the series among other indices such as the references manifest to the hypotext the novel *La peste* of Albert Camus. The author of the present investigation conducted the master's thesis in Latin American culture intitulated, *Estudio semiótico de la serie Postales de Orán de Joel Jover*. From this antecedent it is necessary as a general objective: to conduct a study by the series Postcards of Oran from a semiotic perspective for an interdiscursive, intratextual and intratextual knowledge of the imaginary universe. *The methodology* used is the text analysis. The work as text expands until it encompasses the vastness of its interrelationships with other texts, in the particular case of the study object predominates the text of Camus, *La peste*. The creation and interpretation are impelled and at the same time enriched by the universe of the discourse established by the previous texts of the author and who interprets (co-creator). Other specific intertexts have been selected in addition to the novel, such as the signs of Greco-Roman, Jewish, Russian, a holistic textual universe to enrich the analytical interpretation of the series. So that the theory of complex systems is also an analysis platform when reading the series as a textual system. In this sense, each pictorial work is seen as the manifestation of underlying processes. Likewise, it is emphasized in the analysis of the NO series as a static system closed abroad, always containing the same components, on the contrary, as an open system in a stable state (quasi) in which matter continuously enters from, and leaves towards the external environment.

Keywords

Intertextuality, Metatext, Targeting, Hypothext, Intrapertuality

1. Introduction

The aesthetic turns within artistic discourses have been of special interest to researchers and critics of the arts. In Europe, the significance of the aesthetic break with the 19th

century by the expressive languages of the artistic avant-gardes gave rise to evaluative approaches that developed from the first half of the 20th century.

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In Cuba, the aesthetic irreverence with the aesthetic postulates of the Academy, in addition to a formal and conceptual estrangement, gave rise to critical evaluations and reflections that appeared in the publication of a large part of these texts in the *Revista de Avance*, which, together with its innovative illustrations, legitimized the new artistic work. The protagonists of this publication sponsored the New Art Exhibition in 1927, where eighty-two works were exhibited, which defined the break with 19th century art. [4]. The artists who showed their creations at that time have been considered by some researchers as the first promotion or generation of the Cuban avant-garde.

So we can say that from the second decade of the 20th century onwards the break with the Academy began, the new art in Cuba began. I would not like to limit this movement to a generation but rather as the first avant-garde aesthetic movement.

The new aesthetic vibrations that were convened at the Centro de Dependientes in 1937, sponsored by the Department of Culture of the City Hall of Havana as an Exhibition of Modern Art, were a reason for the approach of scholars of the visual arts who considered this movement as the second promotion or generation or new artistic avant-garde in Cuba. These assessments have become widespread in studies on Cuban art, although we consider that this group of artists who exhibited their art on this occasion did not show frank ruptures or aesthetic turns in relation to what happened in the second decade of the 20th century, but rather a consolidation or maturation of the avant-garde budgets in line with the European avant-gardes, is the criterion that we maintain.

It was certainly in the fifties when another aesthetic change took place, painters and sculptors became involved in the internationalization of North American informalism and European abstractionism. It was precisely in 1953 that this new aesthetic was introduced at the Galería Nuestro Tiempo under the name Los Once, so that, as expected, this break with figuration gave rise to criteria, studies, as well as evaluations on the subject, sometimes with a large dose of impressionism.

The art critics Luz Merino Acosta [1] and Pedro de Oraá [2] agree on the dates of the beginning of the movement from the exhibition in the month of February from the 16th to the 26th, at the Sociedad de Nuestro Tiempo. In this context, the intellectual Juan Marinello considered that this non-figurative or abstractionist current was a "...plastic expression of superficial elements." And later pointed out "...that the greatest antidote against abstractionism is an art of profound national character." [13]. Certainly this assessment lacked a contextualized vision from the arts at an international level, which would allow him to distinguish that Cuba was inserted in an almost generalized behavior of the Western world: Europe, the United States, Latin America. Although we also think that Marinello's criteria were related to the official artistic strategy of the Eastern European countries, socialist realism, which excluded the Russian avant-

gardes of the beginning of the century, despite being the initiators of this cultural policy proposal.

It is essential to highlight that new aesthetic behaviors were evident after the revolutionary triumph (1959) and in the following decade. These years were characterized above all by stylistic convergences, even the leadership of the Revolution in a situation of conflict, put into consideration what the art that would represent the people should be like, that would respond to the new cultural political demands. The leader of the Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, on June 30, 1961, pronounced the Words to the intellectuals in accordance with these concerns about what were the valid aesthetics in this period. Where he expressed his criteria regarding the creative work of artists and intellectuals: *"I think it is quite clear: What are the rights of revolutionary or non-revolutionary writers and artists? Within the Revolution: everything, against the Revolution no rights."* [14].

This concern about the new aesthetics that would represent the art and creation of the Revolution was constant in these years, so that four years later Ernesto "Che" Guevara also referred to the then burning issue of freedom of creation and the aesthetics of the period: "We must not create salaried workers docile to official thought or scholarship holders who live under the protection of the budget, exercising a freedom in quotation marks.

Later, Che polemizes with great realism, contextualizing with the behaviors of the art world, to then suggest the paths of the art created in the Revolution, criticizing the aesthetics imposed precisely in those countries that had created similar revolutionary processes, he expressed: *"Capitalism in culture has given everything of itself and nothing remains of it but the announcement of a smelly corpse, in art, its decadence today. But why try to find in the frozen forms of socialist realism: the only valid facet?"* [13].

Thus, it is a concern at the State level about the existence of an aesthetic that would identify what was happening that was new and that should be achieved through the visual arts, among other artistic manifestations. A context of searches, encounters, disagreements, tensions, agreements and disagreements intensified in the 70s was evident, materialized in the National Congress of Education and Culture held in 1971, where the conclusions constituted the core of the core ideas in which the aesthetics of revolutionary art should be directed:

"Art is a weapon of the Revolution...our art and literature will be a valuable means for the formation of youth within revolutionary morality...We reject the pretensions of the mafia of pseudo-leftist bourgeois intellectuals to become the critical conscience of society." [13].

This melting pot of exacerbations and conflicts regarding the aesthetics of the revolution was stigmatized by some as a grey five-year period, and by others as lasting longer, fifteen years [20]. We are inclined to the second criterion. Together with the training of artists in the visual arts at the Instituto Superior de Arte created in 1976, it led to a rupture, an aes-

thetic turn, violent changes in relation to what had been done before in Cuba.

The resonances at international levels are unprecedented, considered as the new Cuban art, the renaissance of Cuban art, where artists, critics, dealers, national and international patrons, fundamentally, formed the boom of the visual arts of the eighties. There have been and are many art critics who have dealt with this phenomenon, Gerardo Mosquera was the one who, from a conceptual point of view, structured the paradigms of this decade, from his critiques, curatorships, discoveries of new artists, trends, styles, validating them from specialized criticism. On the other hand, critics from other countries also formed part of the framework of the new Cuban art. Among them, the Uruguayan professor and artist Luis Camnitzer stood out, who spread the new Cuban art of the eighties across the seas, which was inserted into the international market.

In this context, Mosquera discovered the work of Joel Jover by chance at the Casa de Cultura in Nuevitas, in 1980, although the artist's beginnings were in the previous decade. These criteria served to validate his work from the critics at a local and national level, placing him on a step from which his work began to be somewhat distinguished. The author highlights the aesthetic principles that have characterized his work:

"Jover [sic] manifests a deep-rooted rejection of making a licked-up, saccharine, complacent or superficially pleasant painting. His paintings are not "pretty" because he, like Quevedo or Rubelais, loves humanity too seriously to not dare to criticize it or to illuminate its less attractive strata.

[...]

Jover's painting is guided by the guidelines of Jean Dubuffet, one of the most original artists of our century... If we investigate more confluences, we will see the Chilean Raúl Sotelo, Picasso and even Leonel López-Nussa. [17]."

Mosquera did not really make a detailed study of the theme or themes of the exhibition that motivated him so much; nor did he make any reference to the techniques used by the artist, the dimensions of the works, the year of their execution, the titles, that is to say, he made a reference to the artist from general aspects that identifies him with the great masters of the visual arts at an international and national level. However, we are completely unaware of what Joel Jover exhibited at the Casa de Cultura in Nuevitas at the time he discovered his works.

Another of the researchers who, since the nineties, has fundamentally developed a more constant critical work regarding the work of Joel Jover has been the doctor in Sciences on Arts, Roberto Méndez Martínez, his works appear published in cultural magazines, catalogues, interviews, conferences. In the book: *Los cuerpos del siglo*, he gathered the majority of the criteria that until then he had wielded regarding the work of Jover; There he explained the stylistic characteristics of his works, affiliations with certain move-

ments or schools, influences, the language of his symbols, techniques, themes:

"Closer to the German expressionists, Dubuffet or Antonia Eiriz than to the Cuban colour tradition [...]

The nineties began with various attempts: ...in 1993 he became an alchemist and distilled coloured waxes in his studio to reinvent the encaustic technique... [15]."

In this text, Méndez Martínez made a critical overview of Joel Jover's main works from the eighties to 2000. [16] There are other authors who have approached Joel Jover's artistic career, such as MSc. Emilia Sánchez published in catalogues and articles. One of the most recently published works addresses the artistic meanings of her work from the 1980s to 2003:

"It is obligatory to remember how a marked expressionist accent opened in Cuadros Humanos [1988] (based on homonymous poems by César Vallejo)... how there were stages recreating Greco-Latin culture, but also emphasizing its mutilating character (El gran simulador and Historia Antigua); how the literary work La Peste by Albert Camus served as a pretext to fill large canvases with walls and labyrinths,... (Postcards from Oran); how religious symbols of Christianity or Buddhism were converted into plastic motifs (Entre dos mundos) as well as the details of everyday life in foreign realities (Golden Slumber). [20]."

The author made a very general assessment of Jover's works based on the artist's criteria on the main works of each stage. The work lacks a formal technical assessment of them, it was not proposed as an objective of its work, but rather it outlined its criteria for the exhibitions mentioned.

Another of the published texts is *Biobibliografía de Joel Jover*, by Norma Nápoles and Belkis Gómez, which has the merit of being the first work that was projected to compile the data referring to the life and work of the artist from its beginnings, from the multiple perspective of his artistic personality, its notes are not critical but rather locate most of the sources of the artist's career: *"[...] The 456 citations that make up the biobibliography allow the reader to take a tour of his most significant works, from his first drawings made in 1970 to his most recent work. [18]."*

This bibliographical tour confirms the need for a study of Joel Jover's works from his beginnings. However, the 1970s constitute a gap in the knowledge of his works, as there are irreversible losses, many of them were lost in cultural centers, warehouses, precisely because of the lack of knowledge of their value in that context.

Also significant is the absence of contextualized studies of his career, both in the local and national context. As well as the need to approach them from a semiotic perspective. The intellectual and polyglot Desiderio Navarro emphasizes that *"...unfortunately, the current semiotic theory of art does not sufficiently deal with postmodern artistic practice. [19]."*

The study of the series Postcards from Oran is theoretically and methodologically justified from a semiotic perspec-

tive. It is the first aesthetic turning point of the entire previous work of Joel Jover. Made in the context of a socially and economically turbulent period of the country and therefore of the author. After the fall of the socialist camp in Eastern Europe in 1989, the social and political economic repercussions on the Cuban people began to be felt in the nineties, President Fidel Castro Ruz defined it as a Special Period. The intellectual Fernando Martínez Heredia collects the following ideas in his analysis:

"The sudden, scandalous and dishonorable fall of European socialism, with the consequent discredit for socialist ideas and experiences throughout the world, has also had very harmful consequences for Cuba. [...]"

A complex of legal and illegal activities – linked to the dollarized sphere – weaken the role of state distribution of products and services, feed the black market, deteriorate the purchasing power of the Cuban peso and therefore, the material and moral meaning of the income obtained in that currency, and erode to some extent the confidence in the socialist economy. [14]."

From this uncertain context, Jover transformed his creative universe like never before. Artists from other parts of the world considered that due to the formal and technical characteristics, they were works "... conceived under the rigors of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts" [8] of course they were unaware of the self-taught training of the creator. On the other hand, the researcher Roberto Méndez Martínez distinguished the relevance of this series by highlighting that critics and onlookers were surprised by the formal exquisiteness of those works that seemed to deny the creator's previous assumptions: drawing of implacable rigor, clear colors, strict concern for the finish. [15].

In addition, the plastic artist Raúl Martínez, acting as artistic director of the Editorial Pinos Nuevos, in 1993, chose one of the works of this series, for its subject matter, conceptual level, as well as its formal achievements, to illustrate one of the hundred titles of this collection that was published thanks to the sponsorship of a group of Argentines. In this regard, Dr. Adelaida de Juan pointed out:

"... paintings have been used sometimes, although they are of aesthetic and expressive value in themselves, they do not fully fulfill the function of being an illustration for the cover... Works by artists known as painters and engravers are included: Joel Jover [sic], from whom a painting was taken from his notable 1993 exhibition, Postcards from Oran... [20]".

There is certainly a recognition from critics of the series as a whole for its technical, conceptual, and referential impact, among other aspects of great interest.

2. The Artist and the 70s

Joel Jover Llenderrosos, revelation and challenge in the development of the plastic arts in Cuba. His vocation had no precedents in his family until now known. In childhood he

did not develop the habit of making strokes that would distinguish him from his contemporaries and make his future aptitude suspect. He accidentally took elementary studies to become an art instructor. The artist said:

I never thought of being a painter. I wanted to be a nuclear chemist, I wasn't sure if this profession existed, but it was what I wanted to be. I made medicines, buried them to see the reactions, I also made rocket fuel, I liked to experiment. The painter thing was pure chance, an accident. One of my friends, Manuel Reyes, and I opted for two scholarships, the first: the provincial art school, because my friend certainly knew how to paint, he had drawn all the ships that entered the port and the other scholarship was for the "Andrés González Lines" school that trained captains of fishing boats or merchant ships, I don't remember well. The truth is that the art school came first and we both went there. I think I was lucky because as a merchant marine I would have given less than what I have given as a painter.

My first teachers were Juan Jiménez, Raúl Santos Serpa, Juan Vázquez Marín and Gabriel Gutiérrez Vázquez. My fellow students were Osvaldo Rodríguez Petit, Oscar Rodríguez Lasseria, Carlos Wambrug and others that I don't remember now. [8].

His artistic language began to take shape in his adolescence, and is now validated by a unique aesthetic, unruly messages and a prolific body of work. His style attracts followers, admirers and critics.

His initial steps were the genesis of a pictorial-symbolic language, which took place from 1971 to the early 1980s. They meant searching for and finding expressive paths, and he formed a pictorial corpus that, from a morphological perspective, was characterized by the use of deformed drawing, porous textures and superimposed planes. He achieved inter-discursive relationships with texts indebted to universal literature, Greco-Roman mythology and with traditional popular culture present in the fields of Cuba, manipulating them creatively. He was also characterized by dual composition, the monochromatic harmony of greys and ochres that related him to the first German neo-expressionists.

2.1. The 1980s

From 1984 onwards he incorporated new signs into his artistic language that differed from the local pictorial context, validating him as an artist of national and international stature. In the works of this period there are masks in profile with protruding tongues in the form of rays, sometimes two-faced, accentuating metaphorical expressions of duplicity and hypocrisy. The characters coexist between life and death, their bodies are fragmented and deformed, submerged in full agony, also externalizing twisted intimate behaviors. They are characterized by a chromatism of complementary colors: oranges, violets lacking oxygen and degraded greens.

From 1989 onwards he consciously flowed into an ideoaesthetic self-evaluation of his own work and in this direc-

tion he selected those that due to their morphological and conceptual characteristics would move to other exhibition selections such as *El acoso* (1986) and *El hogar* (1988). The narratives of loneliness, cornering, anguish and psychosocial shocks allowed him to do so. The maximum expression of this symbolic language was concentrated in the series *Postales de Oran* (1993) which, at the same time, meant an aesthetic break in relation to the set of previous pictorial texts.

Breaks are not easily detected, they are usually preceded by a period of time in which old and new elements coexist in tension. The process of gestation of new formal elements is transcendental, internal collisions undermine the old tendency without completely giving way and in its depths the new patterns of artistic language are formed.

2.2. Tensions 1992

The tensions between the signs in expiration with the new ones intensified in the works made from 1989 to 1992. The perspective code bursts forth, the precise drawing and the oil technique is systematized. His technical mastery walks in authority, paradox, clash of cultures, fragmentation, playfulness, intertextuality to the fullest and conceptual complexity formed the pictorial corpus of these years. Jover's solo creative life conditioned, in my opinion, the presence of the pictorial and figurative signs referred to above.

The height of tension is expressed in the cyclopean work *Organigrama del poder* (Organisational Chart of Power), made up of eleven works for a total of 650 x 400 cm, oil on canvas that brings to mind the pictorial heritage bequeathed by the early Flemish of the 14th and 15th centuries. The narrative underlines the universal iconography from the Genesis of the Bible to the present day, and shows off that second postmodernity. The visual journey can be developed from left to right and from top to bottom. It is started by the male Maintainer of the species, whose reference is Adam, the first human being created; on the right at the other end is the maintainer of the female species, Eve, recognized by the attribute of the snake, a symbol of deceit and cunning, but at the same time defeated by the woman's heel. With this pictorial text, Joel Jover reached the peak of his transition process, where he masterfully mixed formal, figurative, pictorial and symbolic elements from previous years and those that would later take precedence in Postcards from Oran.

He organized the composition in the manner of a Greek cross, so that a gallery of icons that the artist had already used in other works appear in a staggered fashion, which in this context take on a different meaning. The great simulator appears as the only power, despite the two-faced nature, David and Moses with sunglasses, with a quasi-pop conceptual treatment. The presence of the spiritual gifts: Faith, Hope and Charity alludes, as is known, to the Christian faith, the popular religiosity that in these years took on an important role in the life of Cubans together with other religions of other origin precisely because of social conditions.

The repetition of the Latin writing *Rara Avis* subverts its meaning; this appellation may well be intended for the simulator as well as for the gifts. The walls stripped bare for support predominate from the second level onwards, as well as the two-faced masks and the puppets. This time, knives were introduced stuck in the back of one of the characters, which accentuates the dual discourse of violence/harmony. The chromaticism is based on dark and cold colours.

The greatest philosophical charge is on the third level, with an increase in Latin phrases, among other intertexts. The artist reinterprets Augustus haranguing his troops, with his emperor attire from the 1st century Roman, placing him on the threshold of a Greco-Roman temple, which at the same time has at its centre the all-seeing EYE of Freemasonry transculturalised in popular religions. The text status *malus* alludes to the state of things, which by association of images alludes to the sociopolitical context of that nation under the referenced emperor.

The last text: *vera salus*: true salvation, the artist draws the gaze to the central pyre where pieces of bodies are gathered, inscriptions with colors, which he proposes to the observer to finish according to the author's instructions. Everything tricks at a faster pace, the priests blaspheme in the middle of the ignition, the use of sequins, as excoriations, new textures, replacing the curses, provide greater visual tension to the pictorial text. Thus the author combined several cultural texts: Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, dead languages such as Latin, as well as the codes of pictorial language in the manner of Jover used in the development of his pictorial career.

As a result of the content analysis of each work and the in-depth interview with the artist for several years, the semiotic analysis became three levels of readings and the enriched interpretation of the same.

3. Semiotic Analysis of the Postcards from Oran Series

3.1. First Level of Reading

3.1.1. Contexts

The late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by the fall of the European socialist bloc and the Berlin Wall. Economic relations with Eastern Europe collapsed, the country collided with complex and adverse circumstances. The island was isolated. Its economic capacity was weakened to the point of suffocation. Spiritual frustrations emerged. The utopia forged so many years was slipping away. Daily life howled.

The country opened up to foreign capital investment as a crucial challenge for Cuban socialism. A new strategy was initiated that did not seek a return, but rather to assume new realities. On a national scale, the visual arts delved into issues that were occasionally dealt with in other eras, such as

feminine discourse, the gay world and subtle racial tensions, which erupted with recurrences on a larger scale in the canvases and other supports of the artists; as well as popular religions, insularity and migrations. For the art critic Rufo Caballero, in:

"[...] the nineties, there is a consensus that they start from Las metáforas del Templo, 1993, approximately when a creative sensibility that begins to be very different crystallizes, Lupe calls it "educated metaphor" I have spoken of topological density, there are those who speak of "return to the craft" [...] in one way or another there has been talk of a change of vectors in the visual arts of the nineties with its zenith in the year 1995 and the first Salón de Arte Contemporáneo. [2]"

Certainly, what is specific about pictorial reality is relational connective tissue with the social structure.

3.1.2. Paratexts

This is a text separated from the main text and, in addition to the latter, it explains in a few words what the author's intention is. From this line of analysis, the title often indicates a signal and Jover refers to Albert Camus' novel *The Plague*. Oran, a city in Algeria, located in the north of Africa. It thus immerses us in a state of estrangement.

They are postcards far from the city in question. So the title together with the images confront the public. However, they are spiritual mirrors of an immediate reality. There is a level of probing beyond the elementary. It proposes an energetic exercise of thought. Resources that incite cyclical interpretive readings.

Joel Jover, an avid reader of Camus' works, was inspired by the symbolic connections of *The Plague*, the national context and his self. Postcards from Oran in relation to the novel is not a translation or pictorial adaptation of the literary text. The narrative text behaved as an echo of metaphors, seductions and thoughts.

In this sense, the words to the catalogue, as a prologue, also help to reveal the intention of the exhibition. Made by the researcher Roberto Méndez Martínez, as an entrance, a preparation, for the spectator of the exhibition. From the beginning, it shows how to enter the labyrinth, abandoning all hope, reasoning, conventional logic. The words to the catalog itself is an intertextually conceived text. It makes reference to texts about labyrinths from ancient and modern times by different authors who discuss the same theme, such as: Dante Alighieri, Albert Camus, Jorge Luis Borges, José Lezama Lima, so that it textually reinterpreted the visual labyrinth. It also made reference to the split that Joel Jover made with his previous work with this series. [10].

On the other hand, the design of the catalog made by the artist Ileana Sánchez Hing, responded to the intricacy of the closing environment, signs, numbers, formulas, notes, flaps, that is, its accessory function to the series was intelligently consummated.

3.1.3. It Is the Hypotext

That takes hold of the text and transforms it according to a certain formal coercion or a certain semantic intention. [6]. In his pictorial texts, the artist manipulated the literary text sometimes by omission and other times by addition.

For an interdiscursive reading, it is necessary to address fragments of the novel that have the capacity to creatively suggest images present in the series. The omissions with respect to the literary text are voluntary because it was not the artist's interest to illustrate the theme or the plot of the novel, which is limited to a city in isolation due to the bubonic plague in the context of the Second World War.

Albert Camus in the novel *La Peste* from the beginning showed guides about time, space, main events, as well as the exclusive character of what is narrated. I have offered detailed descriptions of the quarantined city with quasi-iconographic images. The chronicler collected a whole universe of facts, actions and images from the closing of the city: *"«They are afraid». The report contained: Declare a state of plague. Close the city. [3]"*. Captured atmosphere. Revealed pictorial indices.

In the novel there is an iconographic profile of lack of communication with the outside:

But once the doors were closed, they realized that they were, and the narrator too, caught in the same net and that they had to manage... such an individual feeling... from the first weeks, mixed with fear... of an entire people during that long exile. [3]"

Recreated in the series with great mastery and imagination. These codes of incommunication present in the novel are diverse, from a sterile and obstinate monologue to this arid conversation with a wall... between the blue, ochre and violet walls of the Moorish houses... essential mechanisms of the narrator to transmit to the reader sensations of confinement, heaviness, heightened by the psychological effects of analogous colors. Literary suggestion that subtly penetrated the series.

Ochre, violet, blue, red, black, dark vaults; these were the colors that took center stage in the work, along with the atmosphere of uncertainty, humidity, darkness, deceptive lights that are breathed in the novel, are then related to the intuition of what Iuri M. Lotman would call creative memory, which plays an important role in artistic creation, and it is that the texts of the past illuminate and help create the new ones: the new texts are created not only in the present cut of culture, but also in its past. [11]" Joel Jover validated the sense of current events of the narrative text.

A work of universal renown, conceptually complex, a dry, austere narrative stands out, with few dialogues, of a humanly agonizing essence. A heartbreaking song to brotherhood, the courage to fight, acceptance of responsibility at any cost, human values exalted in this novel. His characters move from personal pain to collective anguish and the right to happiness that the author reveals through his characters sparkles.

La Peste, a universal symbol of human plagues, served as a hypotext for other artistic codes: for cinema, in the same historical context of Postales de Orán, this time in Argentina, the film director Luis Puenzo made a co-production with France, England and Argentina, just in 1992 with the same name, homonymous. In Cuba it was exhibited in 1993 within the framework of the XV Festival of New Latin American Cinema.

3.2. Second Level of Reading

The creative process from a semiotic perspective has the importance of distinguishing artists individually, because each step responds to their potential as creators, their mastery, their way of doing things, the wisdom regarding the selection of materials and their aesthetic attitude towards them. It reveals the practical experience, the solutions to carry out the creative activity, the cognitive world, as well as collaborators. This is the process, a rational modeling of images, chromaticism, concepts, in their way of foundation and in total organicity with the inner world of the artist.

At the end of 1992, Jover was chosen among some Cuban artists to exhibit in New York, United States, a common practice in those years. A curator provided some materials for the realization of the same, with the purpose of being exhibited in that country:

"...a proposal came for Cuban artists to exhibit in New York, with a scholarship to paint, then exhibit. The curator visited several provinces. Postales de Orán arose for this purpose, a project that aborted and the works remained. [9]"



Figure 1. Cuban visual artist Joel Jover.

Ileana Sánchez Hing, his wife and mother Nélida Hing, sewed the fabrics that served as supports for the works that were made in their previous home on San Ramón Street. [9].

The original idea manifest in the *sketching process* is the hidden DNA of the processes. No one takes a snapshot with the fetus, but with the baby and successive stages. However,

the sketches reveal the dynamic intention that the pictorial text delivers at the end. Currently, the sketches are not available in their original form; they are shown through a video made by Gustavo Pérez, recently finished with the series.

The sketch stuck to the wall, the artist's *habitus*, is conceived from psychological studies of the human figure, mathematical calculations, strokes of light and shadow. The presence of the human being was initially conceived in a self-portrait. That is, in the primary conception of the idea, man was inserted into the figurative corpus. Then, he dispenses with it, and this absence of the human being reinforces the active participation of the observer who moves into the pictorial space.

The artist chose the canvases before other supports such as cardboard and plywood with which he had worked previously. This behavior had already been prioritized in his transition stage, for the artist durability and museum properties began to be elements to consider in his then present and near future. As an important turning point in terms of the treatment of the support, he prepared his eighteen canvases himself, with the base for oil, with carpenter rabbit glue and white from Spain, several coats. The wooden frames, on which the canvases were tightly stretched.

The artist selected as the appropriate pigment only oil, of Bulgarian and Russian nationality, without mixing, that is to say, applied with skill directly from the tube. He prioritized spatulas over brushes. In effect, he turned to the most conventional in terms of pictorial techniques and at the same time achieved a novel graphology in relation to his previous work.

The eighteen canvases that make up the series have the same dimensions 131 x 157 cm. These works began to take shape in October 1992, he worked hard until April 1993, then exhibited in the months of September and October of that same year at the Center for Visual Arts.

3.3. Third Level of Reading

3.3.1. Intratextual Analysis

The pictorial signs taken into account for the analysis are the following: chromatism, lines, textures, perspectives, environments, light, contrasts, isotopies, composition. This analysis does not respond to a strict numerical order in prior consultation with the artist Joel Jover. It is developed from virtual paradigmatic series noted by the associations of figurative, symbolic or other elements, from the perspective of the semiotician Louis Marin. [12].

The associative virtual paradigmatic series with the figurative sign: the staircase and the associative virtual paradigmatic series with universal plastic icon symbols stand out:

3.3.2. Associative Virtual Paradigmatic Series with the Figurative Sign: The Staircase Figure 2

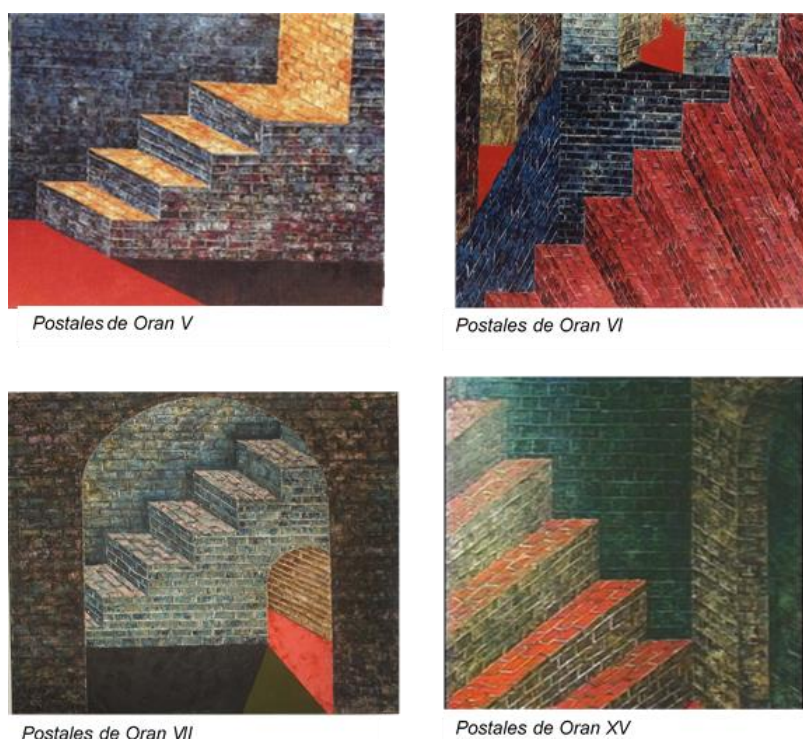


Figure 2. Associative virtual paradigmatic series with the figurative sign: the staircase. *Postales de Orán V, VI, VII y XV.*

The staircase is a visual rhyme of movement, transcendent force, will to power. In Orán V, it points to a spiritual rest, devotional, reflection; in contrast to Orán VI, in a downward movement that highlights various levels of the journey towards a dark and corner underground space. Emotional states that move from psychic, moral rest to a downward movement, perhaps towards the underworld. Culturally, it notes endogenous practices, ancestor cults that until then had withered now awaken in knowledge once practiced. In this sense, when the levels are crossed towards the basement, there is an exploration towards the depths of the instinctive. From a connotative perspective, the staircase is seen as the axis of the world, a sign of verticality and of a spiral. The triple principle: what is above is like what is below; what is below is like what is above and what is inside is also outside. Symbolic uniqueness, analogy between the outside world and the inside, reference to a unique origin or nourishing source of both worlds. Orán XV reinforces a progression towards knowledge of the apparent or divine world, when it rises towards the sky.

Although the red colour in Orán V contains the staircase in dry form, in Orán VII the red colour under the staircase draws the eye and dynamises the text. The vision is captured by red, an allegory of process and vitality, but also of agony, associated by approximation and treatment of the texture to green, which symbolically alludes to vegetation and lividity. Green acts as a bridge between black (mineral being) and red. That is, life agonizes and withers due to the impossibil-

ity of moving to a higher state of existence, which it tries to reach.

Porous textures occupy almost the entire pictorial space. Psychologically linked to the sensation of humidity and old age, he related them to cold tones. Smooth textures are linked to isomorphic figurations, they are triangles that compress the space, precipitating the gaze towards the tunnel, a vanishing point that linear perspective stimulates. The author used the retinal technique of *trompe-l'oeil* and created an illusory space placing the observer right in the lower zone, the tunnel, testimony of contemporary social conditions.

The presence of figurative elements linked by contiguity of analogous meanings: staircase, tunnel, semicircular, threshold. They have a common connotation of passage, entrance and transition. Necessary?

The presence of these figurative signs evokes their opposite or complementary:

They are included within a system of opposition, of unity of opposites, understood as a special form of community that neutralizes their contrasting character.

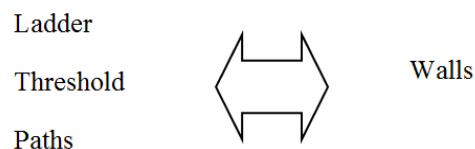
The system of opposition is by antonym:

The meaning of binary community was activated: the paths and the walls. Both statuses belong to the same system of communication and of the spiritual being. Stopping on the path is also a state of movement, as meditation and search for possible solutions. **Figure 3.**

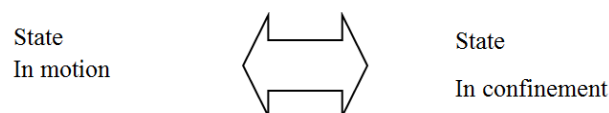
The visual rhyme of bricks and the metaphorical transgres-

sion with the staircase psychologically related dual worlds although visually it does not lead to the exterior, its transgression was at a connotative and intuitive level. The figure of the staircase allows an opening of the pictorial system and a double orientation of the paradigmatic senses. [Figure 3](#).

The effect of meaning of this virtual paradigmatic series from the figurative element of the staircase suggests an integrated elevation of the whole being. It is the staircase as the axis of the world, of verticality, and of the spiral, the triple principle returns: what is above is like what is below; what is below is like what is outside and what is inside is also outside. Symbolic uniqueness analogy between the outside world and the inside, the origin or nourishing source of both worlds is the same. [Figure 4](#).

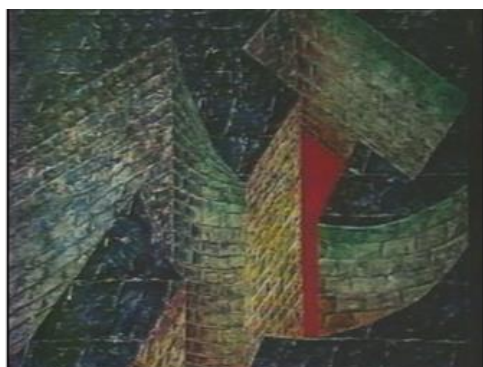


[Figure 3](#). System of opposition by antonym (a).



[Figure 4](#). System of opposition by antonym (b).

3.3.3. Virtual Paradigmatic Series Associative to Plastic Icon Symbols: Postales de Oran XII, XIII and XIV



Postales de Oran XII



Postales de Oran XIII



Postales de Oran XIV

[Figure 5](#). Virtual paradigmatic series associative to plastic icon symbols: Postales de Oran XII, XIII and XIV.

Postcard from Oran XII is the iconic sign of the hammer and sickle, insignia of the October Socialist Revolution that became a symbol of real socialism. It is decontextualized from its emblematic surroundings and the figuration is conceived from walls. This makes it take on new meanings, it points to a before, without reference to an after. It alludes to a state of impasse. Connoted with peeling walls that infer crises, from the personal, family, national, metaphorical

pictorial context. The cold colours subdue, only the presence of a beam of dark red, in hypovolemic shock, reinforces the real state of decay of these postulates. The blues, violets, mixed with the red colour, give the sensation of being deprived of oxygen, almost dying, it is the border between life and death. The dynamism of this work is marked by the angles, the planes, the diagonal, vertical and curved lines, as well as the projection of the figure from bottom to top.

The allegorical presence of the stripped walls in the entire work, including the icon, alludes to a before without reference to an after. The almost total degradation in a unique and comprehensive space-time. The human presence is inferred through the symbol of human work: worker and peasant.

Postcards from Oran XIII manifests another of the icons of Russian culture, it is a reinterpretation of the Orthodox cathedrals, in their upper structure. At the same time, the use of the double spiral makes visual reference to Tatlin's Tower, a model that was never built, a symbol of the Third International that was never consummated. It is a reference not only to this non-event, but also to the avant-garde movements of Russian plastic arts.

The artist placed this image as a sanctuary. Emphasized by the red color as a base. It is there as a sanctuary, as a stage to observe, as an element in phase and culmination. In this work, the walls do contaminate it, the closure is evident and oblique, there is no possible exit; they constitute the object of civilization, an intellectual representation that jumps to our spirit as quickly as the teaching directly extracted from our optical sense.

Oran XIV stands out superbly, the central figure ponders a universal symbolism, the five-pointed star. The black-red and light-shadow contrasts establish a disruptive, violent dialogue that visually suffocates the presence of other chromatic values. A similar behavior is seen with the lines, the broken ones predominate, forming obtuse and acute angles. Connoting behavior leading to confusion, schizophrenia, and outburst.

In this text, the walls crowd together towards the visual centre, presenting a certain lassitude and movement. From an aerial perspective, it reflects the exact moment of the implosion of the wall, broken into isomorphic pieces. The five-pointed star is the knot of tension, the visual attractor. This sign is part of highly conventionalised codes, it is present in insignia of different cultures, military ranks, flags. Universally, it is an allegory of independence, of the fight against uncertainties; in this case, it is a flaming star, a sign of the force of the expanding universe. In the national context, it is the insignia of the country and alludes to total sovereignty, struggling against external forces that crowd together to make pacts in favour of suffocation.

Is Postcards from Oran an "underground" text? Although it does not warn of the external, it is a fertile womb, a living seed, therefore a latent forest. The signs and symbols allow for a univocal reading in its entirety and at the same time metaphorically transgressed in its depth.

3.3.4. Paradigmatic Virtual Associative Series with the Labyrinth: Postales de Oran IV, X, XVI and XVIII

Postcards from Oran X ranks among the figurative signs the presence of the dome as an iconic sign, since it does not have the physical properties of the object, but rather the perceptual structure similar to that of the imitated object, according to the criteria of the semiotician Umberto Eco [5]. From a universal symbolic perspective, domes have a sacred meaning, because the communities of believers found in them the dominating force of the sacred, the presence of the new heavens over the new earth, their protuberance towards the exterior transgresses the total lack of communication, accentuated by the presence of the staircase.

But... certainly the gaze is dislocated, the red color of the foreground and the vanishing points play, disorient, upset the observer. Where am I going? The saturation and intensity of red radially marks the vision towards figures with pointed, vertical edges, and then in a visual retreat concentrates it on the central column. Dual figurative-chromatic-symbolic game.

In this case the clear brightness of the red color attributes the presence of an incorporeal light, creates a visual tension with the dark spaces, with the long shadows that form mysterious puddles of gloom, delimited by long straight lines, firmly drawn that compose a strong rhythmic, geometric scheme. The artist made use of the psychological effects of the lines to create chaos: the ascending ones motivate the spectator to a visual advance, at the same time the descending ones are joined with a contrary effect, the curves with an angle of 45° dislocate the movement and the triangular vertices create effects of a sense of insecurity.

The smooth textures maintain the same system already analyzed and the porous ones on this occasion to fully achieve the effect of approach using another scale of shades, mixing sepias and oranges, reds and blacks. The detailed and skillfully studied use of the ruler and compass is noted, that is, of geometric elements and mathematical analysis to achieve in the work a quasi-classical perspective, in reverse, where the starting points reside in the vanishing points like the eyes of a human face. The spatial depth responds to the intention of placing the observer within the space.

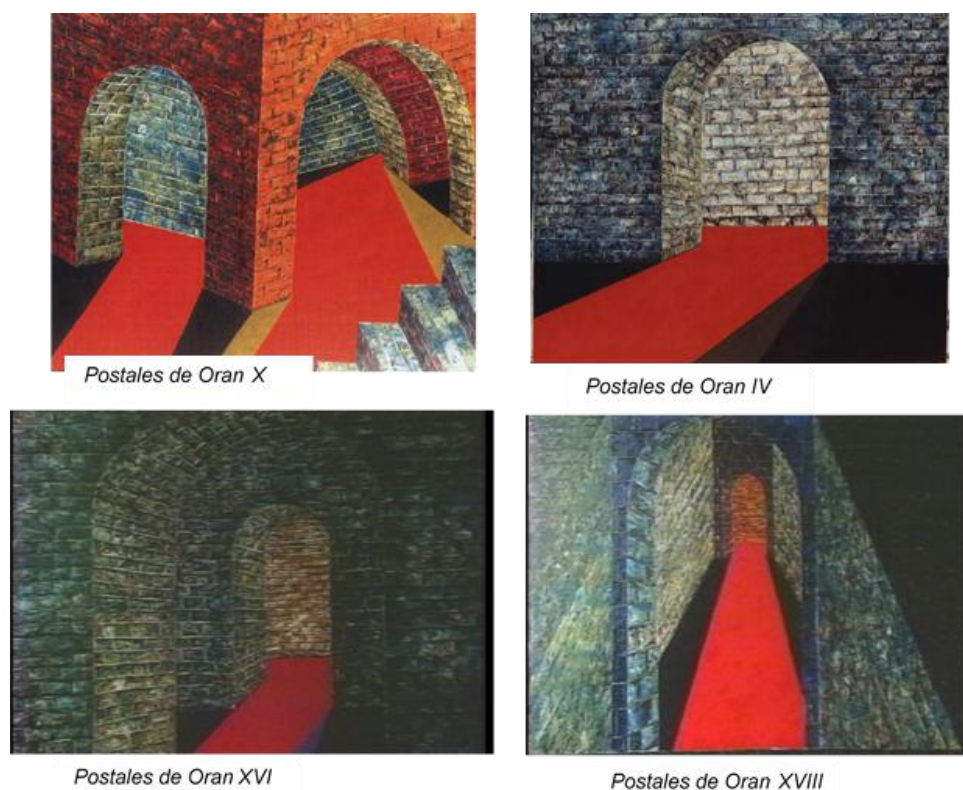


Figure 6. Paradigmatic virtual associative series with the labyrinth: Oran IV, X, XVI and XVIII.

The composition of the work is balanced, at each end are located elements of force, on the right side, the corners of the steps and, on the other, pools of shadows. Joel Jover developed his own symbolic and interpretive codes: the presence in this work of the binary, represented through the well-defined half-points, two beams of light, symbolize: echo, reflection, conflict, Magna Mater. They can also be read as a replacement or trope of human eyes by symmetry, the flowing light. The total absence of human figuration is symbolically intensified, since zero, non-being, is mysteriously linked to unity, as its opposite and its reflection, an Orphic egg, underlined by the presence of the hierarchical, virile column, as a transcendent force.

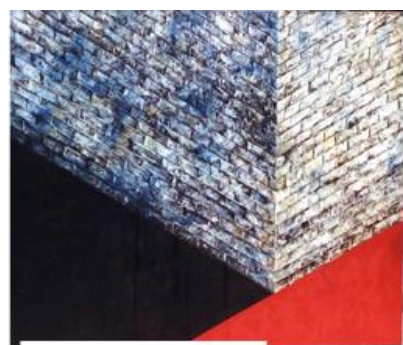
In this work, light and shadow compose a strong rhythmic, geometric and metaphysical scheme. The artist made use of the effects of lines to create chaos, the ascending lines motivate an advance, in turn they are linked to the descending lines with their opposite effect. The curved lines dislocate the movement that with the triangular vertices of irregular bases reinforce the uncertainty. In the midst of the conflict, he aspires to unity as his complement, balance and strength.

In general, the only thing that is present is the presence of a dome formed by several semicircular arches in Post-

ales X. The rest of the virtual paradigmatic series responds to a rustic that reinterprets Roman aqueducts, or to the long-barred naves of a nave. This series accentuates the effect of the sense of a labyrinth, and of paths visually contaminated with thick walls that underline the indexical sign of lack of communication. The lights, the shadows, the equivocation, the inner world with no possible exit, dark and humid, make the series the cornerstone of his poetic corpus of emotional, spiritual and physical heaviness and captivity.

He codified a typical theme: the human being plunged into personal and social isolation like a pathological depressive syndrome. Hence the motif of the walls, its total symbolism. Works such as Postcards from Oran I, II, III, VIII, IX, underline such feelings. Meanwhile, there is a dynamism violently driven by the angles: Oran XI and XVII. Together they show within their codes, different relationships between chromaticism, textures, perspective and composition. These last works visually develop a journey towards depths different from the previous works. Very small steps almost unnoticed. The effects of meaning compete with the total desperation of the human being, who resorts to the most intimate part of his being, to the fetal position, loneliness that weighs tangibly.

3.3.5. Virtual Paradigmatic Series Associated with the Pathological Depressive Syndrome: Postales de Oran I, II, III, VIII, IX, XI and XVII



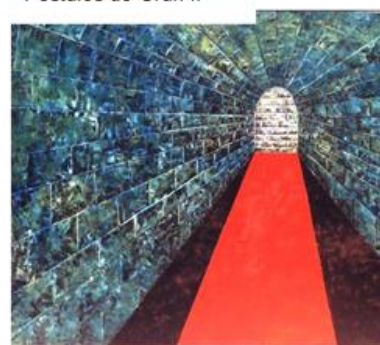
Postales de Oran I



Postales de Oran II



Postales de Oran III



Postales de Oran VIII



Postales de Oran IX



Postales de Oran XI



Postales de Oran XIII

Figure 7. Virtual paradigmatic series associated with the pathological depressive syndrome: Postales de Oran I, II, III, VIII, IX, XI and XVII.

4. Conclusions

Jover, throughout his artistic creation up to Postales de Orán, in his imaginary universe and pictorial language, specifically in the years from 1970 to 1982, made use of the mixture of the tragic, the comic, pleasure, pain, the aesthetics

of ugliness, the contrast of intertextual with intratextual, which made him different and at the same time meant points of connection that would later be seen as significant elements in the Italian trans-avant-garde movement. We are inclined to think that Jover, by confessing tribute to neo-expressionism as a style, on the philosophical platform of existentialism that made it his own, as well as his solitary artistic point of view,

far from fashionable aesthetics, in addition to the presence of a very personal chromaticism, conceived his own language, sometimes harsh from the communicative perspective with his visually domesticated spectators in a different art, in such a way that he went beyond the then known stylistic labels, within the context of Cuban plastic arts.

From 1984 to 1988, Joel Jover made use of novel elements of the plastic arts at an international level, not common in the national and Camagüeyan context, such as photography manipulated from the perspective of a plastic artist and not a professional photographer, and the use of enameled steel with emulsion paint. He began to develop a more intimate art, greatly influenced by existentialist philosophy, where human pain, anguish, and human concerns on a generic scale became more evident. The intertextuality given by his hypotexts awakened the need of those who studied his work to reread the literary references he evoked. The formats were greatly expanded, many call it the stage of gigantism precisely because of the dimensions of his works from these years. He incorporated into his conceptual and visual language his characteristic masks, a personal metaphor that alludes to the duplicity of spirit, double standards, hypocrisy; visually it is a mask in profile from whose mouth lightning bolts emerge. The support continued to be generally cardboard or cardstock.

It is necessary to point out that in the eighties, internationally, mainly in Europe, the United States, Latin America and Havana, as a national space, there was a boom in the visual arts. The Caribbean stood out for its anecdotal painting. Cuba, for its part, in the capital, developed the new Cuban art where generally the themes of these years were strident, rebellious, socially critical, violently erotic, which for many, such as the critic Nelson Herrera Isla, considered these years as bad work. Thus, it was an art contextualized not only with European and North American movements but also with the themes in vogue in the insular Caribbean, especially with the popular religiosity of African descent where the artists were also practitioners of the same.

The novelty from the pictorial aesthetics was the treatment of the persistence of racial prejudices even when they were thought to have died out, bureaucracy, a desacralized vision of heroes, also treated in North American painting but in a less explosive way; it was a very participatory artistic proposal with the public who felt part of the exhibitions and performances.

The rest of the country had a different behavior and Camagüey in general, in these years incorporated new artists who had recently graduated, amateurs and an individual maturation of each artist without relevance as a movement, since there was none. However, Jover consolidated his aesthetics of the seventies, in terms of expressionism as a style, ugliness, given by the deformation of his drawings, monochrome, given fundamentally by the use of gray, cold tones, toned down to the dirtiness of orange, violet, sepia, black tones and at times the inclusion of untreated flat colors; dis-

similar supports, preferably cardboard, dimensions with a tendency to gigantism, he began to venture into a work that subverted his thematic postulates with what he had done before, and also with the Mecca of Cuban art, since from a visual seclusion, he became intimate with the existential concerns of universal man. He shrewdly wielded the use of personal and universal symbols from his perspective such as: profile masks with tongues that are knives, quasi-human animals and humans with zoomorphic profiles, both with a marked presence of mutilation, making his work at this time a visual denunciation of the behaviors that degrade the universal human being.

For Jover, the year 1989 meant the incorporation of new expressive elements, more selective, more philosophical, with concerns towards the social rather than the individual. From 1989 to 1993, the year in which he produced the Postcards from Oran series, the subject of this study, Joel Jover's works showed a more energetic connection with the existentialist philosophy that underpinned his work; fear, loneliness, pessimism. During these years he focused his gaze mainly on social problems, leaving his individual problems in the background. He also appropriated the symbols of different universal cultures, giving them a more personal approach.

Jover's chromaticism continued on the palette of cold and sepia colors, although at times he incorporated flat colors seeking contrasts, in such a way that he was breaking with his imposed and characteristic achromaticism. His careless drawing was gradually yielding to the search for perfection, gradually leaving behind the aesthetics of ugliness. Cardboard began to be replaced by canvas and oil began to take a leading role. The intertextualities expanded to other spheres such as texts written in different languages, without abandoning the hypotexts of literary works, as well as works from the history of universal art; the textures increased and they sought the tactile with greater profusion.

So that by 1992, the year that *Postales de Orán* began to take shape, Joel Jover was in full creative maturity and, as a process, the first aesthetic turn was developing as a result of his artistic work: pictorial, philosophical, literary and critical thought. This artist was not influenced by fashions or circumstantial idioms but rather by a journey along the paths of his own, different, gradual art.

The *Postales de Orán* Series, emerged after a process of maturity of the artist Joel Jover, from a chromaticism that began with grays, dirty colors, degraded, sepias, with complementary colors that accentuated the intention that was proposed with the deformed drawing, the visual dirt, the depression, the anguish; He gradually incorporated a clearer chromaticism until he reached the explosion of color. On the other hand, he appropriated codes from other artistic expressions such as literature, works from the history of art, existentialist philosophy related to the psychic life of the human being, such as fear, despair, hopelessness, absurdity; outlined in his works of the 1970s, intensified in some works of the 1980s and 1990s until its greatest expression in Postcards

from Oran. The intertexts were opening his cognitive spectrum towards Greek mythology, biblical literature, works of modern literature, events from the context of the work. It is important to add that he also used literary works of his own creation as intertexts, such as *The Staircase*, and *The Misery*.

Among the symbols that outlined the Postcards from Oran series, there were those sketched in previous works such as, the peeling walls, a closing element, a fortress, a simulation, from 1989. Another of the symbols was the architecture of Greco-Latin inspiration, especially with the religious repertoire, the commemorative sculpture of significant figures in Greek politics; of the history of the Hebrew people. On the other hand, the use of Latin texts in an interdiscursive dialogue with the images. As well as the insignia of countries such as Russia, the United States, Cuba.

The texture moved to more prominent expressions, such as the use of emulsion paint on metal in a state of cooking, the use of sewn sequins, encaustic on plywood, among others until reaching Postcards from Oran where the spatula and the direct use of unmixed oil from the tube achieved dissimilar textures within the same work. Textual units, that is, contexts, metatexts, paratexts, hypotexts, allowed us to interpret the universe of the creator's objective, subjective, and aesthetic motivations when faced with a specific text.

The second level of reading, which deals specifically with the creative process, allows us to have the universe of both the thought that creates the work and the material that the artist has at his disposal, his level of inventiveness, originality, and ingenuity based on what he has; as well as the creative process from the beginning to his final work. Jover certainly conceived these works for a large-scale project, both in terms of artistic expectations and international recognition.

The indexical symbol of the Series, through the recurrences of elements such as peeling walls, medieval architectural structures, passageways, the absence of openings and natural light, related by association, can be read as the state of deterioration and total introspection of the universal human being.

Reading the series from a semiotic perspective, with the three levels of reading analyzed, allowed us to make a greater interpretation of the universe of the series from its context, pictorial signs, figurations, symbols, transgressions, intertextualities. So that in the midst of total consternation, a halo of hope is noted. Joel Jover is, even in what has been studied, a profoundly humanist artist.

Author Contributions

Kezia Zabrina Henry Knight is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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