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How dearly we missed petrichor this summer—that first scent of rain as it touches the earth. Across Europe, perhaps as never before, the heat enveloped those of us who, with the first cold days of October barely upon us, already find ourselves longing for the sun’s piercing rays. And so we spend the next six months yearning for them beneath the low clouds of Paris, as the days grow shorter and shorter until the shortest one arrives, when the sun sets halfway through the afternoon.

But this year, the sun burned. And in the midst of summer, it offered us an extraordinary sight: an eclipse, during which it was partially concealed by the moon. These were strange days, when our lives seemed to revolve around the sun’s relentless heat, its perfect alignment with our satellite, the realization of its indescribable power over our existence, and our own folly in the face of the countless ecological warnings its effects have been sounding for years.

The paintings by Hilda Palafox in this exhibition, however, belong not to August in Paris but to August in Mexico: an August our bodies know by heart, whose famous *relámpagos* have even been enshrined in our modern literature. More than a people of the sun, we are a people who have worshipped water since ancient times. Tláloc and Chalchiuhtlicue, Nahua deities to whom colonial chroniclers respectively assigned masculine and feminine genders—a distinction possibly sharpened by the polarizing categories of European interpretation—embody a relationship that cannot be reduced to a single force or a single meaning. Within them coexist fertility and destruction, abundance and scarcity, sky and earth.

Our present relationship with the climate is a negotiation with sky and earth. An unequal game in which, collectively, we pull at nature, stretch the limits of what it can sustain, push it to its breaking point and, with increasing frequency, beyond.

In her paintings, Hilda Palafox delicately invokes that negotiation, while it is still possible to call it one. Her figures, invariably female, appear fused with a network—a mycelial network, the artist specifies: women who rise like the vapor released when rain touches dry earth and become landscape; women who inhabit the pictorial space, work upon it, and are transformed by it. We see their strength; we feel their strength.

Are these female figures allegories of nature? Their scale undoubtedly suggests something larger than ourselves: a figure who might be all of us, a woman’s body capacious enough to hold us all. This association has a long history. At the dawn of the twentieth century in Mexico, it was explored predominantly by male artists, who made the bodies of women and mothers into powerful allegories of the land, the nation, and the protective post-revolutionary state—or, conversely, of colonial betrayal or a prostituted nation. One of the intrinsic contradictions of the Mexican modernist project thus found expression in a visual culture obsessed with monumentalizing the feminine while granting women profoundly unequal access to that same monumentality.

Hilda Palafox does not relinquish the monumentality of the Mexican tradition, but she changes who is allowed to inhabit it. While Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros repeatedly turned to female bodies as powerful motifs, artists such as Aurora Reyes, María Izquierdo and, later, Rina Lazo had to negotiate their own place within an artistic field in which their abilities, ambitions, and right to work at monumental scale and occupy public space

were questioned, deferred, or denied.

Perhaps Hilda Palafox's female figures are allegories of nature only insofar as they cease to represent it from the outside. Their bodies neither stand apart from the landscape nor impose themselves upon it. In *Tierra amarilla*, body and terrain share planes, edges, and temperature until it becomes difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. In *Verde tierra*, the trees appear first; only later does the body reveal itself, in a pair of hands that seem to reach into the earth like roots.

The titles of the works offer further clues: *Labor*, *Cuerpos en faena*, *Acuerdo*, *Germen*. Their vocabulary is not one of contemplation but of action and relation: to work, to sustain, to connect, to come to an agreement, to germinate. In these paintings, nothing seems to exist on its own.

In *Labor*, many hands hold up a cloth too large for any one of them to carry. The fabric itself takes on the undulations of a terrain, so that the landscape seems to depend upon this collective act. In *Cuerpos en faena*, the bodies themselves form the network: arms, hands, and points of contact transmit weight, momentum, and resistance from one figure to another. And in *Acuerdo*, two figures construct between them a precarious point of balance whose existence depends upon them both. If one gives way, whatever they hold between them disappears.

Monumentality takes on another meaning. These bodies are monumental because they are capable of sustaining and of being sustained. Their strength lies not in their autonomy but in what passes between them.

The mycelial network that runs throughout the exhibition offers another way of imagining this condition. Beneath our feet, mycelium extends as a web of connections, linking organisms and sustaining relationships invisible to our unsophisticated eyes. In Palafox's paintings, this network can also be understood as a metaphor for the bonds that make life possible. The monumental body ceases to be epic. It becomes sensitive, permeable, dependent, connected.

Finally, *Germen* introduces time into this network. A figure emerges from a flower, returning to an image from the Mesoamerican visual tradition, while the bas-relief brings forms into being through the subtraction of matter. This seems less about returning to an origin than about imagining life as a succession of transformations: body into flower, flower into body, matter always holding within itself the possibility of becoming something else.

The scent that gives the exhibition its title belongs neither entirely to the rain nor entirely to the earth. It emerges only when the two come into contact. As the artist explains, "Petricor turns our attention toward what emerges when water returns: bonds, transformation, and forms of life that can exist only in relation to others."

And so, as we move away from the searing heat of summer, the first rains begin to touch the scorched ground of Paris. Hilda Palafox's paintings inhabit that brief interval: the moment when the earth receives water once again and, for the span of a breath, we remember that we, too, are part of it.