

Denise Lira-Ratinoff and Time

During her entire life Denise Lira-Ratinoff has ran against the clock's hands, with extraordinary and poetical clarity in regards to the indescribable passage of time and the progressive devastation that she leaves behind in what is her passion in life : Nature. Certainly, a time that is not the Time of the old mythologies of the eternal return [i] , where everything was circular and origin and beginning merged in a cosmic end destined to restart over and over again. No. This time it has to do with time created by mankind, time that pretends to be controlled by machines, computers, industries and that requires fuel and hundreds of elements aimed to satisfy today's human beings but condemning the tomorrow of the species.

This is why "Chronometer" [ii] is a complete work towards which her steps guided her, in an unforgiving way, almost like destiny, fatality or the reverse, to an epiphany; since the artist at the same time is showing the damage and the jaws from the shade, illuminating, registering instants, sublime landscapes that remind us of how beautiful our planet is and how much we keep losing and losing, year after year, month after month, hour after hour, second after second. In this manner, "Chronometer" is a work that constitutes a declaration - of love and pain, two feelings that seem to go together - , a thesis and a direct imprecation to the most universal public that can exist, from children to adults, from the Southern Pole to the Northern Pole of the six continents and from its five oceans, of the ones that before were seven oceans and today are hundreds of bodies of water spread around the world and all of its mountain ranges, deserts, mountains and inhabited areas.

For these and other reasons, The Association of Art Critics of Chile named "Chronometer" as the best "Exhibit of New Media" in 2019. From this experience a new site-specific installation blossomed, "UMBRAL" (THRESHOLD) that took place in the Biennial of Medial Arts, at the National Museum of Fine Arts, at the end of 2019. Here it appeals to similar elements; images of an ocean in movement projected on a huge box of salt of 9 x 5 meters and whales bellows interrupted by the annoying sounds of magnetic resonance made to the dolphins.

These tests are performed in order to diagnose the damage that this effect has from the acoustic contamination of the ocean. In the midst of a shocking social burst, to which the work "THRESHOLD" joins, the artist's voice joins the chant of the cetaceans, begging for a world with greater ethics and heartfelt sense.

From the vegetable abodes to the southern waters.

Denise Lira-Ratinoff started her installation [iii] trajectory creating uncommon constructions of bails of straw, then boldo (a type of herbal tea) and later grass in an area of open ground, like primary vegetable dwellings that were and invitation to inhabit a live Earth of a vibrant green color tree.

Later, she moved to New York and returned to submerge herself in the frozen heart of the agonizing glaciers of the Chilean Patagonia, with ice sculptures chiseled by celestial hands that year after year, month after month, hour after hour, second after second start melting, petrifying and dying.

She kept capturing the most crystalline and stormy waters in the planet, sailing through oceans and seas on every type of floating implements from the most sophisticated vessels, even brigantines passing through, with harnesses hanging from the sky where wings sprout to offer us, her spectators, the most spectacular views of the unrepeatably waves and eddy of simply of a sutil breeze that painted such a smooth swell, as well as perfectly geometrical and almost off-white, on the edge of the salted water.

In reality, each one of her works is unrepeatably, since it reflects, not "the decisive instant" of Henri Cartier-Bresson, but a unique instant. And ephemeral. Condemned to disappearing and to destruction, by the same eyes that contemplate the beauty of her work stopped in her work and do nothing to remedy what is happening in our planet. Because, since she does not tire of shouting it: "this devastation can be stopped, it is up to us to save the Earth". And she, to this cause has surrendered with integrity, in sickness or in health since an Astrocytoma has inhabited the marvelous center of her brain for years, that sometimes has played not well, but has allowed her to have an incomparable connection with the firmament and its stars, just like her name indicates [iv]. In addition, it has refined to a great degree her consciousness, her senses and the assessment of Time, that for all of us drains between our fingers like water, but she faces that water and photographs it, trying to hold it in every way possible.

She is definitely committed in a visceral and desperate way to this cause. Her love towards nature has no limits or frontiers and she has rendered all her Time to it, as if we

were infinite, knowing that we are not. It is the way in which she has given her heart to all who surround her and to her art. Her heart and her mind are sparkling.

Sands and the millenarian cultures

Behind ice and waters she decided to conclude in the desert her photographic trilogy on extreme nature [v] This rough but touching and pristine landscape gave her soul back to her life, after the premature departure of her husband, which she was able to heal walking fully on the high plateaus of the Altiplano and fulfilling her artistic commitment. Years later, in the same landscape, she found her new travel companion, with whom she shares home, vacation and cause.

Hundreds of days and consecutive nights in the desert, over and over, taught her the language and the light of Atacama, in the other extreme of the country, in the north of Chile and started discovering its textures, the infinite varieties of each tone of the sky, cloud [vi] or particle of a rock. These solitary highlands filled with vacuum and silence that she knew how to fill, discovering how the millennial gale draws grooves in the sand hills that seem works of art, granted her a meaningful international recognition. [vii]

Soon, she became a friend of an aged Shepherdess, Leonarda Colque, with who she lived intense moments during the lengthy walks with the llamas, goats and donkeys in the Altiplano steppes.

Together they followed the routes of the apachetas [viii] sleeping in stone shelters with the warmth of the animals, creating invaluable ties in the length of a year and the artist keeping the registries of a precious culture that is also becoming extinguished in our eyes. [ix]

She also climbed to the summits of Atacama, all filled with systems of symbols and legends, in order to decipher its mysteries, the color of its magma held from volcanic eruptions of immemorial times, since in the desert the yesterday and the today get confused on the line of the horizon, and nevertheless the desert is also disappearing, conquered by some mining or chemical companies; and its this courses of water, that created oasis and then saved the towns and valleys from asphyxiating their flora and fauna, becoming dry. They dry every year, every month. every day, every hour, every second, a little more.

Many flamingos, birds and stars in those latitudes appear dead in banks that today are only stony.

Denise does not sleep. Especially when she is working, when she is on sight. "There is no Time - she states -, there is no time available". Each image that she has taken no longer exists.

And she goes back to cry out for the screams on behalf of the nature that is losing its voice.

Then, she started doing bails again, this time with tons of flattened plastic containers, those that most often end up in the oceans, specifically swallowed by cetaceans and large fish and once that they break down, in thousands of birds and smaller fish. In the same manner, through this feeding chain, they come back to our organisms. Today we all have plastic in our interior; we are all plastic.

These bails of crushed bottles, to which hundreds of residues of solid plastic [x] are added she piles them up one on top of the other to build a tunnel, that is the conductive thread of "Chronometer". It's a dark and long passage into which one enters barefoot [xi] on a mirrored plate, where the solitary walker is reflected. As one keeps going in, the man, the woman or the child start feeling each time more oppressed and more desolate and the notion of time keeps getting lost, because once again we are in a time outside of the Time, where this human being is responsible today for having created a time foreign to the Time and can witness or experiment how the passage of the years, months, days, hours, seconds carry the irreversible consequences towards nature. She shows it to us.

Makes us walk in the dark towards a cliff where one expects to reach a precipice of destruction, abyss and eternal silence, where all the oceans, stars and mountains will succumb. All that comes to mind while one tries for the vision to get used to the darkness and the lungs to the breath that the plastic smell sends out, to that stench of pure chemistry, while we keep advancing carefully through a labyrinth of waste of liquid and solid containers that we have eaten and drank. As if we owned everything that surrounds us and she knows that well, may it endorse that old saying no longer makes sense, since we have eaten and drank, today can be taken away from us, more so, we are driving coming generations from it, that will not be able to enjoy the most precious gift of Creation: Nature, the source of life. More so, she seems to be able to show how

we are pushing those new generations to the precipice of destruction, abyss and eternal silence...

Nevertheless, Denise's tunnel does not take us there, but, on the contrary, to a postcard of Eden, Dante's Paradise and his nine heavens; the first reflected in a lunar shape, which is the one that takes the striking image of an ice flow photographed with the radiance stopped by Time. This is to say, a fragment of the firmament of ice, that she freezes in that image for us to stop the time and maybe to remind us that there was a Time that was beautiful and we were truly free. And we kept all of our dreams in crystal castles; which have started vanishing, because this time outside the Time that building only obeys to the inconsistency of a world based on instant profit, a world whose values also melted, becoming water.

This is why "Chronometer" finally leads us to the sea, to a cliff that roars under our feet thunders and shakes the foundation of our humanity, in a video coproduced by Denise Lira-Ratinoff and Patricio Aguilar Díaz. [xii] An ocean that roars like a hurt, disoriented and frightened animal. Like so many of the whales that visit our coastline, today confused by so much submarine noise, a product of tourism or fishing ships, sonars, salmon ladders; sounds that Denise reproduces for us in order to make us feel in our own flesh that acoustics contamination that bothers and sometimes drives the population of our oceans crazy.

Frightening episodes have taken place lately due to this and or other pollutions in the waters, such as the massive loss of life of species in different parts of the planet and one, particularly sad in the well named Gulf of Sorrows (Golfo de Penas), where more than 300 whales died in 2015, without an apparent cause.

In these southern solitudes under a universal firmament, those innocent souls suffer in our consciousness. Denise also brought to us their chants recorded by multinational teams of Marine Biologists and other scientists [xiii] focused on deciphering the mystery of their melodies. Are they chants of love, of mental derangement or loss of hope?

Finally, Denise Lira-Ratinoff takes us to a beach that she created with two thousand kilos of salt that she transported with her passionate work team, because she is a soul that knows how to multiply herself in many other souls when she wants to build her work and her message. Her beach of white salt is so beautiful,

from where starting at the roof of this small space at the Museum of Visual Arts, projects images of waves of our Central Pacific, so pleasurable, simple and neat, that it makes it seem that in the long run it is not that difficult to create beauty, in lieu of an abyss. Nevertheless these images at time are interrupted by others, by recordings of the so called "raschel mesh" that have also visually contaminated our landscapes. The projection of the mesh bothers, but then the sea reappears and for a moment it is forgotten, yes, everything can be forgotten, for a moment its even better to forget it, but Denise does not allow us to do it - Not to overwhelm us, but to endorse: it is not that difficult to create beauty, in lieu of the abyss. It is what she has accomplished, at the price of running against time, of singing, of reflecting what Mother Nature has given us. Time is a river, she concludes quoting the U.S. artist Paul Teck (1933 - 1988). For the people of Atacama, the Milky Way is a "river of Souls", that all of our ancestors [xv] have crossed, from the era where Time was still circular.

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NOTES:

[i] Cf. Mircea Eliade, "The myth of the eternal return".

[ii] Name of the Installation Exhibit of Denise Lira-Ratinoff (Santiago, 1977), along with Patricio Aguilar Diaz (Molina, 1961), presented at the Museum of Visual Arts in Santiago, MAVI, from January 5th. thru February 10, 2019.

[iii] Before this stage that she started in the nineties, she was dedicated to engraving, painting and drawing. She was educated in Chile (Finis Terrae University), continued her studies in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico (1995/6), in Cuba (1996/7), where she worked for a year with the Lithography Studio of the Cathedral, also called Experimental

Studio of Graphics in Havana, by invitation of the Cuban artist Manuel Mendive; and later in the United States.

[iv] The Astrocytoma was discovered in 1997 and the drawings, etchings and paintings by Denise Lira-Ratinoff curiously announced the health problem that was about to happen, confirming the special connection that some artists achieve with "what is invisible to the eyes" as Antoine de Saint-Exupery would have said.

[v] She dedicated almost a decade to this trilogy, from 2007 until 2017, approximately. It includes photographs and registries in video.

[vi] Native brush from the Altiplano region, that looks similar to moss.

[vii] She received an honorable mention in the 9th. Annual International Color Awards, with 5 thousand participants from around the world, among a number of other recognitions and awards.

[viii] An "apacheta" is a heap of stones that the villagers of the Andes in the southern region, place one on top of the other, as an offering to the Pachamama, their ancestors or other deity at special areas of the roads.

[ix] She spent one year with Leonarda Colque and brought her to Santiago, being the first time that she visited the capital. "Together we had a lot of new experiences, both for her and for me, says Denise.

[x] Provided by TriCiclo, a company that aims to make a change through recycling.

[xi] One has to remove the shoes to wear special covers for the feet, in order to go in with respect towards the Installation

[xii] This video, observed through glass in the tunnel's floor, beneath the spectator, has a zenithal view of the Pacific Ocean, evocative of the oceanic trench of the Marianas, the deepest in the planet and it looks as if a cascade of solid residues were falling into the ocean.

[xiii] From the MERI Foundation.

[xiv] Used daily in agriculture; the raschel mesh is made from high density polyethylene.

[xv] Study performed in the framework of a research project of ethno-astronomy carried out by the ALMA Observatory and local experts: The Universe of our Grandparents.