

WHY ENCLOSING ART HISTORY INTO SHARDS OF DURLOCK? THE FALL OF THE WALL

by Maria Gainza

-What is in Durlock that cannot be found in cloth?

-A kind of hand to hand confrontation. That's what attracts me from Durlock.

-It is almost like sculptural work.

-And it also breaks down and falls, as if it perceived everything that happens to me.

Then two images mingle one with another: young Catalina León confronting materials like a brave Jeanne D'Arc facing the English armies, and young Catalina León lying down on the floor, writing and drawing in trance-like state on a support that captures her hours and days as if it were a diary. León would confess later that she was first attracted by the idea of painting interiors and Durlock turned out to be the best material to do it: pars pro toto, what she could take with her once thrown out from the room. Being intuitive, what we would call an accurate decision she thinks of it as a mere product of chance. Timidly, she admits that, as everything she finds seducing nowadays, the materials has always been there. She simply wasn't aware of it.

In between the drawings of women and fish and children's faces, you can read "no more faces" and, underneath, there is a question: "Why can't I get rid of myself for a while?"

"That's what I ask the painting", she says.

And what does it answer?

It is peacefully pleasant to see that, in her soul, León realizes that there are no answers. There's no need to run, because there is really nowhere to go. It is all about letting oneself go and allow doubts come and join us in our path. Plain Sailing, as John Lennon wrote. The artist, former participant of the Kuitca Program for Visual Arts 2003-2005 is able to sail from sculpture to drawing, embroidery, poetry and installations. Even so, and whatever we might do about it, "We are not the wind" as poet Laura Riding wrote. That is, we are the part which remains the same. León's works look like trying to remove something. As if she was peeling the skin of the world in search of a permanent and recognizable environment. Her works are rarely determined by physical perception, and tend to inhabit an emotional atmosphere: pearls hanging from tree branches, the wall of a room covered with interior plants. The sea of Durlock torn to pieces, looking like a history of art lying shattered on the floor, covered and protected by a soft sky full of embroidered birds and songs.

About twenty years ago, Francesco Clemente said: "I keep myself the idea that is much better to be a lot of different people than just one lonely person, and that many gods are better than a single god, and many truths better than just the truth". When looking at León's works, the idea of the artist as a medium comes up: "I open the door and, suddenly, every painter passes through my hands". She smiles and you easily could tell that such special ability does not upset her at all, but relieves her. All in all, her urge for getting rid of herself seems to fulfill during those instants of metamorphosis. A

reductionist understanding of León's works would say that she has been pervaded by her recent years experience: pervaded by her close contact with de Peruvian community in Buenos Aires while living in apartments house near Abasto, pervaded by Chavela Vargas' songs, pervaded by the grandfather's house she used to wander in through the darkness in order to learn it by heart. But León doesn't make any auto(crypto)biography. Anyways, it is true that events like these have an influence in her work: the exhibition is, in fact, named by a line borrowed from one of Chavela's lyrics, "Concha Nacar" (Shell Nacre). But underneath the surface, you could find an endless river full of Catalina León, flowing, slipping in between the materials. You could hear its voice from distance. We recognize its course because its runoff is just that of our own daily experience.

Recently, during an interview, Paul Auster asked himself: How can we stand a book we suspect that the writer did not feel obliged, pressed to write? Fighting with materials, but initiating an intimate conversation with them at the same time, Catalina León achieves the blend of urgency and calm that only an artwork born out of necessity can have.

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