



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mattin-Laurent Partarrieu is a painter of Basque origin, who dared to break with the traditional ways of the Basque artists who preceded him.

He left his home of Hasparren in the south west of France for Paris, at the age of 4, yet that was enough time for the landscape and the people to be ingrained in his memory forever. He remains very attached to the soul and traditions of the Basque Country - references feature often in his work, and he is passionate for the popular Basque sport of Pelote.

The first painting that he created as a pre-adolescent child caused a tornado of discussions and commentaries by the French intellectual elite of the 50s, and celebrated authors proclaimed his work as a masterpiece worthy of a veteran. There is something sad about his story however. A boy eager to defend and uphold the principles of his people, but whose journey cost him his Basque identity.

As well as belonging to two very different environments that make up his country, he is also a commentator and contributor to the country as a whole. If his work is a social commentary, is it intended to highlight social similarities and divergences? Does he try to translate relations or possible exchanges between the two methods of life - the one of the capital and the one of his deep roots? How does the rough compare to the refined? By combining the two he is able to excel from his cross-cultural, multi-faceted platform.

His work is a very personal expression, of freedom and of extreme vitality, with the power of audacity. His art either seizes upon everything beautiful or astonishing that he is presented with, or it chooses elements from deep within the reserves of his Basque genealogy, experiences, and inherent characteristics. The combination enables him to gather such a quantity of strong visual imagery.

Partarrieu draws on everyday life, visualising while going about his daily business, and some would probably say while sleeping judging by some of the dream-like fantasy figures he offers to us. They shine with eroticism, and the vibrant optimism of his burning colour palette.

He fondly captures life with detail and nostalgia, continually drawing comparisons and confrontations between the two worlds to which he belongs - the idyllic countryside lifestyles of yesterday and the cosmopolitan Parisian lifestyles of today. The weird and wonderful world of cafés, restaurants, bars and bordellos feature often in his work, like references to the bygone era in the great tradition of Toulouse-Lautrec.

His exceptional gift for studying, interpreting, designing, and painting are handled with the brightest and most expressive form of artistic flair, and allow him to penetrate below the surface of the subjects that he represents. He is able to capture the essence of their soul, and we can experience their emotion and passion in his work.

His figurative capability is accomplished and masterly. While his forms are elongated and exaggerated and appear to have been sketched in a hurry, his postures and expressions are never loose or clumsy, character and body language are represented with such considered subtlety and exactness he seems to have spent a lifetime studying them.

He is not especially an artistic improviser, even though his spontaneity is an important element that breathes life through his art. His is in such control of his ability and his medium, nothing he does is random or by accident.

His viewpoint is furtive, he is a voyeur of intimacy, and his subjects are exposed and off guard. He is able to display their inner beings as vulnerable, open souls with nothing to hide. His eye waits patiently for an unveiling, seizing upon the fleeting moments of chemistry and revealing the rich tapestry of scenes of everyday life. Perhaps it was his friendship with photographer Robert Doisneau, who also trained as an engraver and lithographer, that inspired the freshness in his approach, his taste of the low-angle shots, his penchant for capturing the instantaneous moments, in a snapshot.

Partarrieu has a love affair with the female form, which he joyfully handles with refinement and elegance. Although he undoubtedly portrays the female as an object of desire, he treats his subjects as equal parts sexuality and spirituality - often risqué, but always with respect.

He is a painter of love, and unashamedly the idea of liberal love, love without bounds. The brushstrokes that lovingly create his female forms in paint are like the hands that lovingly caress their beautiful bodies.

We are able to forgive the men for their shallow behaviour, their lewd and questionable morality, but not for the cheap titillation of seeing the courtesans defiled and debauched, only for Partarrieu's sublime allegories of love.

His ultimate goal seems to emphasise the deep emotional expressions of the figures as they travel from their canvas onto his, studying them in their surroundings to connect with them, familiarising himself with revealing people of his own extreme sensitivity. The acute observations of his trained eye, however, are never over-emphasised, and his work is an honour to the great power of suggestion - he still prefers to excite the imagination than reveal all there is to be seen.

His art is alive with intelligence, irony and kindness, and breathes an air of sensuality and cheerfulness. The fluidity of his stroke allows him to push his analysis of the figure even further, and he seems to take great delight and fulfillment from his own artistic ability.

This is his language; it is good to enjoy the result, but for Partarrieu it is better still to enjoy the process.