

## Within strange waters, my shadow

These works were created by the artist Shirin Salehí during different visits she made to Madrid, Florence and New York between 2011 and 2018. They shed light on her artistic work from the moment when she found her own voice by using paper as a place where something occurs, and not as a medium. She works on the paper with the utmost care, transforming it and allowing it to lead her the way. The space is occupied by inscriptions, incisions, drawings or writing, a deluge of feelings and questions. She tackles different mediums with the same care and, according to the expressive or spatial needs, incorporates other elements such as water, sound, an installation or video.

Her dedication to engraving has given her a special awareness of time: historical time, the passing of time from the present moment and of the necessary times involved in the engraving processes that, quite naturally, extend to creation in any medium.

Her works invite the viewer to take a closer look, to become immersed in silence. They transmit a close examination of universal pain, lack of freedom and solitude. But, at the same time, they proclaim beauty and poetry as an antidote to suffering and death, bringing meaning to our existence. The dualism of pain/hope, darkness/light, imprisonment/freedom, violence/affection have an internal order, which harmonises tension.

Her principal interlocutor is literature, which stimulates the construction of an original and mysterious creative universe tending towards abstraction. Shapes that appear, suggesting - and not imposing- a view. Eminently poetical aesthetics connected to the rich Iranian culture ---Persian and Islamic--- that has gradually merged with Western culture. It is linked to the ancestral need to leave a mark and preserve memory.

In the hall that looks onto the terrace, the series entitled *Discurso en las sombras* (Discourse on shadows) evokes distant universes, opaque and uniform. Significantly, the first images to emerge on the paper are not drawn but cut, torn with conscious violence that produces tears through which light is filtered. Inscriptions of her pain and, at the same time, images that speak of horizons of freedom, although imprisoned behind sewn bars.

The initial incision lays the foundations for engraving, allowing her to draw on metal sheets, letting her imagination run freely. Mysterious images of light emerge from dark universes like vertical threads that resemble spindles or ears of corn. Perpendicular lines try to retain them in fluid tension. The precision of the lines, their expressive ability and brilliance isolates the images in the background, giving them a life of their own. Silence reigns and there is harmony in the layout.

A small copper sculpture inside a half-open piece of furniture begins the series entitled *Aguardar y desaparecer de sí* (Waiting and ceasing to exist). The "material where something occurs" is the copper, which gradually disappears as it is successively subjected to acid, leaving chance to act upon it, with the minimum intervention of the artist.

The violence of the incisions is replaced by the violence of the acid. After the corrosion, delicate fragments of metal remain, like archaeological exhibits, expressing the fragile nature of all that is human and material when confronted with its disappearance. They bear the mark of time and contain the memory of all that has occurred. A close examination of pain, death, the deterioration of material, but in a more up-to-date language.

The process of the disappearance of the moulds creates unique works that recover the lost aura of mechanically produced work. Each copper mould is subjected to successive acid baths, and the resulting fragments are stamped, recording the state of the mould at each precise moment. The white areas of the paper evoke what has disappeared.

During her visit to New York in 2017, Shirin Salehi was deeply moved when she read "Vuelta de paseo", the first poem in the book by Federico García Lorca, "Poeta en Nueva York". She recognised emotions and feelings that were very close to those she was feeling during her visit to the city. The installation entitled *Cadencias en el vacío* (Cadences in the void) is the result of a dialogue between the artist and the poem.

By delving deeper into the meaning of the poem, by paying attention to the impact it had on her, she feels compelled to record the emotion, to scrutinise the pain she shares. She needs to take refuge in that emotion. In order to invoke it again, she unconsciously repeats time after time the verses that arouse in her the greatest disquietude. By using repetition to appropriate the poem, the result is a personal recital. And she needs to inscribe it. It is the transcription of the recital of Lorca's poem in repetitive cadences, just like the philosophical tradition --- mystical, Persian and Islamic --- inherited since childhood. Once more, paper is a place to record the rhythm, expression and cadence. It is no longer an incision or acid that modifies the paper or copper. It is the writing itself --- white upon white --- which records, like in a sonogram, the intensity of the feelings.

The calligraphic drawing with its small writing and continuous lines, intends to be felt rather than read. It records the body language of the emotion that was produced during the action. The gaps or silences are clear in the separations between apparent paragraphs, as well as the oscillations of the internal restlessness of the order and grouping of the letters which, on occasions, trigger apparent enjambments of the lines. It reflects the instinctive gush of a growing emotion that subtly takes over her body.

In her desire to record the moment, she makes a recording of the sounds as she was executing the work: the quietly pronounced words and silences of the recital, the scratching sounds of her writing and her hand as it glides over the paper.

The calligraphic drawing along with the element of sound, enables the viewer to be simultaneously present in two times. On the one hand, the present time of the completed work and, on the other hand, the time of the action taking place, which recreates and shows the origin and intensity of the emotion. Both registers become memory. They are simultaneously the narration of a long process and the internal exploration of this process, in relation with the visual work. The sound surrounds the work, delimiting a space that

invites the viewer to enter and become involved in the event. And the light, as it shines through the paper, gives a three-way view: physical, intellectual and spiritual.

The emotion felt remains within the artist, prompting her to take a closer look, moving the transcription of the poem to other materials and using different registers that widen the possibilities of expression like containers of memory and its preservation. Paper as fine as butterfly wings, in the form of books, rolls, loose sheets and diptychs, copper sheets engraved directly or with mirrored writing that reveals the fragile nature of matter. Executed with loving care and requiring the most subtle attention from the viewer.

And mystery. Concealing as well as revealing.

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