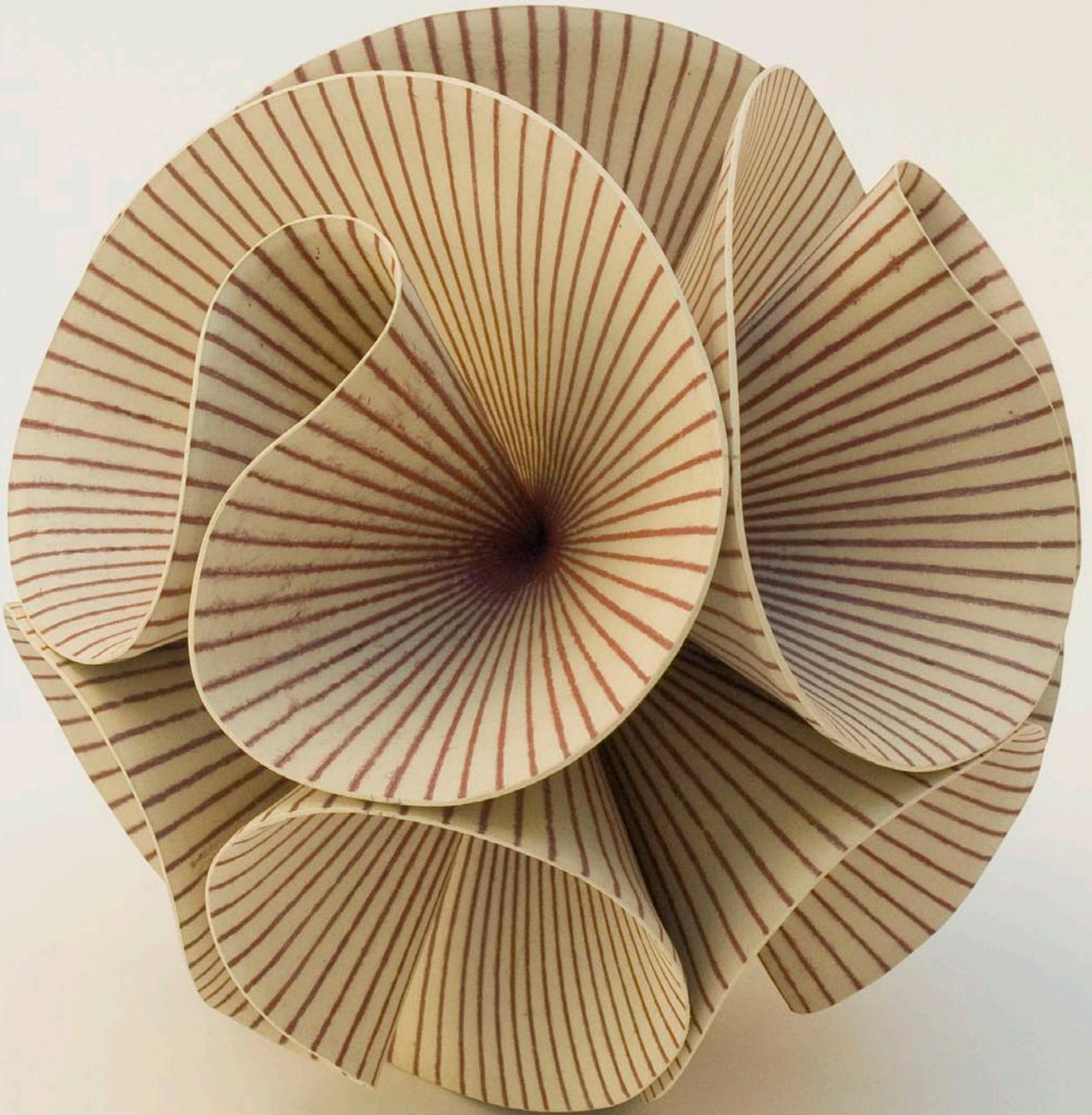


# Vital Emptiness



María Oriza's Sculptures



Previous page: *Flor Fractal*. Stoneware with red and cobalt oxides. 32 x 32 x 32 cm.  
 Above: *Vacío Inagotable*. Stoneware with iron oxide. 420 x 20 x 68 cm.

*Emptiness is wide. Like the bird that spontaneously sings and is identified with the universe.*  
 Chang-tzu

IN THE PRE-MODERN ERA, EVERYTHING ACHIEVED THROUGHOUT fire's tame was enclosed by a magic aura belonging to an alchemist nature. Fire is placed in an honoured position due to his allurements and capacity for terrifying (over earth, water and air) in the list of basic elements created by the ancient thinkers to explain universe creation and its order.

For Heraclitus, The Obscure, "All things are an interchange for fire and fire for all things, just like goods for gold and gold for goods."<sup>1</sup> These interchanges are carried out within the global cycle of fire, which means the alternation between the disappearance of the whole cosmos blazing to be reborn and created again through fire.

Empedocles is another ancient philosopher who attached great importance to fire in his cosmogony and he believed that each one of the four basic elements have features of eternal and unalterable being, also they are the roots of everything. In addition, he believed cosmic forces of love and strife play as an engine to aggregate or disaggregate these elements.

In the Chinese cosmology the combining action of this love is able to transform multiplicity into a unity, so it is the vital breath caused by the empty space dividing yin and yang. Probably that is the reason why emptiness is so significant in María Oriza's sculptures, since her creative action is rooted in Taoist tradition and its meaning of the emptiness: "a man's heart could be the rule or the mirror of himself and the world, thus breeding emptiness and identifying pivotal emptiness, human beings are placed at the beginning of the images and shapes. Emptiness captures the rhythm, space and time and it controls the rule of transformation."<sup>2</sup>

A single drop of clay allows one to craft a glass, according to Lao-Tzu, but the empty space makes the glass useful. In Oriza's sculptures, we can appreciate this subtle play between the physical identity of an object with a concrete shape and its true function throughout emptiness: it is not just its 'use', it is to delight with a concrete aesthetic created by the artist. Moreover, this play is an attempt by the artist to understand the world through artistic creation

as well as the emptiness within.

Regarding Eduardo Chillida, Ángel Valente says that enclosing full emptiness "places the artist and us in a point where creation is achieved and in its achievement, what has been created, fades so that the world continues to be possible, that is to say, to perpetuate the possibility of creativity".<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Martin Heidegger reflected about the meaning of emptiness in Chillida's works and explains "creating emptiness" is to "create freedom, openness to a settlement and life for a human being".<sup>4</sup> This means that understanding of the emptiness is required, not only as an amplified concept of the shapes crafted by Oriza but also as the environment where she acts and expands her creative spirit.

Maybe her work of art *Spline* is the best example of her creative genius as it is perpetuated endlessly throughout the filling of an emptiness defined by a helicoidal ring that reminds a little bit of the one of Möbius, since it is an endless shape rolling up and over itself like twisted yarn, allowing the remaining space to be infinite. In a way, the work of art *Spline* is conceived to serve as metaphor to the physical concept of the endless screw, without running out of substance in the universe sidereal emptiness. *Vacío Inagotable* (endless emptiness) is based on the idea of the endless extent of the universe, not like the application of this magic 'trick' achieved throughout the curl of a screw

rolling over itself but as the creation of a stage of an endless emptiness whose axis is a linear direction, expanding the creative breath and whose

rhythm is created by a number of rings, crafted regularly spaced as if they were vertebrae.

Obviously, this vertebral structure is an invitation to see inner emptiness as a central axis of creative breathe, whose expansion means adding more rings to the work of art, one after another, endlessly. *Hitos* is composed of a 'vertebral' association. Its structure, however, reminds one of two parallel chains, whose vertical expansion is achieved following a juxtapositioned axis perpendicular to each one of the marrow axes of the links. This work

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*Aldaba. Stoneware with iron oxide. 47 x 16 x 68 cm.*



*Contenedor de Sonidos. Stoneware with iron oxide. 40 x 26 x 72 cm.*

of art should be seen as two chains of inner emptiness, meanwhile they have a dialogue with the empty space that divide the two columns of 'links'. In *Vacío inagotable* (Endless emptiness) this undefined progression is highlighted by the virtual movement of the winding lines drawn inside and outside of the rings, always changing according to the spectator's point of view. The same happens with *Aldaba* (Door knocker). Thus, situated in front of the sculpture, we appreciate just the optic game of the outside lines but if we move slowly towards a side of the work of art, inside lines get in to our visual field until they reach the first position in our visual field.

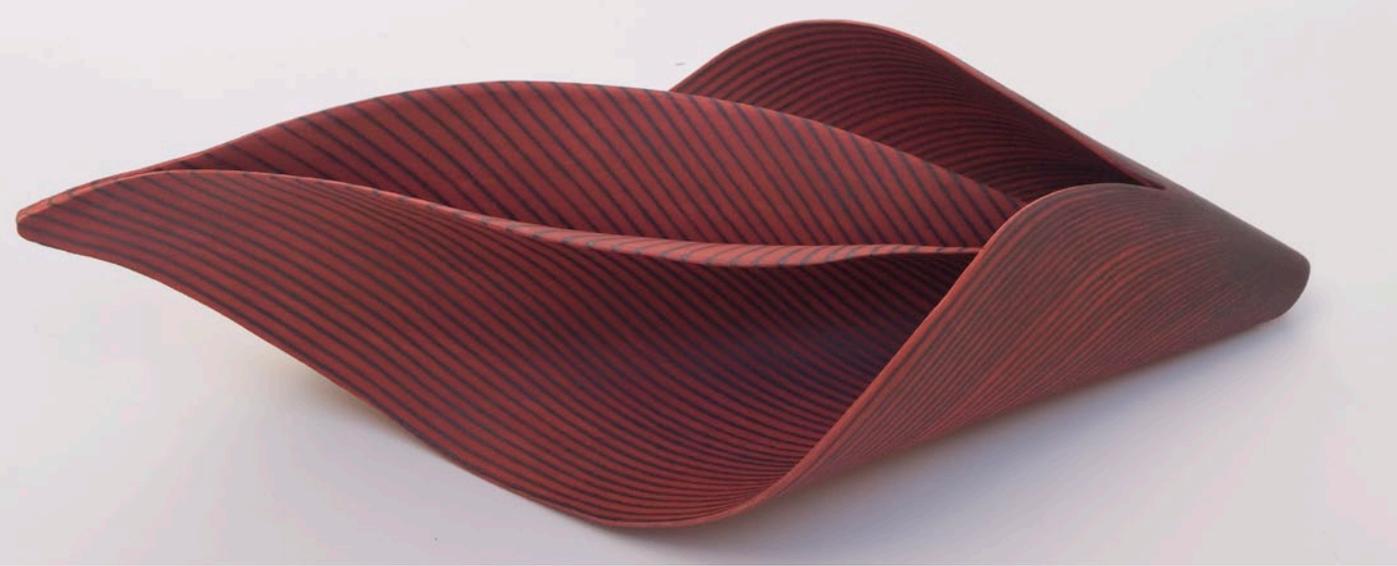
This optical interference caused by the lines drawn as in *Caza Sueños* (Hunting dreams) also lead us to think about the quality of extension (therefore of the space) that in Bergson words is not "a physical attribute comparable to the others" such as gravity, heat. . . If we assume that we notice space throughout sight and touch, these lines make the spirit speculate with its own forces about this notion "cutting out *a priori* one of the figures to determine *a priori* their properties: the experience, even with the initial contact lost, follow them, despite endless difficulties of the reasoning of its reason".<sup>5</sup> Thus it is the same effect caused by zebra's strips in our conscience, somehow, left there a long time after we have seen the herd passed by.

For Rosalind Krauss the appearing of the grid in the work of well-known artists of the beginning of the 20th century shows a contradiction: on one hand, the grid answers a need of 'cooling down' of the ontological value

of art, getting away from any transcendental project, placing it instead as an exercise of pure objectivity applied to the physical dimension of the piece of work, that is to say to emphasize full autonomy of art. On the other hand, a grid could mean a return to the original essence of an art considered – in Schwitters' words, "vital, sublime as divine, unexplainable as life, non defined and endless".<sup>6</sup> Grid in Oriza's works of art might share completely this reasoning with Schwitters, far from materialism. Nevertheless, we should look for its true meaning among the thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. To these two philosophers the strips contribute to aid to "translate flat space", "to tame, to over codify, to neutralize" and moreover to give the space a meaning to be propagated, extensive, refracted, renovated, pushed. Without these qualities the work will end up dying away: "like a mask that not only allows the work to breathe through but also to achieve a general form of expression."<sup>7</sup>

These two philosophers explain that "the major science (in this case the art to craft significant shapes of clay) has a perpetual need of an inspiration that comes from minor aspects. This can be constantly verified in nature, since nature 'decorates' with great inspiration in birds' feathers, fish's scales or the structure's caprice of a turtle, which, indeed resembles 'the skin' of *Torre Biónica* (Bionic Tower).

*Máscara* (Mask) leads us to think in a mollusc's shell, with grid ornaments whose scale changes according to the narrowness of its spindle's shape. Thanks to this feature we might see this work of art or *Flor Fractal* (Fractal



Flower), *Gea* (Gaia), *Eolo* (Aeolus), as the best ones to disclose the secrets that are hidden in strips and grids: the inspiration mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari that it is just the artistic capability of Oriza that adds the dynamics to her shapes through light's capture in its skin.

Of course, this capacity depends at first on the properties of the material used to create the works of art. Wood and glass are at opposite poles in the art of luring light. We shall

remember the famous passage of Maurice Merleau-Ponty where he takes the example of a swimming pool to analyse the sun's magical light game and water and the way it distorts all of the lines creating a grid at the bottom.<sup>8</sup> In Oriza sculptures, distortion does not appear by means of light diffraction while it crosses a watery lens but distortion is caused by an exact curvature of shapes and the fracturing spaces, a result of the changes in directions at each intersection point. The achievement of this hypnotic and dynamic effect is a sample of the refined technique of Oriza's ability to transform the unity of thin walls in flesh-like shapes such as the commisure of the lips as in *Contenedor de Sonidos* (Sounds Container), *Caja de Pandora* (Pandora's box), *Pluma* (Feather) which reveals explicit sexual references.

It is apparent that a name like *Caja de Pandora* is subjugated deliberately in a will to insist in these references, since the libido could be considered as more of a mystery box that unleashes everything good and bad of mankind.



Top: **Pluma**. Stoneware with red slip and cobalt oxide. 29 x 65 x 16 cm.

Above left: **Montaña Artificial**. Stoneware with chromium slip and cobalt oxide.

Above: **Torre Biónica**. Stoneware with iron, cobalt and manganese oxides. 35 x 35 x 70 cm.



*Máscara.* Stoneware with iron, cobalt and manganese oxides.  
17 x 8 x 69 cm.



*Gea.* Stoneware with iron, cobalt and manganese oxides.  
43 x 38 x 32 cm.

speculation is taken further by Yves Bonnefoy in *Tombs of Ravenna* when she compares ornament with “the concept which consists on denying death, since death is equally what escapes abstraction”.<sup>10</sup> María Oriza’s sculptures are fruits of love between fire and humid earth, a tangible metaphor of the denial of death expressed with the same formal resources used by nature in the hymn of life: arches, ellipsoidal curves or hyperbolic curves, that far from being main characters of a cold geometry as in *Oscilante* (Oscillant) or *Montaña Artificial* (Artificial Mountain) the sculptures give sense to the shapes in their spiritual fight between the emptiness that holds them or separates them and avoids that emptiness that could become the moor of horrifying nothingness.

#### Footnotes:

1. Abel Jeannière, Héraclite. *Traduction et commentaire des Fragments*, Éditions Aubier Montaigne. Paris 1985. Pg 25.
2. François Cheng. *Vide et plein*, col. *Essais*, Les Éditions du Seuil. Paris, 1991. Pp. 62-63.
3. Ángel Valente. *Elogio del calígrafo*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2002. Pg 38.
4. Martin Heidegger. *El arte y el espacio*. Herder Editorial, Barcelona, 2009. pp 21-23.
5. Henri Bergson. *L'évolution créatrice*, Col. *Quadrige*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1986. Pg 205.
6. Rosalind Krauss. *L'originalité de l'avant-garde et autres mythes modernistes*, Les Éditions Macula. Paris. 1993. Pp 136-137.
7. Gilles Deleuze y Felix Guattari. *Mille plateaux*, les Éditions de Minuit. Paris, 1997. Pg 607.
8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, Gallimard, Paris, 1983. Pg 70.
9. Henri Focillon. *La vie des formes*, Presse Universitaires de France. Paris, 1964. Pg 29.
10. Yves Bonnefoy. *Les Tombeaux de Ravenne*, Gallimard. Paris, 1983. Pg 17.

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