

Tatiana Parceró. MUSAC Collection Case Study.

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Showcase Project

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The Collection Case Study is a project in which the museum's showcases become a space to study the artworks and authors that make up the MUSAC Collection. Its purpose is to show the museum's audiences the results of the research and studies carried out so that they can gain a better understanding of the artworks which, at an internal work level, are reflected in their catalogue files.

These case studies are carried out in close collaboration between the staff in charge of managing the Museum's Collection and the artist in question. The case studies are approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, in such a way that the artist's career is studied and shown; the conceptual aspects of the artwork; its discipline, language and support; its conservation needs; its mode of production; its possible affiliation with schools; its history within the museum; its participation in exhibitions, etc.

This third case study from the MUSAC Collection looks at the work of the artist Tatiana Parceró through artworks from the series *Cartografía Interior, Actos de fe y Re-invento (Interior Cartography, Acts of Faith and Re-invention)*.

Tatiana Parceró (Mexico City, Mexico, 1967) began working with photography in the 1980s and, since the early 1990s, has focused her artwork on the body and the self-portrait. She incorporates various mechanical techniques of photography, digital imaging, and video with which she portrays the human body in search of the same aesthetic and conceptual approaches, such as the reconstruction of experiences and concepts such as identity, memory, territory, and time.

Tatiana Parceró's photographs respond to a very careful formal approach. Using black and white or ochre colours, she takes parts of the body printed on acetate superimposed on photos of anatomy diagrams and pre-Columbian codices. Combined, this forms a human cartographic map

full of layers, and therefore full of meanings and connotations. The artist's main idea, in her own words, is "to redefine the interior body; to explore the interior space from the outside as a process of self-knowledge and, at the same time, to have the possibility of showing what is invisible to the naked eye. These photographs are a way of constituting visual images and of exploring the body as a map; of showing the interior body and what seems invisible at first sight". The body of which the artist speaks is none other than her own, and therefore these artworks could be understood as true self-portraits. Self-portraits of the physical and obvious, but also the psychological and ideological. The fact that the prints, tattoos and pre-Colombian codices are all what sustains her body speaks not only of a technique, but also of a way of conceiving the world and its existence. The artist presents herself as an inextricable part of her country's past, including its roots and historical heritage. Through her work, she questions aspects of personal identity that not only allude to how she conceives herself, but also how she presents herself to others and how she is received and interpreted by the viewer.

In the artworks belonging to the series *Actos de fe* and *Re-invento*, the artist includes iconography of ancient religions as well as images and inscriptions belonging to different civilisations. The body is the container of this information that allows its permanence in time, transforming beliefs and movement. The skin is a blank territory on which religion and beliefs can be written and displayed, transformed into acts of faith. She also uses iconography related to chemical and physical experiments as a way of alluding to the human interest in contemplating, discovering, recognising and inventing our environment, complemented by pre-Columbian codices and Hindu mudras.

Although the artist touches on different themes in the three series under study, from the technical point of view they are resolved in a similar way. Since the first series, she has performed the technique of juxtaposing transparent black and white acetates on colour photographs, thus creating few differences between each series. Mirroring an X-ray, allows her to work with transparencies and to see through the body, handling several dimensions and recreating a new visual territory with diverse iconographic sources.

The artist began this process mechanically, physically combining 20 x 25 cm. photos with Xerox prints on paper and acetate, until she arrived at a photographic process that allowed her to print on transparent material. Nowadays, with the use of Photoshop as an image processing

programme, the combinations are infinite and the process has been simplified. A complete series can have around 50 artworks as there can even be two or three options of the same photo.

The artist says that when she continues to make self-portraits, the object of focus is not limited to the body, such as images of landscapes and objects from nature, perhaps wood, leaves or bones, to name but a few. Thus the iconographic illustrations that complement each artwork metaphorically trace the lineage between her personal experiences and the wider human experience.

As for the type of photographic equipment she uses, she started taking photographs with the camera her father gave her at the age of 12 - a Canon TX 35mm film camera. That camera accompanied her for a long time as she developed film rolls and made prints and enlargements in her darkroom in Mexico.

When she moved to the United States in 1992, she gained access to the laboratories of the University and the International Center of Photography (ICP). And at the end of her Master's degree, she started using other types of cameras such as a medium format Mamiya, and digital cameras like the Canon Mark II, some Lumix and some Sony. She currently only works with digital cameras, but if she needs to use negatives, for whatever reason, she scans them and then works on them digitally.

The type of images she generates are usually taken in the studio. For many of her series, she comments that the shots are taken in a studio or in an enclosed space, where she almost always uses a black or navy blue background to successfully delimit the body against this dark background. As for the type of lighting, she prefers natural lighting.

Each series takes a long time to prepare before shooting. Before the details and iconography can be defined, there is a lot of writing, reading, and research involved. She then draws each piece as if it were a working guide or a cinematic story-board. Although some parts are improvised, there is also a lot of thought and planning that goes into the making of each image.

Initially, the artist makes a first retouching of the images: if there is a negative, once scanned, she always retouches the image to slightly to clean it up and to prepare it as a digital file. The digital image is then ready for the next step which marks the beginning of the blending with the archival images that she has been simultaneously working on since the beginning of the project.

A significant amount of time is required to not only search for, but also compile and choose the archive images which will be mixed with the photographs taken in the studio. This is because they are the iconographic details that will complete the original photograph, details such as codices, maps, nature photos, landscapes, etc. When the photos are obtained from a digital camera rather than scanned negatives, the artist retouches them if necessary; however, she tries to keep this retouching to a minimum to preserve the image in its original shot.

Her work routine includes the use of sketches as a guide for taking photographs. She does them on paper and pencil, in a notebook dedicated to the series that she is working on. Although the artist sometimes imagines the details that are superimposed on the image beforehand, they often emerge spontaneously during the assembly or montage where she tries out various options, until she arrives at the one that reflects what she wants with respect to the idea of the series.

As for the prints, over the years she has worked with different materials, ranging from photographic paper to cotton paper, acetates, canvas or fabrics. She likes to try and experiment with different printing techniques. The acetate that goes over the image, complementing it, is almost always separate and is glued to the inside of the methacrylate to protect the emulsion inside the frame.

The distance between the acetate and the colour photo in the background also plays an important role in framing. This is where the effect of the transparency overlay on the photograph is generated, its appearance depending on the size of the image. If it is in a small or medium size, up to approximately 50x70 cm, the distance can be about 2cm, and if the artwork is larger, from 70x100 cm, it can be separated by 3 or 4cm. It also depends on the width of the ribbon or rod used for framing, but these can be considered valid measurements as a general reference for the artworks in the MUSAC Collection.

In the case of the light box, the duratrans is always mounted on the external methacrylate, and the size of the artwork is what determines the bottom of the box that houses the light source installation. Compared to any other lightbox printing system, duratrans has the highest quality with a sharp, high resolution and excellent colour saturation. These factors have made it one of the best backlight mediums, often used in art production. It is not a regularly used film material,

as it is technically a photographic material under patent of the Eastman Kodak Company that is laser printed and processed with the original Kodak system.

The MUSAC has a total of 9 artworks by Tatiana Parceró in its collection - in this exhibition there are 8 of them, as the ninth is part of the exhibition *Exotermia (Exotherm)*. *Semiótica de la ubicación en la Colección MUSAC (Semiotics of Location in the MUSAC Collection)*, and can be seen in Room 1 of the museum.

The artworks have entered the collection on two occasions, the first of which took place in 2009 with the purchase of 5 pieces: *Cartografía interior #35*, *Actos de fe #11*, *Actos de fe #25*, *Actos de fe #2* y *Actos de fe #16*, las restantes obras, *Actos de fe #7*, *Re-invento #22*, *Re-invento #23* y *Re-invento #19* were integrated into the collection and donated by Tatiana Parceró herself in 2017.

The pieces belong to the following series *Cartografía interior* (1995-96), *Actos de fe* (2003) y *Re-invento* (2005) are now closed series, although the artist occasionally returns to some to include them in new productions, either as a background or to use as a fragment. The number of pieces in each series varies between 30 and 50.

The first series, and the first to enter the MUSAC Collection, has had greater visibility and has been on loan to many other institutions. The first series has also been part of several exhibitions, both at the MUSAC and in other institutions. On this occasion, the artworks donated in 2017 are being shown for the first time.¹

¹ Exhibitions which the pieces have participated in:

- *Cartografía interior #35*:
 - *Se hace camino*. Exposición itinerante: Huesca, Barcelona, Vigo, Logroño, Pamplona and Vitoria. 07/06/2010-15/11/2010
 - *Caleidoscopio y Rompecabezas. Latin America in the Colección MUSAC*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. 09/06/2016-09/10/2016.
 - *Territorios que importan: Arte, género y ecología*. Huesca, CDAN. 18/10/2018-20/01/2019.
 - *Cinco itinerarios con un punto de vista*. León, MUSAC. 25/01/2020-11/10/2020.
- *Actos de fe #25*:
 - *Lo Real Maravilloso*. Tokyo, Mot. 14/02/2014-11/05/2014.
 - *Caleidoscopio y Rompecabezas. Latin America in the Colección MUSAC*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. 09/06/2016-09/10/2016.

These series by Tatiana Parceró are also in the collections of other museums, mainly international, such as the MoMA, Museum of Modern Art (New York), MAM, Museo de Arte Moderno de Río de Janeiro, INBA, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (Mexico) or Mec, Museo en los Cerros (Jujuy, Argentina).

Regarding the history of the pieces at MUSAC, *Cartografía Interior #35* is the one with the longest. With *Interior Cartography #35*, Tatiana Parceró won the Acquisition Prize of the XXXII Encuentro Nacional del Arte Joven (National Encounter of Young Art) at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (The National Council for Culture and the Arts), Aguascalientes, Mexico. She also participated in and was the image of the *Our selves, Photographs by Women Artists from Helen Kornblum* exhibition held at the MoMa in 2022.

In 2011, *Actos de fe #16* participated in the Foto Rio Festival in the group exhibition *Eu me desdobro em Muitos: Autorrepresentação na fotografia contemporânea*, CCBB, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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- *Actos de fe #16:*
 - *Lo Real Maravilloso*. Tokyo, Mot. 14/02/2014-11/05/2014.
 - *Caleidoscopio y Rompecabezas. Latin America in the Colección MUSAC*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. 09/06/2016-09/10/2016.
 - *Cinco itinerarios con un punto de vista*. León, MUSAC. 25/01/2020-11/10/2020.
 - *La colección Collegium y sus diálogos. La historia entre la persistencia y la crítica*. Arévalo, Ávila, Collegium. 20/10/2022-05/02/2023.
 - *Actos de fe #11:*
 - *Lo Real Maravilloso*. Tokyo, Mot. 14/02/2014-11/05/2014.
 - *Caleidoscopio y Rompecabezas. Latin America in the Colección MUSAC*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. 09/06/2016-09/10/2016.
 - *Cinco itinerarios con un punto de vista*. León, MUSAC. 25/01/2020- 11/10/2020.
 - *Actos de fe #2:*
 - *Lo Real Maravilloso*. Tokyo, Mot. 14/02/2014-11/05/2014.
 - *Caleidoscopio y Rompecabezas. Latin America in the Colección MUSAC*. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. 09/06/2016-09/10/2016.
 - *Cinco itinerarios con un punto de vista*. León, MUSAC. 25/01/2020-11/10/2020.

About Tatiana Parceró

By Blanca de la Torre

Tatiana Parceró's work speaks of the body, identity, memory and territory, developing in an interstitial and liquid space permeated by systemic violence and the colonial history —both associated with her native country—, as well as her connection with nature that for her began in her childhood garden, as well as her experience as an activist and training as a psychologist. Parceró (Mexico City, 1967) studied at New York University and at the prestigious International Center of Photography (ICP), in New York, and was also a student of the leading Mexican photographer Pedro Meyer.

From very early on, she created her own artistic space in which she combined the main elements of the most orthodox photography with a set of extra-photographic elements that allowed her to work from other angles. By using an expanded technique, she has managed to construct a distinctive language and visual grammar, which has characterised her since her first works: the juxtaposition of black and white photos printed on acetate over colour photographs. In her work, the transparency of the acetate clearly refers to X-rays and the idea of seeing through the body, a concept she plays with through infinite combinations or iconographic iterations. She also uses natural light, always with dark, black or navy blue backgrounds, to emphasise the principle artistic elements of corporeality.

Her sophisticated work, in both technique and concept, begins with a meticulous process of research and preparation that includes sketches and storyboards. She then retouches the negatives and combines them with archival images, selected through very careful research into pre-Columbian codices, maps and photos of nature. This is how she approaches the body as landscape, referring back to this "shaping of the land" as the origin of this concept (*landschaffen*) which by definition acknowledges the reciprocal "shaping" of people with the environment in which they live- and has been linked from the outset to aspects of human labour, ownership, domestication, jurisdiction, etc. - that would stem from the dialectic between humanity and the land (Scott, Svenson, 2015, p. 3). In Parceró's work, this can be applied to the notion of the anthropic manipulation of body and territory throughout history. Both the body and land, then, are set up as political spaces with which the artist creates a kind of autobiographical cartography that she develops through a language that seeks a connection with universality, juxtaposing

stories highlighting the different types of extractivism discourse, communities, territories and cultures.

This is the case here, where a dialogue is established between a selection of works belonging to three of her well-known works *Cartografía interior* (Interior Cartography), *Actos de fe* (Acts of Faith) and *Re-invento* (Re-invent).

In the first work (1995-96), Parcero explores the body as a map that shows inside and outside, showing us what is not always visible, the "b" side of things, the obverse side that portrays memories and identities, with which she weaves a sort of network composed of visual metaphors of a very personal nature that combine the intimate body with the social body. This cartography reminds us that geography is the "writing of the earth" and that the map is nothing more than a image-based interpretation of that writing.

These work has a predecessor entitled *The Map of my Body* (1993), which combined fragments of the human body with images, sketches and drawings from ancient anatomy books and pre-Columbian codices. Just as these pre-Hispanic manuscripts were read from left to right, the artist seeks to challenge the Western way of reading and diachronic temporalities. Subsequently, deepening the desire to extract and make visible the interior of the body, this project will become more complex until it reaches *Cartografía interior* (Interior Cartography), which is divided in two parts: the first takes these ancient anatomy images as a starting point, while the second establishes the links between this interior corporeality and the pre-Columbian codices - Mayans, Aztecs and Mixtecs - to refer us to the cosmogony of indigenous Mexican cultures. This is her unique way of recovering indigenous views of the world, where body and nature are not two separate entities ("the body as the earth, the blood as the rivers, the organs as the lakes", the Mexican artist often points out). Her particular notion of self-portraiture emphasises this ecosystemic idea, focusing not only on our exterior, but also on the landscapes and the elements that make it up, such as wood or leaves, and establishing links between personal experience and collective memory.

It is clear that her work adopts an ecofeminist approach, both in its connection with the sacredness of the earth or Pachamama, and in its holistic approach, closing in on some of this movement's more essentialist approaches, where ecology and feminism meet. It is precisely at

this intersection that the links between the domination and exploitation of both women and nature become visible.

Along similar lines, the imaginary threads with which the artist weaves together images and stories take us back to the concept of bodies-territory-land, typical of the communitarian feminist concepts of authors such as Julieta Paredes, María Galindo and Lorena Cabnal. This last author speaks of the body as the first instance of a territory that must be defended and the first demonstration of violence of any kind; she speaks of how this violence has been woven into the body, and how relationships, also based on patriarchal practices, have exerted their control over the natural environment (Cabnal, 2022, p. 57). Similarly, Parceró includes in her works the individual and collective memory, of herself as a woman and of women as a social collective, of human skin and land, where the line between public and private are blurred.

A few years later, in *Actos de fe* (2003), she goes onto reflect on our belief system and the idea of faith, driven by her experience during the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Once again, in this work she draws on the past to include images and inscriptions from ancient civilisations, with which she plays around in order to transpose them to the body, understood here as a container and strainer for all these memories. Parceró is specifically interested in thinking of the skin as a clean slate on which to write - which resembles the idea of the map and geography as writing of the earth - and the perception of religion as an act of faith, but also as origin, as nature-body and ancestral knowledge. These works relate to authors such as Ivone Gebara, who introduces the dimension of religion into ecofeminist ethics, which, for her, aimsto open up space for women and the ecosystem so that they can have a say in the construction of new relationships based on respect and reciprocity. This goal also seems to be part of the wisdom that comes from the inability of economic, political, cultural and religious patriarchy to promote and respect the rights of human beings, animals and all life sources that exist as the body of the Earth. (Gebara, 2003, p. 177)

The third of these works is *Re-invento* (2005-06), which was commissioned by the magazine *Arte y Naturaleza*. This time Parceró focuses her attention on body language through postures and hand positions, placing the focus on mudras, hand gestures that, according to Buddhism and Hinduism, channel the body's energy. Thus, she once again connects with belief systems to which she alluded in her previous works, a focus that she again relates to pre-Columbian codices to which she introduces iconography related to scientific experiments in physics and chemistry,

in reference to the different ways of discovering and understanding the world to refer to the paths towards knowledge.

Combining science with religion/spirituality arises from this idea that the body is a vessel and simultaneously a generator of all this, based on an eco-centric ethic which, as Carolyn Merchant points out, is based on the cosmos, where all elements of the environment, animate and inanimate, are given intrinsic value. For the author, "the eco-scientific form of this ethic draws its duty from the science of ecology (...). Maintaining the balance of nature and retaining the unity, stability, diversity and harmony of the ecosystem are its overall objectives. The survival of all living and non-living things as components of healthy ecosystems is of paramount importance" (Merchant, 2005, pp. 75-76).

Re-invento also brings to the surface a scientific world that, like everything related to the body, has been established as a territory confined to the masculine sphere. The scientific and the anatomical thus come together as two spaces of power. However, here they are also shown to be areas of research and vindication of the feminine universe, of all those female scientists erased from the history of science and vindication of those observers of other epistemologies.

The images bring us back, therefore, to *extractivismo* discourses - of bodies, territories and epistemologies - and the role they play in the climate emergency we face today. The implications of the body as a poetic-political space, of being a body and territory at the same time, are also reflected in the artist's interest in the eco-social crisis, which has led her to take photographs of different social movements on feminist struggles in different parts of AbyaYala², predominantly in Mexico and Argentina. Parceró calls for a two-fold inward-outward exploration, in the same way that she insists on the importance of self-knowledge to show that which is not seen, she shifts this importance to the territory to encourage us to stop and look at those other traces around us, like those of a climate debt inevitably associated with historical and colonial debt.

Now, at the time when boundaries between the interior and exterior are blurred, the memory of the body and the territory become one. Through this sort of personal palimpsest, her proposal involves writing by recomposing fragments as a way of unravelling other readings of the world.

² AbyaYala, which means land in its full maturity or land of vital blood, is the name by which North America was known before colonisation. It was the term adopted in 1977 by the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and comes from the Guna or Kuna language ("Abia" means blood or mature mother, and "Yala" means land or territory).

As a result, layers emerge that combine identity, memory, space and time, with which the artist generates new semantic codes to propose an intertextuality in which marks on the body and the despoiled territory are the corporeal and ecological footprint.

Her (self-)portraits of the body-territory speak of individual and global space, of pluriverses, and of skin and earth, where decolonial resonances intersect and overlap with those derived from a patriarchal heritage inscribed in a capitalist system.

In this way, the artist succeeds in stressing, poetically, the intricacies of the capitalism-patriarchy-colonialism triad that has formed the basis of the structural violence of the current paradigm. A systemic, invisible and "slow" type of violence that "needs to be seen - and deeply considered - as a competition not only for space, bodies, labour or resources, but also for time. We should bear in mind Faulkner's words when he stated that "the past is not dead, it is not even past" (Nixon, 2011, p. 8)

Ultimately, Parceró's work reflects art's ability to guide us in a kind of transformation for which a lot of determination and post-capitalist fantasy is essential, to counteract the difficulty of forming realities beyond the status quo and to envision other worlds in order to think in terms of pluriverses to reconstruct what Gramsci called our "Common Sense" (1986). A place where individual and collective horizons of desire meet.

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