

## TORAL AND THE SUITCASES

Mario Vargas Llosa

When Cristóbal Toral knew that a man had arrived at the Moon for the first time, he rented an astronaut suit, and dressed in this manner, helmet included, went out to the streets of Madrid to exhibit himself. By doing so, he wanted to show his joy before the world for this great feat of imagination, science and technology, which permitted human beings to cross stellar spaces and set foot on that extinguished star which, from time immemorial, encouraged fantasy and dreams, and appeared in all classical or romantic love metaphors.

I would have loved to see him in that guise. I can imagine him perfectly: small, glittering and well-built, astonishing passers-by in the city centre of Madrid with his incredible costume and, also, with his happiness and vital energy, that contagious force he exudes and which has been preceding him in life as a ship's figurehead. There was a lot of affectation in that theatrical gesture, of course, but at the same time, a genuine hidden exaltation for that feat, which gathered, as in a bundle, the different recurrent obsessions of his painting: space and weightlessness, the reality of scientific knowledge and the fantastic world of imagination, rootlessness and journeys.

Although he is afraid of flying and (physically) does not move around much, I doubt whether there is any other painter, living or dead, who is more of a traveller than Toral. Few have gone as far from such humble and difficult beginnings and none has shaped such a rich and suggestive visual mythology of exodus, departure, movement and change as that which enliven his paintings. Only for this, it could be said of him that he is at the peak of modernity, as is it not true that our time is the time of journey par excellence, the time when the world shrank as if wearing a contracting skin and made its remotest extremities available to all mortals, the time of frenzied hordes of tourists, and of dramatic emigrations? Some of them in pursuit of pleasure, others fleeing from hate and death, in search of a better destination, or persecuted and expelled; by choice or by lack of alternative, human beings move around today as never before in history, and the borders that still exist are continuously trespassed, unable to hold back the moving crowds. That world possessed by the demon of transit, the one we have to live in, found its visionary password in Toral's brushstrokes. But, fortunately, his work not only consists of contemporary life and recent experiences, it is also old and timeless, as the stars that light up the night or the twisted Holm Oak trees of the Andalusian mountains where he was raised.