

For the catalogue of the show at the Ruth Benzacar Gallery in 1999 (Corner Pieces y Obrador)

Mónica Giron, Presences and Absences
Marcelo E. Pacheco

Contrary to what phenomenology –which is always phenomenology of perception– has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes. Contrary to the assurance that Husserl gives us a little further on “the look” cannot “abide”.

Jacques Derrida,
Voice and Phenomenon (1967)

In recent years, Mónica Giron's artistic gestures have consistently been related to the landscapes of her childhood. She has knitted suits for birds from Patagonia; modeled women's torsos that look like the bark of trees from southern Argentina; exhibited gloves of soil, stone and organic remains found in the woods near Bariloche. Her objects and installations partake of Patagonia as natural territory, cultural body and political text. Combining craft and contemporary techniques, she has found a register of her own based on scientific taxonomies and museum displays. The classification of birds, trees and rocks from a distant memory of her school years has given shape to an atlas of nature in Patagonia. At the same time, there were other possible meanings for these domestic forms and real or imitated materials. The richness of Monica's feminine art wrapped in colored wool, wooden and mother-of-pearl corsets, stone and earthen gloves was slowly revealed; its homey warmth, knitting and sewing, choosing buttons, leaves, sand and bark, has proven acute.

Giron's works made reference to a context peopled by phantasms and misencounters, revitalizing models and fads of the 1990s. A system of globalized signs and signifieds was interrogated and subjected to in-

dividual and collective tensions. Her taxonomies became political commentaries and structures aware of other meanings and other needs. The message of her works, what they wanted to say, shed light on other fields of perception and consciousness. The insistent presence of absent bodies, hands and torsos, the obsessive manualness, and the careful listing of animals, plants and minerals were components of a discourse whose latencies were charged with a terrain at once autobiographical and historical, the here-and-now of a continuous present time and of a geography that crossed borders and reformulated limits.

The two installations that Mónica Giron is presenting today after a clearly perceived and prolonged absence are the direct result of personal and artistic experiences in recent years in Buenos Aires. They partake of exhibitions, workshops and encounters in other cities and places. The multiple and extended references to Patagonia have disappeared, as have the allusions to the body. The system based on the notion of inventory has been broken. The absences, mutilations and disappearances have been rendered new presences and other absences.

Corner pieces is first and foremost an enigmatic and seductive work. Scraps of blankets piled up to form circular towers encroach on the space with no apparent logic; organic and parasitical shapes that grow on the walls and floor with their bright ceramic glimmers and colors. Dry and coarse geometrical blankets that are curt and strict despite their range of designs; shapeless, slimy objects, seductively hot, beautiful and obscene, urging us to touch them while dazzling our eyes as they grow unexpectedly, solitary yet confident of their own multiplication. A simple, even shabby interior with cheap gray carpet, a dubious architecture whose corners are full of blankets and ceramics. There is no composition but rather a blocked space; cornered, all we can do is observe from an empty center.

Contrasting forms: some regular and simple, recognizable and repeated in their likeness and insistence; others shapeless, vital and in the making, shaking, in their organicity and ambiguity, at the moment of birth. Contrasting materials: some worn down, cut, industrial and homogenous; others craft-like, gelatinous, cavernous, diverse. Contrasting colors and temperatures: some dull, dingy and cold in their uselessness and age; others exuberant in their color and light, their hot surfaces like Chinese dragons, kind, repulsive and always excessive. Far from her earlier works, this universe of sensation and perception is a new world with no inhabitants or writings; it is beyond knowledge and devoid of presence or metaphor. We simply walk, disconcerted before “the indefinite drift of signs as errance and change of scene, linking re-presentations, one to another without beginning or end.” (Derrida, 1967)

Obrador [Worker] occupies the gallery space with its voices and (un)veiled texts. The impossibility of speech due to full existence and the artistic gesture that attempts to enlighten by means of the repetition of sounds and writings that hide and show themselves. An interplay of presences and absences concealing language and reducing the world to appearances that are (re)discovered in our movements, moving forward and back in space. Two resources are combined: artificially processed human voices in five recordings of the five vowel sounds are heard as the lights on five texts written on the walls turn on; these lights blind and cover the writing with their phosphorescent ink that can only be seen in the dark. Tension between seeing and reading, listening and turning on the lights, darkness and reading, moving and staying still, texts that glow in the dark and vanish with the light. The need to anchor the stammering sound and the blinking light leads us to an expectant reading of texts slippery and suggestive. The entire installation revolves around the (im)possibility of trying-to-say and of representation, the

difference between the imagination of the word and the word imagined, between the word in the world and the perception of the word. *Obrador* is a sounding board on the possibilities of giving real existence to artistic signs charged with meaning. The detours and exigencies that Giron deploys place us at the mercy of disjointed and fleeting sensations. A distress that, like real and poetic experience, is the sensation that dominates this manufactured scene of representations of representations where the only certainty is that everything is happening solely in the present. Our task is to discover the presence of the texts by illuminating the silent darkness with physical phosphorescence and phosphorescence on the level of meaning.

Corner pieces and Obrador shatter our need for arguments and narrations, putting us in a world where we no longer know in the Derridian sense: “This does not mean that we know nothing but that we are beyond absolute knowledge (and its ethical, aesthetic or religious system), approaching that on the basis of which its closure is announced and decided [...] Thus, we no longer know whether what was always presented as a derived and modified re-presentation of simple presentation, as ‘supplement,’ ‘sign,’ ‘writing,’ or ‘trace,’ is not in a necessarily but newly ahistorical sense, ‘older’ than presence and the system of truth, older than ‘history.’”

Marcelo E. Pacheco
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Translation from Spanish by Jane Brodie 2011.

English quotes in Jacques Derrida:

<http://es.scribd.com/doc/24627075/0810103974-Jacques-Derrida-Speech-and-Phenomena-and-Other-Essays-on-Husserl-s-Theory-of-Signs>