

Gallery Action

A Possible Exploration

In *Ejercicios con el modelo terrestre* (2015)(1), Mónica Giron formulated an action—called “Gallery Action”—that was performed many times over the course of the show: five moderators(2) (trained by artist Liv Schulman) engaged in a series of exercises designed by Giron(3) in collaboration with Schulman and transmitted to viewers/participants in the work.

In 1992, Mónica Giron began to express her interest in non-Western ideas and traditions. Taoism and Buddhism, as well as practices bound to esoteric knowledge—“the strength of forms,” “the core self” and “the available energy”—are points of reference that run through her production. Her research is circumscribed by ideas of “chance” and “randomness” tied to the universal modalities that structure the cosmos. This philosophy holds that each element is composed of matter and spirit and that all beings are linked in a network of energy, tangled in its crossings.

Giron heeds particularly closely the thinking and conceptualizations of Feng Shui.(4) A branch of Taoism, Feng Shui studies the effect of relations between forms of nature and forms of urbanism to determine how they might act on both humans that inhabit a specific place and their cultural memories. According to this branch of ontological observation of the world, forms play a determining role in our relationship to the environment and its situation, orientations, color, characteristics, design, and layout.(5)

At the intersection of knowledge of the creation of forms in the terms of Western classical art, on the one hand, and Taoist training in Tai Chi—experimental and pragmatic study of knowledges based on Feng Shui—on the other, Giron transfers, by means of this action, an experience centered on the Taoist thesis of the circulation of energy in a habitat.

Inspired by these concepts, Giron explores the exhibition space on the basis of the map of the nine palaces and the magic square (Feng Shui notions). Each of them activates a different quality of the space to formulate an analogy between elements like energy, character, personality, organs, and the potential of the will.

—

Walk over the map of the nine palaces or the magic square. Follow in the footsteps of your moderator. First go in one direction, then cover the same path in the other direction.

(Instruction 1)

The gallery space is divided into nine palaces within which there are five elements: earth, water, metal, air, and fire. The action entails movement from one palace to another: from one to two, from two to three, from three to four, up to nine. Though it may be simple numerically, the succession of movements in the magic square does not consist of straight lines; it is more like an ancient labyrinth. It is impossible to remember the path, whose directions are convoluted and seemingly arbitrary. The gallery is crossed differently on the path away from the starting point and the path back to it, from one side to the other; viewers/participants retrace their steps at times. When the fifth element (earth) is reached, the path is interrupted and the process is started again.

—

Standing straight, stretch your right arm through your index finger. Focus on your finger and start spinning around clockwise with eyes open.

(Instruction 2)

During the training, Giron gave the moderators an action kit: a map with the nine palaces, two drawings by the artist, and a questionnaire to be given to the viewer/participant. Each of those elements performs a distinct function within the methodology.

The action begins when the moderator chooses a spot in the room and gathers the viewers/participants there. Step by step, a rhythm is established between the moderator and the viewers/participants. They walk around the gallery “as if marching.” Viewers/participants and moderators promise to be silent for the entire action, as they walk a path that is intangible for the viewer/participant but pre-established for their moderator.

—

Standing straight, stretch your right arm through your index finger. Focus on your finger and start spinning around counterclockwise with eyes closed.

(Instruction 3)

The preconceived idea of looking at one work after another in a chronological or formal order vanishes and those habitual museographical logics implode. What reigns here instead is the idea of forgetting oneself in the visual to focus on the experience of being seeing. We become involuntary *flan-neurs*. There is no forward or back, no side to side, no right or left. All we have is a series of steps taken at a pace that, whether slow or quick, is always determined by the moderator. Under the direction of the moderator’s silent presence, the viewers/participants cross the gallery.

In their hands, the moderators carry two drawings made by Giron, one blue and one red, one for yang and the other for ying.

In the Tao system, any situation is capable of turning into something else. (Giron)

The paths are based on those drawings by Giron, which are analogous to the works in her “Lazos familiares” [Family Ties] series. The zigzag of the lines walked on is vertiginous but the space, when explored according to the logic of the drawings, transports the viewers/participants elsewhere, inciting inner transformations and changes in mood.

—

Dwell on one piece for five minutes. Look at it carefully, from side to side. Let your gaze float while multiple images captivate you. Let the images take hold of your body. Concentrate while also leaving the rest of your surroundings behind...

(Instruction 4)

When the “Gallery Action” has been completed and its paths explored, the moderator gives each viewer/participant a questionnaire to be filled out at will.

—

In house five, standing straight, spin around in a full circle so that you cover the gallery in its entirety.

(Instruction 5)

By withdrawing the gaze at the impetus of the series of exercises proposed in “Gallery Action,” the viewer/participant establishes bodily and physical contact with the work. Here, visual truth is mitigated and concealed for the sake of an inner search. The object/work is truly born and grows in the subject’s core and, thanks to a turn in the subject’s self, participates in the universe’s process.

Thus, Giron establishes a relationship that runs through all her work, one that could be seen as activating transformation that yields a broader idea of art. The origin of her reflections lies in rethinking the relationship between art and life, between human being and world, between one and origin.

Art is, for Giron, that fluid, dynamic territory in constant motion. It is that principle of beginning where the movement of life and our participation in that movement arises, constant yet mutable.

Where life is bound, even unconsciously, to other lives and where each life, like a microcosm, is bound to the macrocosm whose unfolding is nothing other than the Tao.(6)

Valeria Balut
Buenos Aires, 2015

In Modelo de Ejercicios terrestres, Editorial Arta, Buenos Aires. Argentina, 2016. Insert, pages 73 to 88

Translated from spanish by Jane Brodie

Notes

(1) *Ejercicios con el modelo terrestre*, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Curated by Santiago García Navarro and Valeria Balut.

—

(2) Liv Schulman (artist and performer), Lucía Gasconi (artist), Malén Denis (poet and writer), Sofía Ungar (artist), and Carolina Deffossée (playwright and actress).

—

(3) For the action, Mónica Giron trained Liv Schulman. They had both participated in the “Pomagello Document,” a possible bridge to Aldous Huxley’s perception exercises proposed by D. Graham Burnett and Gabriel Pérez Barreiro in the context of the exhibition *Siete muebles, un mono y dos conejos* (Universidad Di Tella, 2015). Those exercises were based on perception and did not have a direct tie to Feng Shui. Nonetheless, Giron and Schulman drew inspiration from some of the movements performed during those exercises and applied them to Feng Shui in the training of the moderators.

—

(4) Earlier works by Mónica Giron that explore Feng Shui include *Visita guiada, Empujar un ismo* [Guided Tour, Pushing an Ism], MAMBA, 2014 (proto-action); *Cairo 90° Biarritz*, Hotel Ostende, Ostende (Residencia RIIA), 2008; *Centro del Jardín*, MNAD, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2003-2009.

—

(5) Eva Wong, *Libro completo del Feng Shui*, Ed. Gaia Ediciones, Madrid, 2008. (English title: A Master Course in Feng Shui).

—

(6) François Cheng, *Cinco meditaciones sobre la belleza*, Ed. Siruela, 2007. (English title: 5 Meditations on Beauty).