
Counter criticism: Art, market, and system hacking

By: Mauricio Escuela
09/10/2024



I just watched the movie ***Mi Obra Maestra***, written and produced by two geniuses, Andrés Duprat and Mariano Cohn. This is a movie that treasures the dynamism and rhythm of these two filmmakers who, in recent times, have released outstanding productions and have set the standard in filmmaking. We are living times where the moral vision of movies and the industry as such is paramount. These are times of cultural cancellation. So, if you do not follow the tide, you are not accepted. Series are made only if they are politically correct and the intelligence of the message behind the scripts is not privileged. In fact, in Hollywood there is a whole crisis with the profitability of films since the public has rejected this wave of correction that remakes sagas, deforms them and interferes with matters of inclusive politics for which these stories were not made. The Duprat-Cohn duo is one of the few who, in the midst of this plague that ravages movie theaters, continue to do something that is only committed to themselves.

Mi Obra Maestra is a film about two people dedicated to the art world,

and the contradictions of the plot arise from the situations that occur subject to this condition. Arturo is a gallery owner with years of experience who has seen all the fashions and circumstances pass by, but that does not detach him from his friendship with painter Renzo Nervi, a person who bears the mark of the beast in his own genius. And one of the themes that this film puts in the spotlight is that of authenticity versus the inauthentic. That is, what really has value versus that which is hypostatized, imposed by fashions, by the market or by the current banality. Although it seems that Nervi's time has passed, the gallery owner is clear about the value of this work that speaks to posterity. Art is the victim of the injustices of a system that weighs it in dollars and measures it superficially.

But Arturo is clear and the whole film hovers around his conflicts with falsehood, with the lies of buyers and with the need for art to have validation in itself. Renzo, on the other hand, is a man who looks reality square in the face and does not share it, he faces it and breaks into pieces, he shatters himself in order to maintain the independence of his voice. Not only does he live in misery full of animals that he can barely support, but he has not sold a painting for a long time, but he continues to do the same without caring about the bad opinion of critics or the darts of fortune. Arturo, who values ??him, knows that this path will lead Nervi to his disappearance and tries to help him in various ways.

The filmmaking duo behind this film vindicates the values ??of art and this is evident in the figure of Nervi. The latter is not interested in being cancelled, he does not care that there are critics willing to lynch him or being negatively categorized according to a prudish morality that builds nothing or contributes nothing. The painter always built his work with aplomb and placed it in the spotlight. He does not want to please the powerful or the kings and refuses to work on commission. In fact, one of the most memorable passages is when he mocks the Larssens, a Nordic family of millionaires who ask the artist for a work that highlights the business legacy of said lineage. For Nervi, all opportunities are for making art and this will always be a weapon of liberation, first of all from a personal approach. This is the type of film that should be in movie theaters and perhaps in schools, to show children the form of critical thinking and not the conformism with the world that the art of correction

sometimes imposes on them.

But let's get to the subject of political correctness. Renzo is an older man, who belongs to a truly rebellious, hippie generation that challenged conventions and lived among drinks and jokes. That was the bohemian life of his youth in which he had the success that took him to Olympus. In the film, the cultural clash with a present in which other values ??exist is evident. That is, it is no longer about real rebellion, but about a simulation where everything must be correct, about a do-goodism that seems harmless and about a docility that does not suit him. For this reason, Renzo crashes into a car and almost dies. This is the accident that symbolically expresses the disaffection between one and another generation of creators. Those from before, always authentic, cannot follow the path of correctness and are going to be run over. The scriptwriters sought the perfect meaning for this event and as such the passage becomes a turning point for the film. The system is impenetrable and also lethal, capable of removing the artist from this world and of making all that immense legacy disappear. But Arturo, who knows all this, shows a solidarity with his friend that moves us and shows us the need in hard times for the real and the authentic to continue to prevail.

Mi Obra Maestra has as its central theme the conflict between the market and art and how Arturo mounts a marketing operation to fake Renzo's death and thus sell his work at high prices. Not only did he manage to make the artist, in hiding, live with dignity, but he also showed the world the falseness of the appraisers of art works, who are only capable of measuring based on superficialities such as the death of the author. Both of them go to live in an isolated house in the countryside and produce paintings for the greatest collectors in the world. The metaphor of this event is presented to us as evidence that we live in a world where what is sold to us has an ironic, sometimes banal value and that art is the only thing capable of moving us towards something truly moving. In this case, it seems that the only valuable work is the friendship between these two men that is presented to us as a rescue of the human condition in difficult times. The detail is that they are discovered and make this hacking of the system their last and greatest element of performance. In this way, Duprat and Cohn give us

a work that touches on the highest events of the conceptual and transform this opportunity into a moment of reflection and contributions from cinema to that immense debate that is the human condition related to art and representation.

Where are we going, human beings, who are validating processes that are not transcendent, such as a death, in order to value the work of an artist? Real art goes beyond that and is the message that the film sends us from its moral height, and this is transmuted to other areas of life that today have been invaded by ideas that do not agree with the reality and depth of our existence. Art is a reflection of many, but it is not the definitive question. What is happening to us as humanity is that we are trying to make the universe governed by anti-values ??that do not build, but rather separate, destroy, undo. In the message of the film, it seems that everything was going to end with Renzo's death after the accident, but that is precisely when the film begins to speak to us of a truth beyond. The script's mastery leads us to assessments that are not superficial at all, but rather constitute the hard core of a reality that hurts us and that is current in art salons and in life.

Before hacking the system, when the painter is in bed recovering from the accident, he and Arturo relive the good times of their youth in a photo album. A beautiful metaphor of reality versus the pain of the absence of reality in a present that is governed by market operations. Both, gallery owner and artist, constitute a front of combat against the falsehood of these times and manage to put moral correctness aside, so that what is really important can survive. Conceptual art as the highest expression of beauty is present in Renzo's pieces and the gallery owner knows this and takes it with the wisdom of a friend to success. Although we are in a time of films full of tragedy, with sad endings, the film is not such a thing and offers us a friendly view of both characters.

Perhaps the filmmakers are sending us the message that not everything has to be negative in a world that feeds on pain, that sells pain, that produces pain. The artist's joy and tranquility contrast with the misery of his beginnings and with the reality of a moral correctness that cancels, persecutes and does not humanize. The artist has renounced

everything that separates him from his mission in the world and now only the production of beauty is left for him. It is perhaps too ideal a vision for a subject full of dark areas such as the relationship between art and the market. But not everything has to be as the big audiovisual companies sell it. And even there, the Duprat-Cohn duo shows their unique greatness.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
