

# ABSTRACTION AGAINST THE LIGHT

Teresa Pereda

My work is based on intuition and observation. I wonder and investigate; I attempt to reveal that which looks at us and speaks to us secretly, in silence. I delve into the elements of water and earth, inside images themselves. I confine myself to what's elemental and essential to matter, to what in matter makes the human being.

I look to abstraction as a strategy to critically interrogate certain aspects of daily life in Latin America. The language I work in is tied to a duality of worlds that coexist in a state of conflict, in a magnetic field of attraction and repulsion that divides us. *Earth* is the element I work with, because it carries symbolic and ideological contents that underscore the values most deeply rooted in American peoples, whether in the pre-Columbian universe or—albeit in disparate and conflictive fashion—today's indigenous, mestizo, and criollo America. By gathering and restituting lands, I make reference to the ancient idea of reciprocity, one of the principles that governs the social relations of indigenous peoples, communities where small sacred acts take precedence in daily life. Steadfast for these peoples is the search for balance, that primordial condition where the delicate correspondence between each part and the whole (individual and community, universe and sacredness) is articulated.

In this context, land as matter means belonging, coming together, and community identification, where we are all equal. I squint. The devastated land calls out to me. I blink. Outlines grow blurry. I perceive *against the light two worlds* clashing in a cultural opposition that wounds us to the core. For twenty-five years, I have been trying, with

my work, to join and bind, to grasp and learn. I restore and experience an age-old native ritual; my skin stretches and dissolves into the earth; my own body is regenerated and healed.

### **A Blue Mark**

Childhood is a universe onto itself, one I never stop remembering. It's as if it were my school book. I can point to two foundational experiences, two events that marked me forever.

One of them has to do to my grandmother, who had a gift for dowsing. I was really little. I remember walking by her side and seeing how the pitchfork she was carrying would sink into the ground; when I would pick it up, the same thing happened. I shared with her an experience that blossomed in my work one way or another, even though I didn't pursue it consciously.

The other experience happened when I was an adolescent. I was taking part in an ancient Mapuche ceremony with my aunt, and they put the "mark of the wind" on me, painting my cheeks blue—a holy color. Why? They didn't tell me and I didn't ask. That blue mark turned out to be magical; it paved my way and let me into a world apart.

Out of a personal commitment, I gradually got closer and closer to the indigenous world. For the past fifteen years, I have formed part of the Vicente Catrunao Pincén-Mapuche *günün ä küna* community, which is dedicated to a process of community re-ethnicization and reconstruction. To that end, I have traveled with fellow members of the community to the bi-annual Rogation days or *nguillatún* held in Picunche communities in northern Neuquén province.

Participation in those events is a form of restoration, a means of grasping the wide and complex world of ceremony and ritual. The Pincén community has chosen me to be a participant, which means I am

a “sister.” In exchange, I have taken on certain obligations. One of them is to “let out the *tayil*”—the sacred chant of women—to strengthen the *quempeu* of the community’s dancers. I delve into that process. We spent a great deal of time together ...

### **From Above to Below**

The aesthetic experience I propose in my art is in keeping with the process I am going through. I am here because I have chosen a spiritual path that is also a field of work, a learning process, a construction that involves my whole person, my art, and what I do as an artist. To carry out my work, I enter into natural cycles and native ancestral time, which is very different from our time. Along with my indigenous brothers and sisters, I learn what I could not learn otherwise: contemplation in community action.

I enact a dynamic that activates a brief challenge. I split in two. It happens today provided it happens tomorrow. The fleeting time between hands vexes me. I join the two banks of a river and return to the mountain. An inevitable relationship between above and below becomes visible, between the landscape I see on the surface and the one that is well beneath us, the underground that we cannot see in our daily lives. On the ground I take in wind, rain, humidity, and frost. Beneath, the still heat and a silence furrowed with rivers that I cannot see with my eyes. The landscape stretches on and on... there where aquifer and underground water, and even volcanic vents, are connected with the center of the earth.

I sink paper into water, and while the water works its way in, tiny particles of earth and dust shift and rest to then slowly settle when the water stills. On a small scale, I make floods, tsunamis, deluges, tidal waves, eruptions, landslides. Their opaque, unfathomable, and enigmatic trace remains. Sediment endures as does the plurality of time. Bearers of geological memory, the works absorb the body of

the landscape insofar as they are the abstract representation of the ground itself.

### **An Abstract Vitality**

Contemporary abstraction and its essence as expanded field of reality have enabled me to implement liberating strategies. My task is bound to the dynamic of relating essential elements, geographic points on drawn paths, and persons in the exchange of lands, in gestures of deliverance and restitution, of tending to and offering over.

I speak of the *earth*, and that generates a dual energy in motion that delves its roots into the native ancestral past as well as a present that is constantly activated. It has the ability to produce and to house life and death, the feminine and the masculine, complementing one another in an unstable unity to shape a whole.

Dust, ground, earth. Rough and permeable, unfathomable and enigmatic surface. I speak with matter—she listens to me, heeds and answers me. The trace endures. That helps me get through and accept the magic to come.