

# Heriberto Nieves: Equilibrium and Spirituality...

Dr. Eduardo Planchart Licea

Naiguatá, July 25, 2010.

Quote of Heriberto:

“The consistent icon in my work, the circle, represents the human being, the purest line in our universe, balance, life”

It is most gratifying to see how the restless young man that I met at St. Carlos Academy in Mexico, an OEA scholar studying for a Masters in Visual Arts, showed in his reflections that he had found his path in life, and had realized one of his most cherished dreams. In his work at this renowned Mexican academy, he stood out for his enthusiasm, for his lack of prejudice and his freedom in the creative process, qualities which still characterize him, who without any type of restraint mutates a sheet of steel into a new aesthetic reality: sanding, writing, he perforated, covered with asphalt, converting the surface of the sheet of steel into a living collage. I have seen throughout the ensuing years how his passion and his accomplishments have increased, and I feel like a brother and an accomplice of his constant search, because each time he enters more deeply into an essentialist language, which goes to the roots of mankind's great dilemmas, instead of remaining trapped in aesthetic discourse; which is so easy to do when speaking of art. Success has not blinded him and I believe that he could not have been born in any other space and time than the beautiful island of Puerto Rico, where he was born with an iron will, a jovial and generous spirit which presents itself in each of his creations.

Steel converted into poetry emerges in the works of Heriberto Nieves, transforming it into an echo of an existential vision which is being forged through his creative will. The artist bases his aesthetics on the concept of the unity of the whole with its parts, in which both cosmos and microcosmos are found to be interrelated; as has been demonstrated in sciences such as Ecology and Physics. This is the reason his work is important, to convey this sensation of empathetic unity between the steel and the elements added to it. He unifies the volumes by a series that integrates them or carries them out in modules; in this way he is able to transmit to the other the sensation and link with reality.

Steel is omnipresent in our daily routines, to transmit lightness and malleability to rocks joined together to diverse elements such as carbon, makes these sheets into something very heavy and impenetrable, and in order to work with it, it is necessary to return it to its origins, high temperatures with the blowtorch and sealed by welds, in this way uniting the steel sheets, their cuts and folds.

Metallurgy, a sacred work, goes back to the melting of iron meteorites and to alchemy, is a millennial characteristic and full of symbolism, that is perceived in his public and social work, by creating harmony through forms which he throws as lines and hoops into space, challenging the material and the laws of physics, through a rising equilibrium; which obliges the steel to submit itself to the creative will. There is little randomness in this art at certain stages of the creative process, mathematical calculations are necessary, and applied geometric studies as is

evidenced in the pieces of the series *Concurrences*, an aspect on which he is able to trespass through color and patinas of the parts of which it is formed.

In the piece *Exterior Concurrence*, we encounter a sculptor who merges with the painter, who assumes an art without the limitations imposed by the bidimensional. We are not before crystallized steel, as he does in his public works, but rather he uses the oxidized patina characteristic of the metal that has been in contact with sea water or other elements, to transmit a climate of a temporality, as occurs in *Geometric Fundamentals*, *Likeness (Similarity)*, with surfaces submitted to a process of oxidation in which the line of soldering humanizes the sculpture and makes it expressive. This Puerto Rican sculptor likes to create based on geometric theorems full of color, which dematerialize the solid and hard strength of the line and the circle, in a material in which the industrial techniques become aesthetic. For him the sphere is intimately connected to his aesthetic concept, since in the history of thought and of Physics it is the perfect form, which symbolizes the union of opposites represented in Uroboros, the alchemist serpent that bites its tail; this creates a Utopian atmosphere, which resonates with the aspirations of humanity to materialize a universe dominated by harmony and justice as a cosmic ethics, not as a function of just one of its parts. Heriberto wants to impact the spectator with this content in a direct way, without an intermediary or intellectualization, to engender an awakening of aesthetic and ethical sensibilities which will project him towards a cosmic conscience.

In his sculptures and installed proposals the work of art is a continuation of the scenery, which seeks to convert art into a meditation on the harmony and coexistence with reality, and open through its dimensions of possible horizons to face our paradoxical civilization. In his public works there is an audacity that reminds us of Sebastian's monumental paradigmatic sculptures and of their integration with the scenery by transmitting to an aesthetic dimension a continuity with nature.

In the small format series, *Concurrences*, the artist accomplishes a visual synthesis, distancing himself from the tropical baroque inherited from European aesthetics. He seeks lightness and frivolity, instead of saturation. Direct forms and discourses express our Caribbean being, mestizo and multiple, dreamy and cheerful, rational and at the same time intuitive. This is manifested in each of these works, in which the angles, the circle and chromatic lines, as well as Geometry, give to a sheet of steel a lightness more typical to canvas. To arrive to this level, the artist had to experiment for years handling these materials, making them his own like the pedagogical fundamentals of the Bauhaus. Art is integrated with life in this proposal...