

Pretty Thug - Fátima de Juan

*Estoy fuerte como Xena La Guerrera  
A mí nadie me enseñó el camino  
Sola llene la cartera,  
no hizo falta vender kilos  
Ni ir de gangster, ni ir de na  
Entre la niebla esquivando los fantasmas*

L21 Gallery presents *Pretty Thug*, Fátima de Juan's first solo exhibition. The project gathers the most emblematic motifs of the Majorcan artist in the largest room of S'Escorxador, all her *bits* in a single space. The title comes from a famous song by Prodigy of Mobb Deep and a declaration of intent on its own.

Pretty and naughty is not a contradiction. In addition to an evident sweetness and an exuberant charm, the protagonists of Fátima de Juan's paintings ooze character, a lot of strength and a warrior attitude. Unruly, they don't need to be protected by anyone.

Fátima de Juan has developed her own language, as personal as it is recognizable, by painting on the streets. She makes graffiti and murals on brick walls. From her native neighborhood on the outskirts of Palma to Canada, characters and letters (Xena!) made her famous. She was breaking the barriers that exist for women in the world of graffiti (and not only there). Fortunately, these adversities seem to dissipate more every day, although ignorance continues to have its last throes.

In the pristine, almost sacred white space of the gallery, Fátima de Juan maintains her iconography and defying the usual domestic measurements presents on this occasion huge canvases with characters that even seem to exceed the limits imposed by their frame. The entire surface is occupied by figures painted with acrylics, spray and many other techniques more typical of *tuning* than of fine arts. It is better this way; the authenticity of the content and form are indisputable.

In this passage from the outside to the inside, from the street to the showroom, the artist pays remarkable attention to detail and takes great care in the treatment of surfaces, without losing the essence of her language. Painting on canvas has allowed her to pay attention to the details that in graffiti, from afar, do not look as obvious as on canvas. Now, as we get closer, the surface spits paint and demands our attention. Her icons appeal to us. Once we overcome the initial amazement at the monumentality and forcefulness of what is represented, we stop in front of the paintings as if trapped, searching and finding *things*. Whereas in the city her murals made us see the neighborhood in a different, more bearable way, now her canvases invite us to lose ourselves within their painted frames.

*Gangsta chick  
I need a gangsta chick  
I want the gangsta do it with my gangsta chick  
Give me the gangsta chick*

Robert Crumb also longed for a *Pretty Thug*. His fantasy was focused not on the weapons and crooks that Prodigy of Mobb Deep aims at, but on a strong attitude accompanied by a powerful body, like the sculptures of Maillol. In many of his comics, the great Crumb wished to teach the last decadent male chauvinists how to tear down stereotypes, allowing them to be lulled by personified voluptuousness.

*God is a girl*, almost makes you want to add: *and a pretty thug one, indeed*. A full body fighter, defiant and armed, with eyes half-closed and a grim face, looks at us straight ahead, brandishing a flail. A huge vertical canvas measuring 350 x 250 cm, accompanied by two equally large horizontal canvases, *Thug Mami 1* and *Thug Mami 2*. A bit trashy, always tender, decidedly Amazonian, somewhat futuristic.

Their footwear is not for modelling, but for fighting. Good girls go to heaven, but bad girls go everywhere. On Fatima's long journey ahead, it is better to wear suitable shoes to take firm steps: those Dino shoes seem ideal. Dragons, dinosaurs, tarantulas and alligators burst into this world, mix and multiply, play with the fruits that decorate her portraits, move sinuously between the nape and the earrings. They are mutated beasts, docile and playful mixtures, perhaps tamed by the same protagonists, although they keep their wild and mischievous energy intact. At this point no one expects the providential arrival of Saint George to slay the dragon and save the helpless maiden. No divine or male intervention is required.

Although it is clear where these works come from and what place they want to occupy, they still unsettle us. The legacy of urban graffiti and of the DIY chav culture is evident, but there is something else in these canvases, something catchy. A carefree mix of styles and references, musical and plastic, distant from each other. It is the *mashup* culture, "of suppression of borders, of wild overlapping of styles that nobody in their right mind would want to mix, unless illogical connections were established with an unexpected internal coherence". This is how Javier Blánquez describes the kind of musical collages present in Rosalía or Björk's sophisticate productions.

It is when sitting on the fence, against labels and classifications, that tension can be created and that, if well channel, it can catch the viewer's attention. The enjoyment that Fátima de Juan's canvases provokes is created by this tension between opposites, an indefinable place, between *Haute Couture* and *Athleisure*. If the distinction between high and low culture is fortunately over, leaving its outdated trace behind, many other barriers still hinder the walk. Although the field of expression does not have keys, and hers, well, it is hers.

*Lo mío es punto y aparte  
Tírame pa'lante  
Calle, pero elegante*