

HUMANITY AS A MAP: PORTRAITS THAT SMELL OF YEARS AND SWEAT



Hugh Wilson is a nomad. I use the term nomadism based on Rosi Braidotti¹'s definition of "nomadic subjects" as a convenient theoretical figuration for contemporary subjectivity, and which addresses the simultaneous presence – or coexistence of – axis such as class, race, ethnicity, gender and age, among others. Thus, the production of meaning, in this case pictorial, by Wilson is a map of places he has already been and which he can reconstruct like a series of footsteps of an itinerary. I make an emphasis on the pictorial but should note the significant work of the author in the field of poetry, which adds a perfect layer of information fundamental to all other creative processes. *Batey Cacata*, his book of poetry as an example, is an essential tool to approach his pictorial product in the bateys of the Dominican Republic.

In the construction of each body of work, Wilson proceeds in a manner similar to the nomad or the cartographer as he presents a situational need where itineraries unfold and the approach to each territory varies with its context. Thus he leaves a path of footprints where his notion of multiple identities develops. In the case of the pieces made in Algeria and Niger, these pose an approach that goes from astonishment to evidence. These works reflect a human group in transition but rooted in an ancient culture linked to the land.

A great part of Wilson's production refers to trades or "métiers" as defining elements of a personality or mood. As such, when his travels (which could be inwardly even while traveling the globe) take him again to central North America, the labor of its men and women becomes the gateway to their intimate lives, their affections and disappointments.

In this broad definition of territory from the portrait there is also a great dose of humanity. To observe each piece with caution and pause will give us the knowledge of the levels of closeness and distance that the author generates with his subjects. Humanity, understood as a map, faces and bodies that allow for a reading of their territories and analyze the changes that occur in their contexts from a critical and emancipatory perspective. From his humanity and that of his portrayed subjects, Wilson generates maps of territories that allow their situation to unveil, as a function of their accesses, ways of life, and intimate settings.

Hence these portraits are also the result of coexistence and trust. Facing them produces the sensation of listening to a private conversation, a dialogue between pairs that are sharing their most intimate secrets. Wilson obtains these results while revealing the psychological, social and political aspects of these personalities through small details. His works are of enormous candor and emotion, that could, paradoxically also relate to a certain analytical distance. Wilson does not shy away from controversial social issues. On the contrary, he unearths in each piece a sum of affects, divides, rootedness and dispossession that are only comparable with a succinct analysis of the contexts that produce these personalities.

Finally, the displacements. Moving from side to side, face to face, hand to hand, is a gathering of subjectivities. Nothing is different, everything is so close, the Algerian old lady and the young migrant; the North American miner and the insular musician are the same, humanity is one and is multiple in the works of Hugh Wilson.

"The last days are quiet, I finish my paintings, doors creak in the wind, the storms fall in other places so I get sun, winter is coming, I have been here before, ending, like a deep breath, new, Jameson is embarrassed for me to see him in his work clothes. He does look different." Hugh Wilson, *Batey Cacata*

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