

artist profile

A l v a r S u ñ o l

Painting Passions

The art of Spaniard Alvar Suñol's may be rooted in his culture, but it "speaks to the world."

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For more than 30 years, Alvar Suñol has been one of Spain's most collected artists. His art reflects the passions that he believes are universal in the human community, while effectively expressing the sensibility of his own Spanish culture.

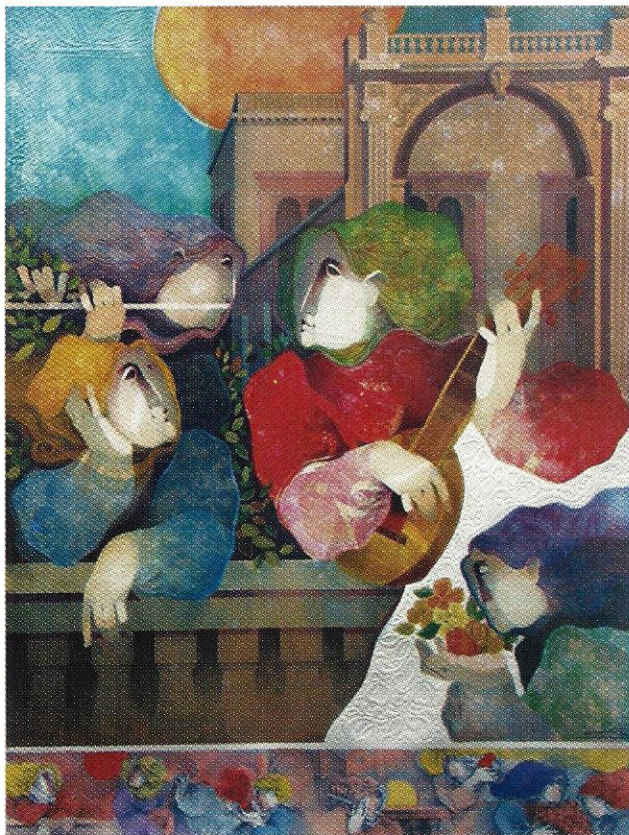
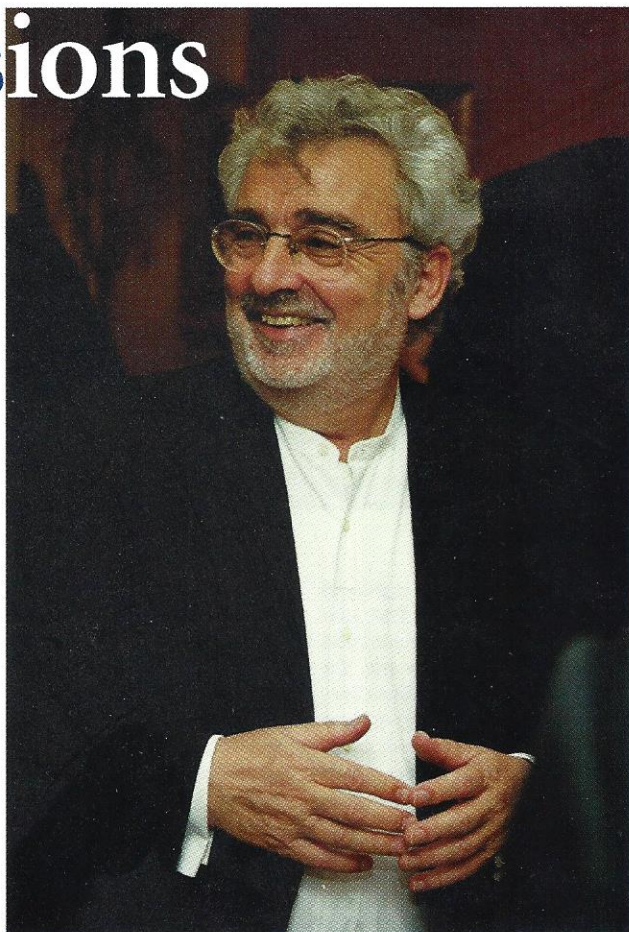
"Good art," says Alvar, "speaks to the world and reflects the artist's origins." Alvar's origins are found in Catalonia, Spain, which lies in the northeastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, bordering France. The area is steeped in history. In fact, the cit-

izens of Barcelona, an ancient port city in Spain founded by the Romans in 15 B.C., have spoken Catalan as their native language for more than a thousand years.

Alvar as a Young Artist

As a child, Alvar showed an exceptional ability to draw and was more interested in sketching in the margins of his school books than in learning their contents. At the age of 13 he began contributing to the family income by taking jobs calling for artistic talent, such as decorating ceramic cups, bowls and vases.

Encouraged by his parents and by his brother-in-law, well-known painter



◀ "Concierto de Tarde"

Joaquim Lema, Alvar set out to discover his vocation by applying to Barcelona's famous Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes de San Jorge. Further studies and travel ensued, taking him to areas in Spain where he became acquainted with the works of El Greco, Velasquez and Goya. After years of study and two years in Spain's army stationed in Morocco, Alvar had his first one-man show in Barcelona, and subsequently received a grant from the Institut Francais in Barcelona for a study trip to Paris, France. Then, in the summer of 1959, he moved there. The Paris art critic, Jacques Lassaigne, saw in Alvar's art the impact of the late 19th century Catalan naturalists, relatively unknown outside Spain, who had inspired Alvar to paint in a style which future critics would compare with that of the Mexican muralists.

Lassaigne wrote, "Alvar Suñol painted big peasant figures, which seemed to be carved in a wooden mass and in which the body formed a cross. He wishes to illustrate the mysteries of life, work, birth and death." Alvar, who knew nothing of the Mexican mural-

ists at the time, was working in the tradition of "social denunciation," as he later described his youthful endeavors on behalf of social justice. Lassaigne's artist support served him well in Paris and later around the world, bringing him opportunities for shows elsewhere in Europe, the United States and Japan.

During his 10 years in Paris, Alvar experimented intensively with lithography. But not until the 1970s did Alvar develop the imagery and the thematic obsessions that characterize his mature art. Paris brought him into contact with Marc Chagall, who he admired both for his artistic fantasy and his fidelity to his Russian-Jewish heritage.

"The painting of Marc Chagall is one hundred percent poetic," Alvar once said, praising Chagall's images in the same way that his own works were once praised by Sebastia Gasch, the Catalan critic. "Chagall is a poet without ceasing to be a consummate painter," said Gasch.

Never an imitator, Alvar obtained from Chagall neither a style nor a vocab-



"Concierto de Mediodía" ▲

ulary, but rather the freedom to abandon naturalistic verisimilitude. In 1967, Alvar painted "L'Angel" in a manner that would soon become his own unique style. The works that followed featured figures floating through a space marked by emblems of Spanish life, such as domestic interiors, musical instruments, plates of fruit, vases of flowers, doves and village skylines. The face that appears in all his art, the Romantic face with streaming hair, signifies for Alvar all of humanity. "In the end we are all alike," says Alvar, "with the same emotions and the same needs."

In the book, "Alvar: Thirty Years of Lithography," author Maria Fortunata Prieto Barral describes his accomplishment as a joyful lyricism. "In his canvases and lithographs, there is a delicious repertoire of angel-women, virgin-muses, celestial musicians and poets that appear as a blessing in ideal places where violence or fear or impiety cannot exist," says Barral. "Figures and objects, villages and invented landscapes, fruits and flowers that want to be more than a mere still life, pigeons that might be the messengers of ineffable announcements—it all appears weightless, even the villages seemed to float in the sweet immateriality of dreams."

From the 1970s to the present, his art celebrates life, conveying to the spectator an appreciation of the values and habits of simple people—values and habits that he considers universal, such as romantic and familial love; conversations that take place while enjoying food and wine; nostalgia; the pleasure of the senses; the joy brought by music and the other arts. Ever present

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are flowers, doves, apples, watermelons, checkered floors and tablecloths, musical instruments, and Spanish lace—all icons for Alvar of the Mediterranean life.

For the last 25 years, Alvar has worked with the master printer, Juan Rodriguez, in his atelier, ArtLitho, in the town of Rubí, outside Barcelona. There, Alvar transfers the picture in his mind onto the zinc plates, adding the colors successively to the evolving image by using a separate zinc plate for each color. Like many of his contemporaries, Alvar uses large zinc plates instead of stone, because the size of his prints and

the number of his colors would make stone prohibitively more expensive. For his recent lithographs, Alvar has used as many as 14 colors. Each lithograph requires its own zinc plate and its own drawing. After the paper is taken through the press, a separate time for each color, Alvar personally inspects each run to ensure his desired results. From there, Alvar takes his lithographs to an embossing atelier where he again works the design, adding embossing that complement the printed composition. In his private studio, Alvar hand watercolors the remark portion of the lithograph. The final step is to hand sign and number each piece.

Living the Good Life

Today, Alvar lives in an ancient Catalan village, Tiana, 20 minutes from Barcelona. His house sits high on a hilltop, visible to most of the village's inhabitants. The white, multilevel contemporary home with a red tile roof sits amongst a carefully tended garden, where in the summer such flowering

▼ "Concierto de Noche"



plants as purple and red bougainvillea, pink begonias and impatiens grow. Beyond the house and farther up the hill, an abandoned pigeon coop sits, where Alvar once raised doves. Finally, facing the Mediterranean are a swimming pool and Alvar's studio.

It's there in his studio that Alvar continues to create a universe where people commune with one another in intimate spaces—talking, eating, painting, playing music and gazing out of windows. It is a world without industry and technology that remains untouched by globalization.

And it is a world whose center is an ancient Catalan village.

For more information about the work of Alvar Suñol, call D.E. Fine Arts at 770-457-8008; e-mail alewis@decorative-expressions.com; visit www.de-fineart.com.

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