

Critical Writing

The Poetical Vision: The Art of Diana González Gandolfi

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From The Book of Questions

III.

*Tell me, is the rose naked
or is that her only dress?*

*Why do trees conceal
the splendor of their roots?*

*Who hears the regrets
of the thieving automobile?*

*Is there anything in the world sadder
than a train standing in the rain?*

Pablo Neruda

In his small poem, the Chilean poet Neruda suggests that the very act of questioning our sensations and the variety of our everyday human experiences as we make our way through the world can be revelatory. It is all about the simple truths of our existence. Down to earth, yet somehow mystical, Neruda's poems convey the small absurdities and deep wonders of the life we have beyond words.

Artist Diana González Gandolfi shares this questing attitude to the world and experiences. Thus her art proposes much more than it answers, and that is as it should be. The viewer follows visual clues as the artist puts forth her plastic interrogatory via personal signs and symbols. And while considering those conundrums and runic ideograms that extend the formal aspects of her paintings and prints, we discover that within any questions posed there are answers...inchoate, poetic and imprecise, yet profound as poetry.

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I believe that being innocent implies being curious, that traveling means feeling a sense of curiosity, and that those who travel do so because they are still capable of looking at things with innocent eyes.

Wim Wenders

Innocence implies a state of being open, vulnerable. And for those who of necessity, or choice, have moved about the world, living there or here, a sense of difference, of always being slightly outside and apart, requires a constant practical and psychic reconfiguring of ideas and experiences. For Diana González Gandolfi this sensibility has become integral to how she engages life and art; the 'where ness' and 'now ness' of site and circumstances, time and history.

Thus much of the literature that has been published in association or in response to her work discusses the artist in terms of her 'otherness', that is, her origins outside of the United States. González Gandolfi's biography includes living in Colombia as well as Indonesia before settling in the United States as a very young teen. While it may appear a somewhat essentializing and delimiting approach to the reading of what she does artistically, considering her heritage as a woman born in Argentina is relevant and perhaps useful in situating her among her artistic peers. She admits, "The work makes reference to early remembrances, experiencing new worlds and coexisting among diverse cultures. These pieces metaphorically explore issues about borders and confinement, political injustices, alienation, memory and mortality."

Ms. González Gandolfi studied art in the United States after she arrived there as a teenager, so one should not presume any intimate relationship between her art and the work of the earlier South American *avant garde*. But given the fact of her Argentine birth and early upbringing, one might find it interesting to point out certain environmental and cultural affinities that connect Ms. González Gandolfi's art to the work of various Latin American modernists. Born much too late for direct influences from the Buenos Aires *avant garde*, one can still imagine in her work an aesthetic echo of the vastly influential painter Joaquín Torres-García of Uruguay. What this much younger painter shares with the influential theorist is a penchant for organizing the picture plane by means of icons and grids. Torres-García's 'Universal Constructivism' was driven by a passionate desire for formal clarity via "geometry, order, synthesis, construction, and rhythm." These are also important elements for Ms. González Gandolfi, but the key to her originality is located less in such formal structural aesthetics for its own sake, than in a more fluid and intuitive understanding of how organic images, marks and signs can evoke, expand, and amplify human experience.

Now located in the United States for many years, and working out of her New Jersey Studio, Diana González Gandolfi has quietly produced a consistent body of work, which, over time, has taken on a nuanced form. The translucent encaustic surfaces of her paintings are built in a slow meditative fashion, often with collage material, including torn pages and written notes embedded in the wax medium. While not exactly declarative in a narrative sense, these encaustic paintings always endeavor to say something beyond their rich abstract form. Equally complex and painterly, the prints are similarly organized via informal rhyming grids that alter in subtle organic ways depending upon the visual effects required. Various series of paintings and prints differ from each other not so much in the physical approach to their making, rather, they can be roughly grouped by an emphasis upon certain metaphysical and poetic themes, or by how the artist augments and organizes the particular alphabet of images she has developed. She says "...numbers, letters, boxes, circles, and cones...are associated with feelings of confinement, repression, absence, change and pain. Clocks and hourglass images allegorically represent the recording of the passage and duration of time. Cages refer to entrapment, emptiness, boundaries and cycles...."

Diana González Gandolfi endeavors through art to maintain and affective poetical, political and spiritual presence in the world. It is only by engaging our human feelings as well as our aesthetic sensibilities that we can begin to understand and value her production.

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