

# Mónica Giron: Nature and Civilization

1992, Estudio Lisenberg,  
catalogue, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Aproximately a hundred years ago, William H. Hudson wrote about the geography of Southern Argentina: It was... the feeling experienced ongoing back to a mental condition we have outgrown, which I had in the Patagonian solitude ... What has truly entered our soul and become psychical is our environment", he concluded meditating upon the long lasting impact of his expedition to Rio Negro, "that wild nature in which and to which we were born at an inconceivably remote period, and which made us what we are. <sup>(1)</sup> The English naturalist's statement seems fit to describe how the desolate Southern scenery took hold of Mónica Giron's imagination, as she spent her childhood and adolescence between her native patagonian province and the pampean grassland. Giron, (Bariloche, 1959), an Argentine by birth and a Swiss citizen by descent, studied art and semiology at the Ecole Supérieure d' Art Visuel, in Geneva (1979-1984). Currently in Buenos Aires, her intuitive understanding of the natural landscape merges with conceptual strategies in a body of work that offers a setting for a complex and dynamic dialogue about nature and its opposite, civilization.

Aware of the construction of signification in art history, Giron has partly focused her attention on the representation of nature throughout the great Western landscape painting tradition between the 18th and the 19th century. Giron's statement about nature relate to notions of the sublime in art. The sublime encompasses here that sensibility which may be traced from 19th century European and American landscape painters' embracement of an aesthetic of awe, immensity and stillness, down to the Abstract Expressionist's exaltation of raw emotions and primordial concepts. In Giron's painting, nature becomes the means to reach the absolute --a largely primordial and silent territory-- through intuition and thought.

A psychic and philosophical investment in the exploration of both the idea of the absolute and a natural environment of absolutes --primordial, timeless and still-- first led Girón to venture into notions of the intangible in landscape painting. In a series called Territories (1988-1990), she dealt with structural modes of dematerialization through bird's eye views of earth or continental masses enveloped by clouds.

Water, rock, light and atmosphere --born after the basic iconographic elements of transcendental landscape painting-- are the fundamental elements of Giron's recent works. Giron's unrippled pools of water in *Arrival and Patagonia* (both 1991) are metaphors for unlimit-edness and timelessness. In *Limit I, Limi II* (both 1991), *Patagonia*, and many other paintings, the natural antiquity of rocks replaces the architectural ruin, a landmark in the Romanic landscape genre. Cultural time yields to the infinity of geological time.

The concept of unlimited extension is also present in *Property* (1991), where flatlands and cattle refer the spectator to a quintessentially Argentine scene--the estancia. Giron recontextualizes this hiper-camp national image. *Property* is an imaginary fenceless territory where cattle has the ability to levitate, as indicated by the shadows of two cows "flying" beyond the observer's scope of vision. This painting is a non sequitur to its title and a tongue-in-cheek to those who associate nature with land ownership and profitable resources.

Giron arrives at the idea of infinitude and boundlessness through other means in paintings such as *Mountain Range* (1990) and *La Brama* (1991), among others. By virtue of numerous repetitions of a figuration --rock animal-- she defines a matrix or grid with the potential to grow infinitely. The picture may be understood as a fragment, cropped from a larger fabric. The viewer is compelled to acknowledge an environment rather than a painting.

Signs of human activity alter nature in some of Giron's paintings. Metonymic objects always replace human figuration in canvasses such as *Arrival* and *Genealogical Tree* (1991). The illogical coexistence of images (the boat anchored at the top of a mountain, in the former) questions the true existence of human presence in these territories. In many paintings, wilderness threatens to master the colonizer, stripping him off the superfluous garments of civilization. The ice-made boat in *Arrival* appears to be melting, thus being absorbed by the landscape. Wilderness and colonist define another concept central to Giron's art: the untried frontier, reaffirming the idea of a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, or the choice of vacant nature over civilization.

Giron's approach to nature is exalted and subjective, emanating from a modernist sensibility for which arrival at absolute ideas and emotions is achieved by plunging into the self. Yet this vision merges with her conviction of art's cognitive and modifying potential, offering the opportunity to reflect on nature as the result of human intervention.

Marta S. Garsd, 1992

Text by Marta Garsd, for the catalogue of exposition at Estudio Lisenberg, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1992.

**Notes:**

(1) William H. Hudson, *Idle Days in Patagonia*, London: Chapman and Hall, 222,225.