



Soccer Ball

Sanitary napkins and black leather

30 cm diameter aprox.

1999



Trouser

Sanitary napkins, threat and metal fastener

1998



Soccer Ball

Sanitary napkins and black leather

30 cm diameter

2012



Room for Isolation and Restraint

300 cm³

Sanitary napkins, wood cube with door and lamp

Plateau of Mankind. 49 Venice Biennial

2001

Text for Room for Isolation and restraint:

Priscilla Monge

La lucidez perversa

Santiago B. Olmo

Priscilla Monge ha explorado reiteradamente y desde diferentes perspectivas los resquicios de los usos del lenguaje y de los gestos sociales, en sus significados y en sus referencias simbólicas. Su obra trata de aquello que se sabe pero no se dice, o de aquello que se hace pero no se muestra, poniendo de relieve, en los significados, los aspectos más incómodos de la cotidianidad, fraccionada entre lo íntimo y lo social, bajo formulaciones aparentemente inocentes, en una poética de la contradicción. A través de leves detalles genera un contexto de turbación, actúa en lo psíquico, en los resortes que convulsionan la sensibilidad.

Su actitud es la de un explorador de costumbres y hábitos, tanto sociales como individuales, pero su objetivo no es elaborar un archivo o una valoración, sino transformarlos en herramientas de introspección psicológica, desde un relato poético que contiene tanto el suspense de lo inesperado, como la sorpresa de lo grotesco, o la acidez del humor negro y la ironía.

Su narrativa es experiencial. Está construida a partir de una anécdota extraída de lo cotidiano. El relato es directo, fluye como un fogonazo de lucidez que tiende a cortocircuitar convenciones y significados, perturba con nuevos sentidos la comprensión de la realidad. Siempre hay un detrás, que revela muchas más cosas: las apariencias no engañan, muestran, desvelan, ofrecen nuevos significados a través de los que ya han sido asumidos, como corolarios sociales o individuales.

Su obra es una re-escritura de la realidad que valora lo que hay detrás, como una introspección siempre viva, compartida y crítica.

La lucidez de su mirada es perversa. Obliga a un enfrentamiento con los contextos pervirtiéndolos, intensificándolos, “normalizando” las pesadillas que se sitúan en la intimidad de lo inconfesable en los significados que no quieren ser asumidos, insiste en la incomodidad.

La violencia siempre está presente en su obra pero nunca aparece expresada con crudeza. Es algo latente y al acecho, se desarrolla en contextos de supuesta ternura, como en las *Sentencias de muerte* (1993), bordadas sobre lienzos sin preparar al estilo de un inocente petit-point; o como en *Cállese y cante* (1997 – VI Bienal de La Habana), donde cascos de boxeo se engarzan con carillones de músicas infantiles; o más aún en la serie de *Cartas / Cadenas* (cartas de amor, recetas de cocina

para atrapar al hombre como un hechizo o un amarre, y cadenas de internet bordadas sobre sábanas – 1994-98-) en las que el delirio de un lenguaje fetichizado desde lo social esconde la imposición de la ansiedad, la superchería o el engaño como modelos negativos de lo femenino. *Los Boomerangs (1997-2001)*, inicialmente realizados en madera, establecían el inicio del círculo vicioso de la violencia, para llegar, realizados en un frío mármol gris, a convertirse en sus propios epitafios. En la trilogía de videos de las “Lecciones”, (Lección de Maquillaje, Como (des)vestirse y Como morir de amor, 1998-2000) se perfila aun más esta acepción de la violencia en tanto que tautología del comportamiento, como fórmula y estrategia cultural o como el enmascaramiento de la inocencia.

Habitación de aislamiento y protección / Room for Isolation and Restraint, la obra que presenta en esta Biennale, es un espacio enteramente tapizado de toallas sanitarias, concebido imitando las habitaciones acolchadas utilizadas en los psiquiátricos para proteger a los internos de sí mismos, evitando que puedan agredirse al golpearse contra las paredes. El uso de compresas como material o como herramientas no es nuevo en su trabajo. Ha adoptado diferentes pero siempre perturbadoras formulaciones. *Balón de fútbol*, (1997) fue realizado por un fabricante de balones engarzando piezas de cuero con toallitas sanitarias, imitando los balones reales. Anteriormente, en 1996, había confeccionado pantalones de distintas hechuras y modelos, cosiendo toallitas sanitarias yuxtapuestas. Fueron siempre exhibidos como objetos, pero en 1997 realiza en San José de Costa Rica una performance en la que la artista se pasea por calles centricas vistiendo uno de estos pantalones, el cual iba progresivamente absorbiendo su propia sangre menstrual en el frunce de la entrepierna.

En el interior de la *Habitación de aislamiento* que la artista presenta en la Biennale, voces y susurros pueblan la estancia como el eco amortiguado de un discurso interior. El sonido del espacio remite a las habitaciones insonorizadas en las que se escuchan son los sonidos fisiológicos del cuerpo, la respiración y la circulación vascular. El uso de toallitas sanitarias (Kotex) permite deslizar los significados hacia múltiples lecturas. Por un lado el blanco aísla de interferencias para remitir directamente al rojo-sangre como su complementario, conteniendo la violencia como símbolo derivado, pero “normalizando” la sangre como un indicador de lo femenino, convirtiendo al rojo sangre en un contenido virtual y despojándolo de connotaciones feministas reivindicativas. Lo femenino como género se convierte en la afirmación de una sensibilidad construida desde un interior corporal. Esa misma afirmación constata valores que se expresan en las contradicciones que ofrecen para lo femenino los contextos culturales. Corporalidad y cultura: la palabra silenciada y el discurso, la voz del cuerpo y las normas de la cultura.

Por otra parte las toallitas mantienen una estrecha analogía formal con ladrillos que forman un muro, de pureza inmaculada: protección y represión, aislamiento como mordaza, la voz interior

como un eco del silencio... En la toallita sanitaria se concentra la levedad de lo puro y la concentración de lo oscuro, contradicciones de significados que aparecen de un modo muy claro dentro de una dinámica mental que caracteriza el hilo de pensamiento de la artista – de las primeras yuxtaposiciones físicas de materiales delicados a otros de grosera factura, que conducían al espectador a asociaciones inéditas y por momentos horribles, Priscilla Monge logra llegar, en esta *Habitación de Aislamiento*, a crear efectivamente estas asociaciones a partir de la pura acumulación excesiva de un solo material, un material permeable y cuyas posibilidades reales de contener o absorber alteran virtualmente el propio cromatismo, convirtiéndolo en la metáfora más sutil del significado último del aislamiento.

Another Tempest





I cried
to dream
again.



I am
full of
pleasure.



Priscilla Monge

"Another Tempest"

7 concrete tombstones with engraved texts taken from Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

120 x 90 x 15 cm aprox.

The piece was in the last exhibition made by Harald Szeemann.

Exhibited in : PS1 Moma and Museo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid, Spain.

Col. Of the artist

Another Tempest

When William Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* in 1612, he could have hardly imagined the many interpretations and opposing appropriations that -to this day- his last play would receive. Honoring its title, the play's turbulent course has, perhaps, surpassed the author's very pretension.

Notwithstanding, there is no doubt that Shakespeare created this theatrical proposal with the intention of going beyond the mere representation of a specific plot, thus placing it into a symbolic and controversial spot: the arrival of modernity. Beginning with these allegorical connotations, Priscilla Monge -a Costa Rican artist, created a suggestive appropriation of the Shakespearean play.

The Tempest's plot develops somewhere in the Americas -an insular territory more specifically- using an implicit dialogue with some European views of the so-called "New World", from Thomas More's *Utopia* to the exceptional, legitimizing comments of "The Other One" by Michel de Montaigne. From the latter, Shakespeare picked up one of the leading characters of his work: Caliban, an anagram of what in the European imagining of that time was referred to as a "cannibal," derived from the word "caribes": nomad and supposedly man-eating warriors who put up the most resistance to the Spanish conquest of the later- named insular and continental Caribbean.

In Shakespeare's play, Caliban is the deformed and detestable slave of Prospero', who had taken over his island in the name of modern civilization and pragmatism. In retaliation, Caliban cast an astonishing curse on Prospero: "You taught me language and my profit on't is know how to curse." And that well-known maxim, having enormous historical and cultural transcendence, is the main text that Priscilla Monge makes her own in her ironic sculptural proposal.

However, the suggestive and peculiar thing about that appropriation of *The Tempest* lies not so much in its novelty but in the re-significance imposed by the artist. In this work by Priscilla Monge, the language is cursed and perverse. Thus, by inscribing the texts on marble gravestones - in western culture being directly associated to the concept of death- the artist seems to be suggesting how useless a rebellion condemned to failure beforehand is, some sort of epitaph to rebelliousness. Anyhow, it is all about expressing the implicit contradiction present in every power and subordination relationship, a recurrent theme in Priscilla's work, who has confronted, in particular ironies, violent contradictions and impossible bonds.

In the case of Caliban's statements, kept in a dominant language par excellence such as English, these contain within themselves the strength of their subversion. When the Costa Rican artist quotes the Shakespearean original in its own language, the appropriation's fidelity becomes gaming rebelliousness -perhaps proof that the apparent subjection can end up being more transgressing than confrontation itself. All this emphasizes, in excess, the paradoxical nature of a blasphemy that constantly delights itself in the subordination of the dominated, that is, being uttered in the dominator's language.

Some other of Caliban's statements recovered by the artist also turn out to be ambiguous and sarcastic: "Let me lick thy shoe", "Lo, lo, again. Bite him to death", "HA, HA, HA." Concerning this, the search for some contradictory impulses in human actions is customary by now in Priscilla's proposals, who has devoted a great deal of her work to question some sociocultural stereotypes, beginning with the subtle contrast, the unmasking and subversion of certain historically-assigned roles.

Some of the most important characters in *The Tempest* -Caliban, Prospero, Ariel- have been interpreted as symbols of modern happenings. At the end of the XIX century, Ernst Renan,

made an apology of Prospero' civilizing condition, whose inescapable destiny would be to exterminate Caliban's barbarism. On the contrary, during that same time José Enrique Rodó, from Uruguay, identified Caliban with the imperial impetus of the United States, and Ariel's intellectual mind with Latin America. Later on, during the sixties and seventies in the XX century, some Caribbean writers -George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Roberto Fernández Retamar- opposed Caliban's anti-colonial and revolutionary subversion to Prospero' colonial pragmatism.

Contemporarily, however, all these interpretations are being revised from different perspectives. The question heading the classic essay *Caliban*, by Roberto Fernández Retamar: "Is there a Latin American culture?"- may be responded today, not from the earlier absolute and defining statements, which instead tried to conclude the question itself, but in terms of acknowledging the debts and marks as well as the differences and otherness of Latin American culture and history. Such a perception would vindicate their plural, indefinite and contaminated status, allowing in turn to identify them by their cannibalistic or man-eating characteristic. Thus, such an expressive possibility is rescued by Priscilla Monge, by means of those biting marble gravestones where she inscribes her disturbing maxims suitable for Caliban.

Nonetheless, the artist seems to distance herself relatively -though without denying them- from the traditional political and sociocultural interpretations of *The Tempest*, moving towards an exploration of more subjective power and subordination relationships. This way, by reinscribing the phrases uttered by Caliban to Prospero, the artist is exploring those ambiguous "master-slave" relationships in which, as Foucault acknowledged, morbid bonds of rebelliousness-submission, cursing-veneration, love-hate -both contradictory and complementary at the same time- are hinted.

However, even by resorting to Caliban, Priscilla's quotations seem to keep a skeptic distance from his symbolic connotations, placing herself at a limit where allegorical identification becomes a possibility to deconstruct their multiple interpretations. Thus, an element that may denote the different -other- character of this interpretation by Priscilla is the very noun of the Shakespearean title: "tempest", which, broken in the vastness of the sea, clears up allowing to observe an illusory horizon, a mirage of calm breaking at any moment before the rage of other tempests that will, unavoidably, sweep new interpretations and re-significances along.

TamaraDíazBringas/ErnestoCalvoAlvarez

School Desk



School Desk

Marble, wood ,metal and blood stain

2009

Col. Of the artist.

Boomerangs



Wood, pyrography

30 x 9 x 1.5 cm

1998

Col. Museo Reina Sofía

Death Penalties



*Luego de saber que
los michachos son culpables,
se les lleva a un cuarto se les
patea hasta quebrarles
las costillas, cuando
están seguros... los
esconden en el bosque.*



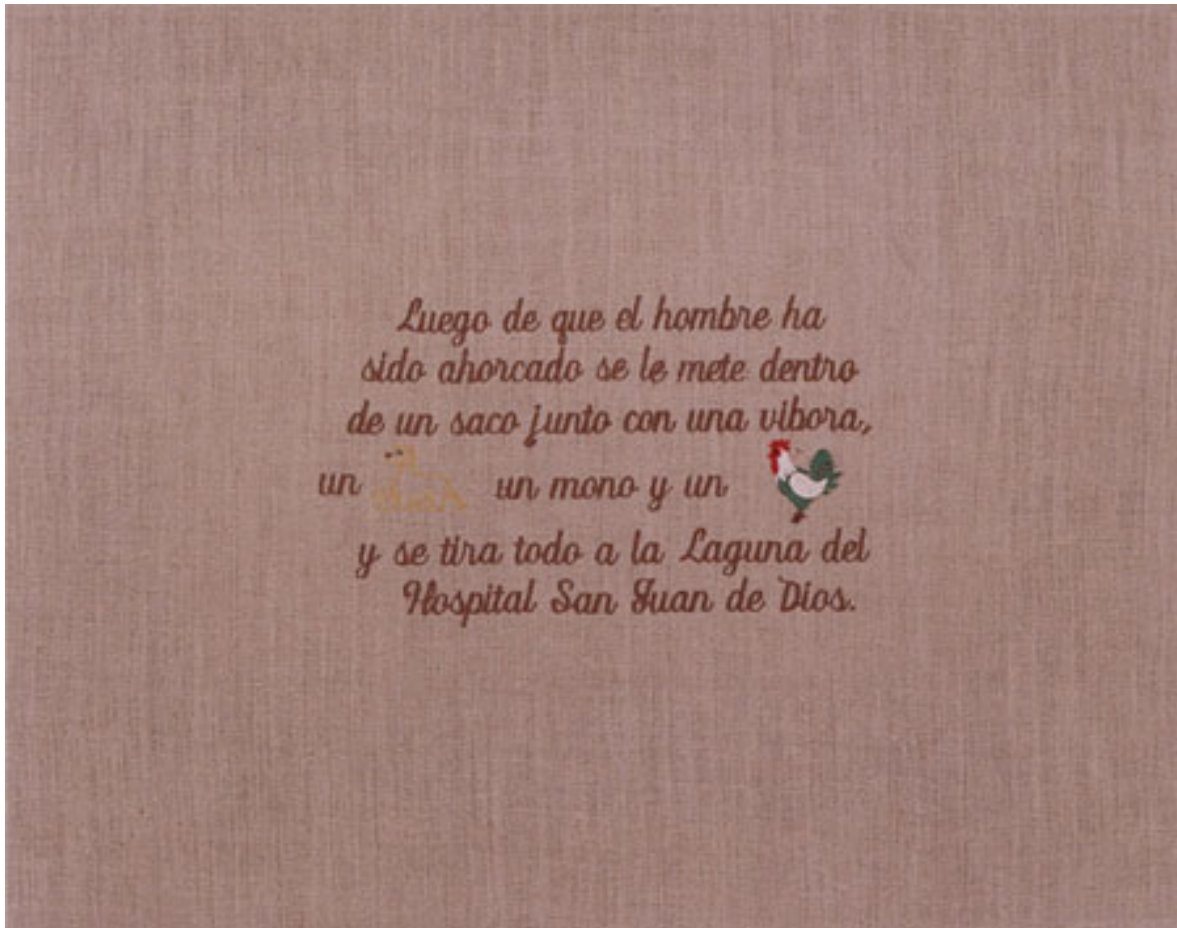
*Como si la tortura y la asquerosidad
no fueran suficientes, si ella no obe-
dece, se la lleva a la Sabana a toda
velocidad casi matandose, luego la pone
de rodillas y le pega con la pistola.
Se necesitan dos para bailar tango.*

*Para cumplir sentencia
de muerte en caso de que sea
una mujer embarazada, se
esperará hasta cuarenta días
después del parto para cumplirla.*



El asesino, traidor y parricida, llevaria ademas los pies descalzos y la cabeza descubierta y sin cabellos. El asesino y parricida vestiran tunica blanca con mangas encarnadas. El traidor llevaria en la espalda un cartel, en que con letras grandes se anunciase su delito de "Traidor"





Death Penalties

6 linen fabrics mounted on frames and embroidered actual death sentences given in Costa Rica up to the 19th Century and some news on police abuses given in San José at the beginning of the 90's.

30 x 50 cm each

1993-94

Col. Virginia Perez-Ratton

Soap Virgin



Soap Virgin

Blue soap cast on the shape of a virgin

160 cm tall

2003

Soap Virgin was a piece made to be shown in the Limerick Biennial in Ireland. The Biennial had several venues and I had to work on the School of Fine Arts which was a former convent and "Laundry". The place was used as a kind of jail where women who did something outlaw were taken by their family and could only go out if someone claimed them. Inside the convent they were forced to work on the laundry which at that time used very dangerous soaps that in many cases left them blind or with other serious health problems.

Outlaw could go from stealing something to being pregnant outside the marriage or having a love affair. Sad thing is they were still functioning during the 70's.

Chocolate Icons



Chocolate Jesus

20 x 25cm

2009



Chocolate Virgin

25 cm tall

2009



Chocolate tablet

20 x 30 cm

2009

Chocolate Jesus

What is sweeter than taking a bite of a chocolate?

For anthropology biting indicates a form to take control of the force, vitality or qualities of an payable enemy.

For the catholics eucharist is the main stone where its religion is based, but this goes further on, then in eucharist takes place the transubstantiation: where the bread and the wine becomes the body and the blood of Christ.

On the other hand, like in almost all the religions, the intervention of a officiant becomes necessary and with the rite and the word the fusion of material element and divine is possible.

The chocolate is used like aphrodisiac, like antidepressant, to the old Aztec soldiers drink it to gain force, it was also used as main drink in the nuptial ceremonies and the orgiastic rites related to the culture of the cacao. Histories of ball parties are counted where the losing one was fed with chocolate so that blood of the victim was impregnated of the liquid.

Answering the initial question, it might be sweeter to bite a chocolate Jesus.

PM.



Ballerina

2000

Variable dimensions

Col. Tate Gallery, London



Shot up and sing

7 boxing leather masks mounted on wood and metal with music box

Habana Biennial

1997

Col. Daros

The installation was made to be showed in La Cabaña, a former prison in La Habana.

Each boxing mask has a music box in the place where the mouth should be. The music goes from Beethoven 5th, Lili Marlen to the Song of Joy. They are actioned by the help of the visitor and it is quite magical when several people are playing them.

The title "Sing" refers to the popular way in which police forces in Latin America refers to making someone confess.