

CIRCUS!

FERNANDO BOTERO

Following his work on Abu Ghraib, Fernando Botero took up a new theme: the circus. In May 2009, Beatriz Manz interviewed Botero about his inspiration for these recent works.

BM: The Circus presents an extraordinary view of many things that go beyond the performance. The light, color, style, space and poignancy touch the viewer. Why did you choose this theme?

FB: While I was in a small Mexican town on the Pacific coast, I went to a circus that had arrived one day. I found it especially attractive because it was a poor circus, like those that came to Medellín when I was a child — a group of poor people who did everything, from selling tickets and ice cream to confronting a toothless lion, walking the tightrope, swinging on the trapeze, juggling, etc. It was a very Latin American version of a universal theme.

BM: Had you been thinking about the circus for a long time or was there a specific moment of inspiration?

FB: Not really. It was a revelation that came at that moment. I was aware that the circus had been a very attractive theme for many well-known and lesser-known artists, a subject dignified in the work of Renoir, Seurat, Lautrec, Picasso, Chagall, Léger, Calder and many others. Nonetheless, I had never dealt with it. I began to reflect on the multiple possibilities worth painting and the poetry that runs through the theme, and I decided to do something. That something is more than 120 oils and 200 drawings. For the moment, I have nothing more to say.

BM: What touches you most about the Mexican circus?

FB: As I said before, the circus is universal. It exists everywhere, including Mexico with its Mexican touch. There is no other human activity that presents the visual artist with the human body in poses like the circus. Just think of the contortionist, the tightrope walker, etc. At the same time, there is the poetry that captures the philosophy of life: nomadic people who live in wagons and who have the circus as the permanent background of their lives.

BM: What do the paintings mean to you?

FB: Painting this series, I felt a great liberty in the color, the movement, the theme. There is no justification for a Latin American to paint camels and lions if he's not painting the circus. Much of that liberty has stayed with me in the new themes, the traditional subjects of painting, that I am currently working on.

Beatriz Manz is a professor of Geography and Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley.

RIGHT:

“Trainer”

128 x 100 cm, 2008, oil on canvas.

All images from Circus appear courtesy of Fernando Botero.





LEFT:

“Trapeze Artist”

178 x 100 cm, 2007, oil on canvas.

BELOW:

“Tightrope Walker”

151 x 101 cm, 2007, oil on canvas.

RIGHT:

“Contortionist”

103 x 84 cm, 2007, oil on canvas.

FOLLOWING PAGES:

“The Flying Eagles”

99 x 137 cm, 2008, oil on canvas.











LEFT:
"Trainer with Dog"
163 x 117 cm, 2008, oil on canvas.

RIGHT:
"Tiger"
143 x 97 cm, 2008, oil on canvas.

BELOW:
"Trainer with Lion Cubs"
125 x 168 cm, 2007, oil on canvas.





"Circus Family"
153 x 176 cm, 2008, oil on canvas.