

Marcela Jardón

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“The act of seeing a landscape is one of discovering a higher dimension in the territory. Landscape is therefore the sum of all that is ecological, historical and geographical, as well as all that is interpretive.”

El puesto de la cultura en el paisaje [Placing Culture in Landscape] by Eduardo Martínez de Pisón. *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* 84, 37-49, December 2017.

Artists who consider landscapes to be their main genre are devoted to expression through different media. Both painting and photography very often reflect the landscapes they represent, yet painting tends to be expressed in quite varied styles, usually inherited from artistic traditions such as realism or post-impressionism. Even so, the idea almost any painting of this kind converges on is the same: to depict a landscape. It should be made clear that landscapes are always necessarily loaded with cultural baggage, since the very concept of landscape means that it is no longer just a part of nature: it is also identified and arranged according to our knowledge; and as such appears civilized. This is apart from being seen not only as territory to be exploited for its resources, but as being a transcendental entity with *ecological, historical, geographical and interpretative* values, to quote the geographer Eduardo Martínez de Pisón. As far as interpretive values are concerned, they usually have to do with aesthetics, but emotions are also involved. Many landscapes are remembered and appreciated due to the affection felt for them, even though some must also be frightening for that very reason. These issues inform visual depictions because if a landscape is not apprehended, theoretically it is not important enough to be painted. And how it is painted depends on how an artist looks at it.

The landscapes painted by Marcela Jardón (Buenos Aires, 1964) explore a different facet of interpretive values regarding the landscape mentioned by the geographer Martínez de Pisón. She understands landscape painting to

be a whole that extends beyond appearances, beyond what is seen. Without the sense of sight, it would seem, at least hypothetically, impossible to artistically conceive of any particular landscape. The only viable means, as a more or less extreme option, would be to create a landscape based on a reconstruction of something given to us and therefore impregnated with subjectivity. In fact, Martínez de Pisón states that this is the “act of seeing a landscape” whereby, *a priori*, optical contact is necessary in “discovering a higher dimension in the territory.”

Nevertheless, Jardón, especially in her series *Paisajes Flotantes (Mapas Interdimensionales)* [Floating Landscapes (Interdimensional Maps)], dares to consider landscape as something that does not need to be observed first hand, or even experienced through images or descriptions that serve to guide our imagination. She thinks that landscapes, regardless of their characteristics, are found in the depths of the human psyche, to the point of being an archetype—a primordial image lacking any meaning *per se*. So for this Argentinean artist based in Barcelona, landscape is not solely experiential, but also resides inside us—at first unconsciously—and can be retrieved in the artistic process. In regard to archetypes, the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung said the following: “The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms, and in that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts, which are also determined in form only.” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Collected Works of C. G. Jung)*, 1970. The research timeframe for *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* was originally 1934-1954.)

So while conceiving and executing her paintings, Jardón makes an intriguing discovery. Fruit of this reflection enables her to locate in her thoughts the landscape's archetype, whatever that may be, and through awareness, interaction with the medium, she ends up revealing it. This is how she occasionally reproduces places that are unknown and foreign to her, such as snowscapes, given the fact that she has never been in a place like that, nor does she remember ever having seen any, thereby being denied the “act of seeing [...] as one of discovering.” Yet it is enough for her to know what kind of landscape it is in order to reproduce its icy,

whiter-than-white beauty. The artist's opinion is that our brains hide a record of all essential images that tend to be familiar to human beings and include certain kinds of landscapes. They don't even belong to any particular scientific classification, as would be expected in a primordial and therefore ancestral image. So this record only allows for basic components such as mountains, deserts, coasts, snowscapes or seascapes. This runs parallel to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, populated in part by archetypes initially having form rather than content. Yet, thanks to the latent existence of archetypes in our psyches —having been incorporated and transmitted generation after generation throughout the millennia of human existence— they can manifest themselves in an individual's consciousness and serve as a guide to reality.

In this way the artist understands that landscape, as primordial image, develops in the mind — not in her own, but in one that has been inherited, one that is collective and universal. Given their inherently abstract, idea-based origins, her landscape paintings are equally abstract. It is pointless to try to reproduce someplace one has never seen, since the inner landscape, the archetype, is woven into the self from the start.

The process of abstraction in order to compose a painting comes from imagining a certain landscape and wanting to show the way it truly is: a simplification of a series of mentally revealed and recreated images intermingled with archetypes, interpretations and memories. Because she is externalizing her subjectivity, Jardón rejects the idea of any specific association shaping the landscape she has in mind. Nevertheless, her brushstrokes tend to sketch a horizon line (not always; sometimes color inundates any options regarding the presented form) which at times can be subtly placed or superficially erratic, the stroke of pigment itself then becoming the formal axis.

The line also represents a chromatic division and allows us to perceive a sense of almost infinite depth obtained by looking at a landscape. By observing Jardón's extensive amount of landscapes included in *Paisajes Flotantes (Mapas Interdimensionales)* [Floating Landscapes (Interdimensional Maps)], significant variations can be detected, not only in the density and texture of her technique but also in the way she arranges her brushstrokes to achieve this materiality. Her lines are suggestive enough to be associated

with concrete landscape textures such as those created by water, snow, sand or earth. Her work of layering paint and texturing is carefully chosen; all this effort also reminds the artist of the passage of time, as represented by the pigment's hapticity. This is a visible, material incarnation of her working thought process. Finally, the colors used by the artist are usually heavy with symbolism, whether or not they refer to truer colorations of the depicted landscape. Color is one more aspect of Jardon's artistic universe, which brings to a close this theoretical critique of her work.