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Marcelo Pacheco visits Mónica Giron in Buenos Aires. Studio visit In Absentia By Marcelo Pacheco

A very large shed full of worktables and tools, located in the neighborhood of Barracas, a suburb of Buenos Aires which lies to the south, towards the port called La Boca: Here ten young artists have been working for a year on a collective project financed by the Fundacion Antorchas and directed by Pablo Suarez, Luis Fernando Benedit, and Ricardo Longhini. The interaction between the grant recipients and the teaching of the three tutors assures a constant dynamics in the creative process and in the realization of their artworks.

Mónica Giron, born in 1959, has participated since April, 1994 in the Barracas Workshop, which has turned into her studio –a place for the preparation of her projects, for reflection and for action. Born in Patagonia, in San Carlos de Bariloche, Swiss by blood and education, raised between the Argentinean tradition of the conquest of the desert, the survival of indigenous cultures, and the scenario of nature as an accomplice in its constant presence, Giron studied in Geneva between 1979 and 1984. “There I created installations and drew. I worked on the topic of cultural migration. I used photographs from the archives of colonists, exiles, people in the war, and I worked allot with material from the Argentina of the last century.” Ten years ago she decided to live in Buenos Aires.

Migration and the symbolic construction of a territory are permanent personal experiences for all who recognize their roots in the European mentality, their memories in a southern infancy, their recent past in the cohabitation with a great urban concentration. Geography and history mesh in the artist; personal and family itineraries, both real and fictitious, model her in her activity. The need to belong, the configuration of

her own memory and of a collective history, are woven amid decisions, individual affirmations, possibilities, and dreams of the community. Thinking of herself as Argentinean from the real and imaginary distance of Patagonia, feeling herself to be Central European by origin and heritage, living in a cosmopolitan and xenophobic city like Buenos Aires, all of these reiterate the personal experience of arriving and beginning; each day she is in need of a small memory in order to construct the where, the how. The established identity explodes, the initial question returns, over and over, in order to build a less strange and more loving atmosphere of destiny.

“In Buenos Aires I began to paint. For two years I dedicated myself to fitting a body of paint over the landscape. The canvases dealt with the modification of a territory after its more or less rational appropriation. There were continental masses in the middle of the sea, landscapes with animals, and trees. I painted about twenty-three large canvases with these three motifs.” In these paintings the animals are gathered together in masse, colorful, alien; summoned by her own images, Girón represents on her canvases catalogs of a real fauna and geography. The esthetic intervention in nature reorders relationships and location, it constructs a directed stare.

Later, in 1993, her weaving arrived. “It was a matter of resolving the need to work with what I have. I know how to weave, in my home we wove, my mother wove.” Imagining women’s wraps for Patagonian animals; the daily act of weaving caps, vests, stockings, shirts; hanging on a wall, in interminable succession, those funereal suits, those hot trousseaux, clothing that protects and encloses, that covers and that kills; exposing silhouettes of wild animals imagined in their nakedness, covered by multicolor wool; strange and suggestive forlorn objects, in their absence of bodies, in their animality, in their childlike warmth. With her

weaving Giron recovers three-dimensional activity as she envelopes with wool ghosts that summon another reality: the one observed from memory. “One of the things that gives strength to these pieces consists in the fact that we have all woven at some point, or we have watched someone weave, or we have put on a sweater. It is an almost vital experience.”

The later torsos/objects suggest tree bark; they are set aside, layer upon layer, with the dryness of wounded wood and a nacreous Light from their interiors. Again the non-presence, what went away leaving its traces, a profile or mark. The bodies of resin, multiplied one upon another, acquire the power of the fragmentary, nature is hollowed out in its dualities: tree/woman, life/death, full/empty; the interiors shine like pearls, the breasts are folded over and over in the centenary textures of artificial cortices.

Giron works by accumulating. Her objects express the strategy of repetition, of insistence; the game is initiated in the succession, in what is piled up, not in the unique, isolated piece. Her “sculptures” announce a constant game of disappearances which are strung together. We must look inside to discover what is missing: bird and woman; the animal and the feminine. Her works are shells which encase, they are there to cover something, they are residues; what is naked is sheltered in the clothing of a woven shirt and of a manufactured corset. Mixed together in her work are the evocation of nature, the reflection on the object –by means of structuralism, conceptualism, and postmodernism– and the blueprint for an essential animalism: the vitality recovered in the artist’s action. “Lived sensations and experiences are transformed into a drawing which later must materialize. Then I seek out the solution, for months.”

Her objects always recall school arts and crafts projects, household chores, the tradition of making things with the hands. Giron appropriates the outside in its symbolic and imaginary presence, manufacturing clothing of another nature in order to recover a way of looking, in order to point out, with a woven or molded gesture, silhouettes that enclose a different word.

Argentina has established the voluntary act of forgetting as a way to annul its historical memory. In this everydayness, time is anesthetized until it produces the sensation of a single flow that moves without will and without accumulation. Violence and fear hinder the construction of a community and they constantly fissure the project of solidarity, the common destiny. Giron seeks to suggest a strategy: to recover a place around the fire, to wrap herself up and to wrap us up, to encompass herself and to encompass us. To card the threads of color, to mold resins, to organize plants, animals, mountains: these are primary acts, attempts to decipher a suspected and premonitory memory. Her objects palpitate in the encounter between infancy and vigil, ambiguity and certainty, irony and the political commentary, fragility and the perdurable. In a society which is breaking apart, the artist gathers and heaps together; in a nation that forgets, Giron affirms and insists.

There is no provocation, only a footnote commentary: mutilated torsos, squashed genitals, covered bodies, classified and ordered nature. To step back and be present; to look and show, to anchor memory with each object that preserves the heat of what was recently made and the trace of the ancient. Ex-votos of a civil ritualism, the social absence named with the Language of the domestic.

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