

# Antonio López García

## The Best of Both Worlds

Over the course of his career, this Spanish artist has combined his innate creativity, academic training, and the influence of modernism to arrive at an artistic language that embodies the best of two worlds.

by ALLISON MALAFRONTÉ



**Greek Head and Blue Dress**

1958 (altered in 2011), oil on board, 27 x 37½. Private collection.





**Francisco Carretero, Tomelloso**  
1961-1987, oil on board, 36½ x 31. Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, Nagasaki, Japan.

began to feel somewhat sheltered from what was happening in the international art world—due to the cultural isolation of postwar Spain—López García and a small group of his artist-friends eventually became fascinated with the work of Matisse, Picasso, Henry Moore, and other prominent modern artists.

López García chose to remain at the academy and did not make a hasty jump into the avant-garde. But he was already uncomfortably aware that, although he was

becoming well-versed in the language of drawing and painting, he was mostly learning to copy surface appearances. In the book *Antonio López García: Paintings and Sculpture* (TF Editores, Madrid, Spain), the

artist says, “Looking back at all the art-related assignments I did at school, I find them to be very correct, very skillful even, but that’s about it. I did not see the spark that works of art are supposed to have. ... There was no mystery to it. And so emerged my passion for unearthing that part of it, that hidden side of things, that which cannot be named and that nobody can exactly explain.” The artist also stated that this move was “exceedingly difficult because it was a transitional step from copying things to trying to understand them. That was the struggle that led us to this significant change and to a truly decisive transformation.”

López García and his contemporaries broke onto the international

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- ANTONIO LÓPEZ GARCÍA

art scene in the 1960s. They earned the label “Madrid Realists” for the way in which their figurative approach stood in stark contrast to the informalism of the day. But even from the beginning, one could see in López García’s output something unlike anything else that was happening in either realism or modern art at the time. The realists noticed the influence of abstraction and Cubism but

respected López García’s skill level and representational ability. And to the modernists, López García did not feel stuck in a reactionary or academic trope but was clearly full of emotive content and contemporary thought.

The artist has been able to achieve this duality because he believes technique is only a means to an

**The Lamp**  
1959, oil on board, 39½ x 51¼. Private collection.



The influence of Spanish painter and sculptor Antonio López García is felt around the world and resonates with multiple generations of artists who find relevance in his classical adaptations of contemporary subject matter. Art critic Robert Hughes has called him “the greatest realist artist alive,” and certainly López García has been somewhat of a revolutionary figure in his native country over the last several decades. His influence on American artists has been equally as strong, especially on a younger generation who seem to be looking at the 76-year-old’s

oeuvre with renewed interest and noticing his ability to present a powerfully nuanced view of the time and culture to which he belongs.

López García began training in his hometown of Tomelloso at an early age under the tutelage of his artist-uncle Antonio López Torres. Recognizing a natural gift and quick learning ability in his nephew, López Torres convinced the young artist’s parents to send him to Madrid for formal training. In 1950, at the age of 14, the artist was accepted into the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando and quickly excelled at the various methods to which he was introduced. Although he



end and never trumps the motivation behind the work. When asked about his process during an interview with Michael

Klein and Amaya Gurpide for the winter 2011 edition of Klein's *American Painting Video Magazine* (APVM), López García said, "I don't give importance to technique. I condition everything so that the painting has spirit, in every way. If not, technique does not do me any good. I have done that: put in all the forms, ordered them in the best possible way, taken

**Sink and Mirror**  
1967, oil on wood,  
38½ x 33. Collection  
Museum of Fine  
Arts, Boston; Boston,  
Massachusetts.

measurements. Everything was done correctly, but the painting ended without substance, vacant of emotion. And that, when I had that sensation, it seemed to me a complete failure, it seemed that technique wasn't worth anything. It's not that technique doesn't have importance, but it's like the word is the link to ideas, nothing more. So you acquire technique—but then what do you do with it?"

If you're López García, you take it and make paintings full of life



and depth. Even though one sees divergent styles and influences in the artist's work, there is still an overall sense of truth, understanding, and personal perspective unifying the whole. In early paintings such as *Greek Head and Blue Dress* and *The Lamp*, López García's ability to evoke an airy sense of weightlessness and capture the warmth of diffuse golden-hour light contribute to his signature sense of mystery and poignancy. The artist also has a penchant for seemingly ordinary subject matter and a desire to make us see the beauty in the everyday, as in *Sink and Mirror*. His large-scale, panoramic views of Spanish cities look almost photo-realistic from afar, but when



viewed in detail, one sees brushstrokes, shapes, and colors that are impressively impressionistic, geometric, and abstract.

López García has been known to take years—sometimes up to 15—to complete a painting. He progresses slowly and expertly, never sacrificing the development of the idea or feeling in service of a hasty finish. In a 1985 lecture at Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo, in Madrid, the artist stated, "It is very difficult to know why we paint, yet this is not something I need to know: What compels us to paint is emotion. And that emotion must come out in

**View of Madrid From  
Martínez Campos**  
1960, oil on board,  
48 x 96. Private  
collection.

one way or another, even if the painting is only half-finished. It is entirely possible that it will never be finished, but once you approach the point of expressing that which moved you to paint, the work is not futile anymore. It has an emotion that is indistinct."

From the beginning, López García knew he had to blaze his own trail through the vacillating trends of contemporary art, one that reflected his personal experiences and beliefs and one that wasn't based on technical mastery alone. One of the most telling comments the artist made in his interview with APVM was, "When my uncle taught

me, painting came to me with great ease, with great ease. But this can be deceiving, because you can be very talented and have nothing to say."

Over the course of his career, López García has made it his mission to ensure that he has a message worth sharing, regardless of what medium he uses to express it. His roots in classical training and the influence of conceptually based contemporary art allowed him to achieve this goal and arrive at a level of skill and substance that embodies the best of both artistic worlds. **A**

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