

# PEDRO SOBRADO

Torrelavega, Cantabria 1936



Following his first, highly successful exhibition in Santander in 1959 he moved to Madrid. In 1961 he transferred his residence to Paris, where he lived for fifteen years. His solo exhibitions there are an eloquent testimony to his hard work and the recognition he quickly won among Parisian artistic circles. In 1976 he returned definitively to Spain, establishing his residence in Santander.

## ARTISTIC EVOLUTION

### **Beginnings....the 50's** **The painter's vision**

In 1953, in the middle of the cold post-war Spanish panorama, an Abstract Art Exhibition was organised in the Menendez Pelayo International University in Santander as a complement to the "First Congress of Abstract Art" and as part of the university's "Contemporary Problems" courses. Important Spanish painters and sculptors, including Berrocal, J. Caballero, A. Quiros, A. Saura, Gargallo, C.Ferreira, participated in this exhibition, along with artists from France (the Espace Group), Great Britain (F.Rose), Rumania

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(Dimitresky., Poliakoff) and representatives of north american abstract painting (B.Childe, J.D. Dowing, A.Weber, etc.).

This exhibition promoted an awareness of new artistic credos and inspired the creation of new galleries in Santander. These galleries helped to create a certain artistic climate and stimulated young artists, offering them new horizons.

It was in this atmosphere that Pedro Sobrado had his first exhibition in 1959. Afterwards, he decided to seek wider perspectives in Madrid. There he encountered some painters who cultivated abstract art, while others concentrated on figurative realism; another school within this artistic panorama was represented by the highly traditional San Fernando Fine Arts Academy. These groups were relatively closed to new members and new ideas, which confirmed Sobrado in his determination to follow his own autodidactic path, for which the city offered him multiple stimuli.

The light of Madrid and the new tones of its surrounding countryside, so different from those of his native mountains, contributed another highly characteristic element of his painting, namely **colour**, which, together with



"Estanque del Retiro", Madrid, oil on canvas, 65x54

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his mastery of line, constitute from this time onwards (1959-1961) a constant feature of his work.

In terms of drawing, the first suggestions of Sobrado's artistic language are nourished by modernism, particularly, English modernism, firstly, because it was in England where the transformation of the symbolic into the decorative first occurred, as part of the "Arts and Crafts Movement" and, secondly, because English modernism was based on various aspects of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

In relation to the former, it should be emphasised that the artist was initially dedicated to commercial drawing, which, apart from developing an extraordinary dexterity in handling line, offered him the possibility of creating a repertory of decorative forms which were destined for other spaces, as had happened to a significant number of English painters who had received the commissions of W. Morris on the threshold of the twentieth century.

With regard to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, it is obvious that many of his first sketches in chinese ink and even their titles are directly

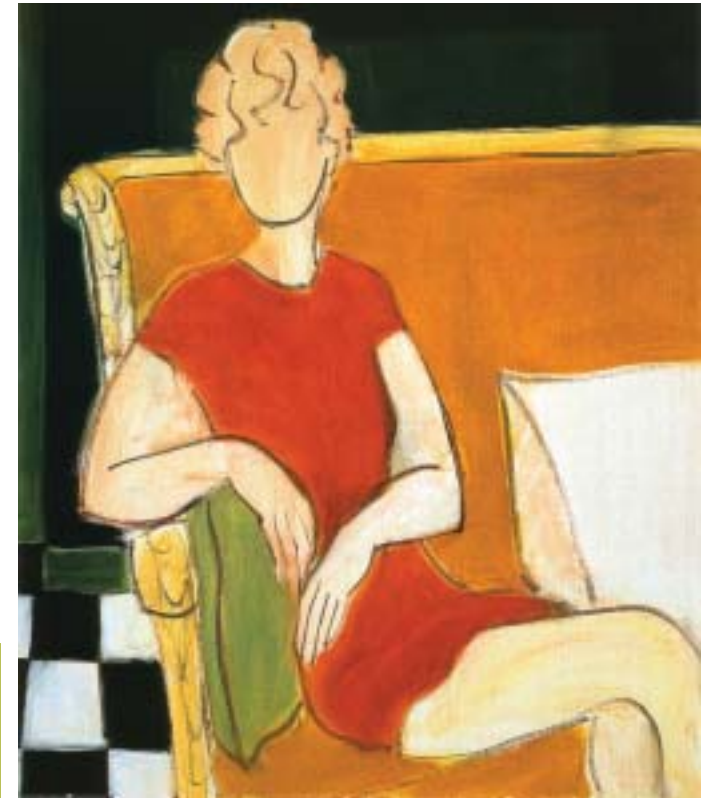


"Arboleda", sketch in Chinese ink, 65x60

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linked to the poetic literature of the end of the century and tell of his interest in the romantics and a certain idealism. Many of these initial sketches, which have as their centre a female figure, are based on Pre-Raphaelite painting, especially the work of D. Gabriel Rosseti, who created a type of woman who was repeated in all subsequent painting and embodies images extracted from daily life and lost in their dreams, a woman who appears in the canvas as a fascinating and undecipherable enigma.



"Joven sentada", oil on canvas, 65x54

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But, as happened in the case of A. Beardsley, who represented the culmination of modernism in Britain, his sketches show a rapid evolution, quickly becoming liberated from symbolism and Preraphaelitism as they elaborate their own independent language. The influence of French Art Nouveau is manifested by a consistent adhesion to the surface and a corresponding black and white, parallel repetitions of forms as a means of suggestive representation, limitation of figures to the expressive surroundings, and horizontal and vertical pictorial arrangements which effectively create a tense space for the curves which, especially in the case of Sobrado, oscillate, forming delicious arabesques.



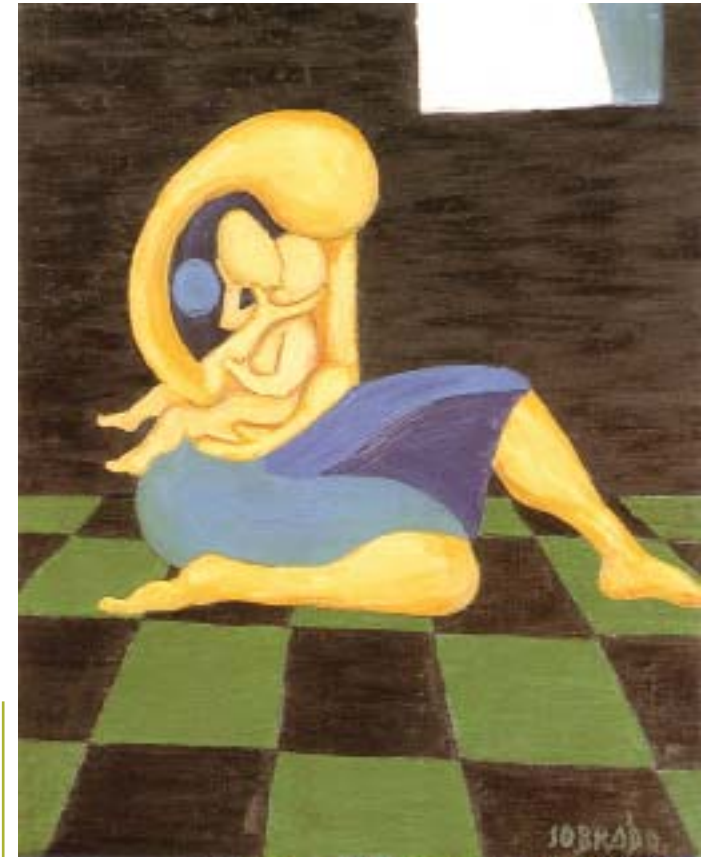
"Crines al viento", Madrid, oil on canvas, 92x73



## Paris...the sixties The scene

Apart from these first sketches, the first canvases confirm that Sobrado's search is situated in this link to the 20th century represented by the language of modernism in order to, from there, select certain aspects of symbolism in the proposals of artists such as Van Gogh, Van de Velde and also aspects of Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec.

It is in Paris where Sobrado becomes the painter we now know. The arrival in 1961 signifies, on the one hand, the possibility of directly contemplating the complex and rich end of century panorama of French painting and, on the other hand, the meeting with the language of abstraction which was in vogue at that time, and whose symbolic aspects interested him.



"Maternity", 1961, oil on canvas, 65x54

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He remained there, in the warmth of the climate created in Paris, until the student revolution.

Paris offered him the ideal scenario for making his definitive commitment for material, colour, line and spatiality. Unlike North American art, the European art of this era was very actively aware of the history and role of the artist in the elaboration of a symbolic repertoire in which none of the aesthetic categories was absent.

In order to illustrate these events which had a worldwide echo and which he lived at close quarters, Sobrado returned to figurative art, where he was to remain definitively.



"Abstraction", acrylic on canvas  
1962, 92x73



"Mai 68", Santander Art Gallery, oil on  
canvas, 130x97



## ...The seventies The search of the language

The beginning of the seventies could be glimpsed in this lively and intense search which Sobrado had undertaken on arriving in Paris. The process becomes calmer and in some ways the artist begins to look inside, towards the Spanish expressionist tradition which, halfway between a real vision of a dramatic moment and a dream converted by the subconscious in obsession, had been announced by Goya.



"Cuadríptico", oil on canvas, 146x120



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To recover expressionism, not to describe situations but to express emotions, which means conceding importance to the expressive possibilities of colour. Works in which flat colour is used and there are some similarities to the forms of medieval art, such as stained glass or *cloisonné* enamels, based on ample flat chromatic zones between surroundings marked by lines.



"Ejecutivos", 1973, oil on canvas, 130x97

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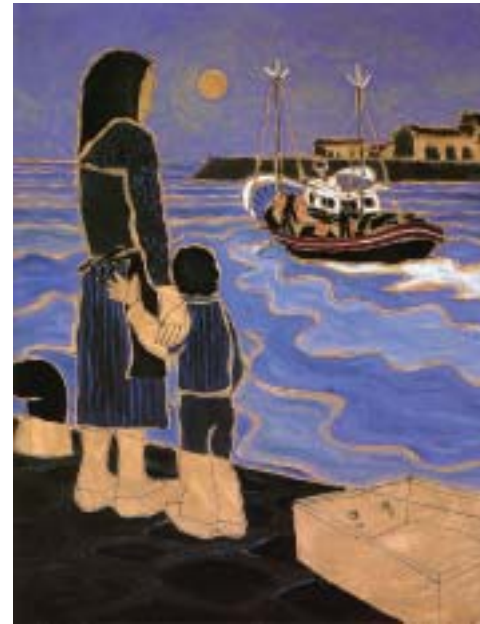
These pictures mark a return to a figurative tradition where the protagonist is the line which, as in stained glass, causes the silhouettes to intertwine and multiply with great agility and with a constant precision of surroundings which reminds us of the best era of woodcuts or ancient bas-reliefs (note also similarities with the Japanese "ukiyo-e" style).



"La Barra", 1973, oil on canvas, 100x81

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He offers us three thematic routes: In the private field, still-lives, portraits, domestic interiors with an intimate character. The world of the humble work of peasants and fishermen which were guarded in Sobrado's memory and their quiet dignity form the subject of the second of Sobrado's major themes.



"La despedida", oil on canvas,  
81x65

"Luna llena", oil on canvas, 65x54



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Sobrado's third major thematic group deals with the public space. In a series of pictures which, in terms of their luminosity and the way the artist has captured the fleeting moment on canvas, are reminiscent of the impressionists, he captures the ebullient parisian street and café life.



"Terraza de café", oil on canvas, 92x73



"Mercado", oil on canvas, 92x73

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At the end of the seventies, the line concedes some protagonism to stains of warm colour although the protagonists are still everyday creatures, clothed with dignity.



"Barcos de pesca", oil on canvas, 73x60

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The colour is always a pictorial element: the landscapes of his mountainous land, so often seen but now recreated in the memory, where the expressive force of colour is what matters rather than a slavish imitation of the landscape. La "Alegoría de la construcción" brilliantly closes the decade of the seventies: harmonious integration of sketch, light and colour. The structure of the composition is almost architectural.



"Paisaje de Montaña", oil on canvas, 65x54

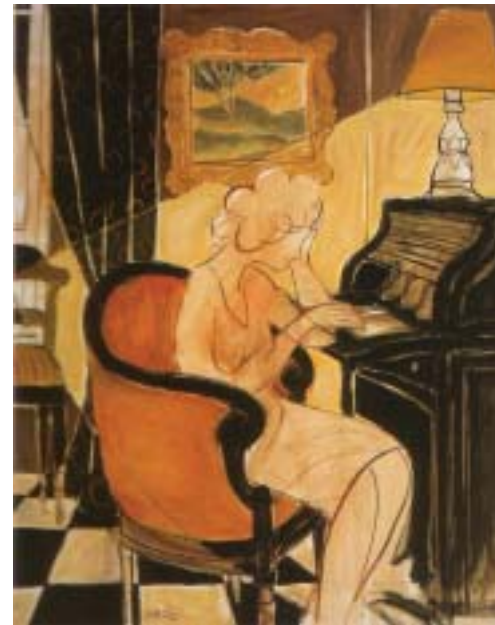


"Alegoría de la construcción", oil on canvas, 81x65,  
Technical Architects of Santander

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**The eighties**  
**"A great painter is the one that finds timeless personal signs to explain the spirit of his vision"**  
**H.Matisse**

Diverse influences, including the exaggerated perspectives of Van Gogh, the compositional approach of Cezanne and certain aspects of Fauvism were incorporated into Sobrado's work.



"Leyendo una carta", oil on canvas, 100x81



"La tetera china", oil on canvas, 73x60

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These influences were synthesised by Sobrado in a series of still lives and urban landscapes where anonymous individuals protect themselves against the rain



" En el aeropuerto", oil on canvas, 92x73



"La lluvia", oil on canvas, 92x73



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Affirming his artistic independence, he began to elaborate more and more personal interiors reflecting cubist influences with an intimate air and figures which, while lacking faces, can be considered as portraits



"Diván", oil on canvas, 92x73



"Le Gueridon", oil on canvas, 73x60

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In the mid eighties we encounter a series of paintings set in the public space whose protagonists are figures in motion.



"Violin", oil on canvas, 92x73



"Golden saxo", oil on canvas, 92x73

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And the black series, where he captures the nocturnal atmosphere of the city, its clubs and dark alleys.



"Última hora", oil on canvas, 116x89



"Discoteca", oil on canvas, 162x114

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Portraits, serigraphy and scale paintings complete the artistic production of the Sobrado.



"Claustro", Cantabria University, oil on canvas, 195x130

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## 21st century

**"It is not about a particular person, the characters are anonymous. The expression is in the attitude. The attitude explains everything..."**, Pedro Sobrado.

The last protagonist of the Paris school continues to observe the world around him, capturing it in line and colour, reinventing as he works the traditional bases of painting. In his work, the line is the undisputed protagonist, the element which articulates every composition. The line is firm and continuous while colour infuses expression into his work.



"Chicago", oil on canvas, 195x114

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Space, the third distinctive element of Sobrado's work, is handled in an unreal fashion, with hardly any perspective, thus generating diaphanous compositions with alternating areas of colour and empty space.

His highly personal style is more and more synthetic and simplified and he continues to investigate the possibilities of representing the feminine figure, portraying her in an intimate attitude which attracts the attention of the observer.



"Sin título", pencil and watercolour on paper, 76x56



"Sin título", oil on canvas, 65x54

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## WORK PROJECTION

Widely recognised as an important painter by critics and collectors, his work is represented in numerous private and public collections, including the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Madrid, the Fine Art Museum in Bilbao and the Quijote Museum in Guanajuato, Mexico.

Prizes:

Arts, Sciences, Lettres, Société Académique  
Mérite et Dévouement Français  
Mérite Culturel et Artistique  
Médaille de la Ville de Nice

This summary is based on extracts from the book "SOBRADO" by Ana María Arías de Cossío, professor of Art History, Complutense University, Madrid, published in 2000



"Gente", oil on canvas, 130x97,  
Bilbao Art Gallery



"Don Quijote y Sancho", oil on canvas, 92x73,  
The Quijote Museum. Guanajuato. Mexico