

## El viejo, la pollera y el mar

Desde 1956 su pincel plasma escenas típicas locales. ¿Por qué un artista que no entiende bien español no quiere pintar otra cosa?

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The story written by Ernest Hemmingway *The old man and the sea* deal, among other topics, about a blue-eyed Spaniard who arrives in exile in Cuba and manages to integrate himself into the community thanks to his skill as a fisherman. Al Sprague, the man who dedicates his life to painting pollera and Panamanian rural scenes, lives something similar. He is 'zonian', but feels Panamanian. His passion is the sea, blue as the color of his eyes.

At 75, he struggles with himself, against every muscle in his face and perhaps also against his memory to launch a line of honest pride. 'I am from Colón. I speak Spanish but I listen (understand) very little. '

He has the hairstyle of a rebellious child, white beard and his look seems to reflect the restlessness of the sea.

'WE DO NOT WANT YOU'

-Hey Natasha, can you grab your cat ?, the painter tells his public relations partner Natasha Cadavid.

In the middle of the interview, the plastic artist fixes his gaze on a white Persian who bursts into the room and takes the opportunity to bring up the subject of asthma, which he suffers from his youth.

As a teenager, one day while walking through the Canal Zone, his father - a New Yorker auditor of the 'Pan Canal', who came to the Isthmus in the 1930s and taught him to love Panamanian traditions - picked him up in the car, He took him to a cafe and explained that due to his bad behavior and low grades in school, he would enlist in the army, the 'Army'.

The day of the physical tests would arrive and his respiratory condition would prevent him from entering the gringo militia. The future of Sprague would then be in the hands of his mother, who gave him one of his canvases and his oil paintings - she and almost all his family painted - and told him to get on the car, to come out and paint a painting. 'Mom, but I do not want to,' he

protested. 'Go,' was the last thing his progenitor told him before Sprague discovered himself among brushstrokes, color palettes and fabrics.

#### PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE FASHION

His paintings are, more than a window or a perspective of something, an object with movement. The shapes and the volumes seem to be diluted where light and colors meet, a remarkable influence of the Impressionist current that was born in France.

#### FISHING, DIVERS AND SHIPWRECK

Sprague is fond of fishing. Most of her youth remembers her with the sea breeze caressing her face.

He remembers the 500 pounds of the grouper that was made one day. And he does not forget the other 300 pounds that when he was fishing he got the rope around his neck. The fish came to drag him more than 100 feet deep.

The painter also sank in the middle of the Pacific when the 21-foot boat that made its way from the island of San Jose at more than 60 kilometers per hour hit a manta ray. It floated about 360 feet deep ... It has lost count of the times it has seen sharks. 'If you dive, you will see them many times'.

But in his paintings, Sprague resorts to any color except that of death or an experience close to it. Art does not get dirty.

#### BETWEEN THE BRUSH AND THE BOOM

In the Sprague school he was a student so little applied that he even failed in art. But in the midst of the red numbers I got at Balboa High School, a generous qualification emerged in English.

He always liked to write. Songs, for example, in which he plays the harmonica and the ukulele in his free time, right after dinner and painting. Your daily routine.

But he also spends time cultivating his prose. The Mahogany tree ('The Mahogany Tree', 2010) is a series of stories that he wrote when he taught art in his alma mater, and he read them to his students every Friday.

The second book was published this year in April, Vendaval ('Windswept'), a bilingual youth novel written in English and Spanish.

The third came to light also this year, The Clear Blue Line, which deals with free diving and shooting fish. 'I dived for 25 years and tried to write about the people with whom I practiced it,

what we did as young people, sharks, love affairs and being submerged at 40 or 50 feet deep, just waiting, without air and seeing fish go by ', he recalls.

A good part of Sprague's paintings also pay tribute to daily life in the Panama Canal

Recently, he painted three pieces of 40'x60 'in which he captured the expansion of the Interoceanic Canal. And in the coming days, in the framework of the centenary of the architectural wonder, tribute will be paid.