

XAVIER CARBONELL PAINTING, MUSIC, POETRY AND SPORT



« *Sprinter* » (1988). Oil painting.
International Olympic
Committee, Lausanne.

By *Ramón Balius Juli*

For just over a year now, a very large picture has been on display at the IOC's headquarters. The work, an original by the Catalan artist Xavier Carbonell, represents a powerful sprinter running across in front of a classical Greek column with, engraved on the pediment, the words "*CITIUS ALTIUS FORTIUS*".

Xavier Carbonell was born in 1942 in Olot, a Catalan town with a long-standing and significant artistic tradition. His father, Lluís Carbonell, an eminent sculptor and painter, Director of the eponymous Academy of Art and lecturer at the Olot School of Fine Arts, guided his first attempts at drawing, painting and sculpture, instructing him in basic academic knowledge and, at the same time, inspiring in him a love of the artistic profession. From 1952 to 1961, he was a pupil at the School of Fine Arts in his home town, where he studied perspective, etching, ceramics, enamel work and stenography. In 1957, he abandoned an undistinguished attempt to study business and devoted himself entirely to art, participating in a number of collective exhibitions and joining the group known as "Art Juvenil", whose members had a distinctive style.

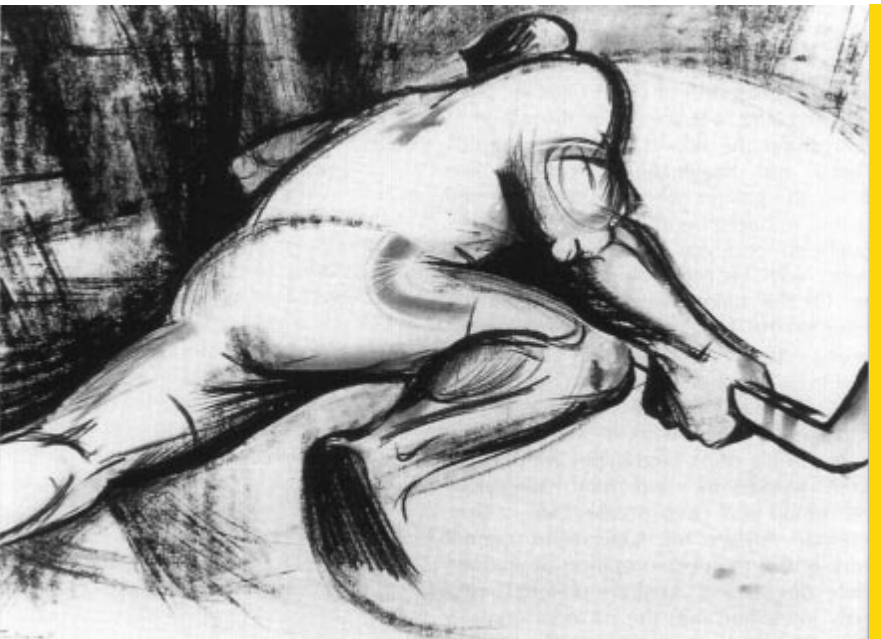
Carbonell's early works show the influence of the traditional concepts of the Olot landscape school, but very soon, he dropped its typical elements - trees, beech groves, marshes - in favour of austere rural landscapes and city-scapes, viewed head-on without perspective. During this period, his palette was fairly subdued, although varied, featuring greys, browns, ochres and oranges - worked with a palette knife as he applied a thick coat of colour - separated by linear brushstrokes.

In the seventies, Carbonell visited Paris and various places in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. His colours grew lighter and took on a greater luminosity; the rural landscapes are delimited solely by colour and the city-scapes become more detailed, with facades, stores, shop-windows and interiors, in which such features as railings or a curtained window, trinkets or flowers seem to illustrate the poetic possibilities of simple things. In the exhibitions of that period, alongside the works I have just described, he presented woodblock prints and landscapes of Majorca, Ibiza, Minorca or Cadaqués, with many views of sea and sky, in stark contrast with the brightness of the white houses or the sails of the boats.

At the start of the eighties, women began to feature strongly in the works of Xavier Carbonell. This period culminated in the exhibitions he put on in Olot in spring 1988 and later in Barcelona in the winter of 1989 under the title "Opera y concepto" (Opera and Imagination). In these two shows, the painter, who has always worked against a background of operatic music, sought to combine his intimate passion, music, with his professional calling, painting. Of this union was born a collection featuring the heroines of various operas, among them "La Bohème", "Otello", "Fausto", "Tannhäuser", "Tosca" and "Carmen". Besides this pictorial tribute to womankind his recent work includes frequent scenes of big cities, landscapes with magnificent woodlands, and rural panoramas with broad and deep perspective. A characteristic feature of Carbonell's current work is the frequent presence of sfumato white doves, and numbers or letters perfectly integrated into the pictorial context. Recently, he has exhibited in Madrid, Zurich, Geneva and Vienna, and on a commission from President Samaranch,

"Voiles-243" (1984). Oil painting.





"Hockey" (1977). Oil painting. Olympic Museum, Lausanne.

protagonists at the acme of their action. Drawings like "Cycling", "Hockey", "Running" or "Rugby", and the oils "Rugby-4" and "Sprinter" referred to above, are prime examples of this energetic and vigorous type of sport.

Nevertheless, and in contrast with these robust athletic figures, we find again and again in Carbonell's work delightful and delicate women cyclists, sometimes soft and indistinct, elegantly dressed, not as main subjects but hinted at somewhere in the landscape.

With these images, Xavier Carbonell shows us that it is possible to find a poetic vision of sport, which is itself reflected in some canvases on which he has created a composition of airy racing sails. Indeed, in the artistic work of Xavier Carbonell, we find music, poetry and sport.

R. B. J.

he created the work "La Paz y el Sol" (Peace and Sun), which the IOC gave to Unesco in 1989 for its headquarters in Paris.

It may be a surprise to learn that this artist, musician and poet, has created works of undoubted worth on the theme of sport. Carbonell probably paints and draws sport because sport is an element of our society, and hence the artist feels himself obliged to capture and portray it. Xavier Carbonell has been producing sports-inspired works for many years, participating in various "Bienales Internacionales del Deporte en las Bellas Artes" (International Biennials of Sport in the Fine Arts" and in two editions of "Artesport" in Bilbao, where he was a finalist in 1974. In 1973, with an oil painting on the theme of rugby, he won the National Sports Delegation prize in Olot. All these works possess an extraordinary strength, as they portray the athlete

Following page : "Rugby4" (1977). Oil painting. Olympic Museum, Lausanne.

