



Paloma Torres
Horizontes fragmentados

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Bárbara Toledo
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Índice
Contents

Presentaciones	
Presentations	
<i>UBX</i>	8
<i>Alejandro E. Montiel</i>	10
<i>Marc's Roman</i>	12
Prólogo	15
Foreword	17
<i>Lucía I. Alonso Espinosa</i>	
Paloma Torres	23
Paloma Torres	25
<i>Miquel Adrià</i>	
Trayectos, contrastes, contigüidades	59
Trajectory, contrasts, contiguities	73
<i>Teresa del Conde</i>	
Paloma Torres, ante el horizonte obstruido	111
Paloma Torres, facing an obstructed horizon	119
<i>Luis Carlos Emerich</i>	
Una coreografía de barro para pensar con la piel	135
A choreography in clay to be seen through the skin	149
<i>Alberto Roy Sánchez</i>	
Semblanza	209
Profile	212

Paloma Torres

Miquel Adrià

Paloma Torres' work belongs in a territory where sculpture and architecture meet and overlap: between the monument and the city, or between ornamentation and functionality. To a certain degree, her work reverts to a Mexican tradition that has tended to close the gap between both these disciplines until they blend into each other. The forerunners —Juan O'Gorman, Luis Barragán, Mathias Goeritz, Ricardo Regazzoni or Alberto Kalach— gave us fine examples of this, on both sides of that intangible frontier that allowed a library building to become a mural, a wall to become a monument and some water towers to become urban icons.

Paloma Torres' metropolitan landscapes are a synthesis of a moment in time, extracts of a cluster of apartment buildings in relief or a fragment of the city among a tangle of electric cables.

Her columns are autonomous, they are milestones that commemorate themselves. They are objects. In architecture, what counts is the space left free between the columns. Perhaps it is the same in a forest. The columns are instrumental and the space they define is the protagonist, the object. Nevertheless, here the values are inverted, the columns become positive. They draw from architecture *their before and after*: buildings in the process of construction and ruins. Metal rods open to the sky or a flattened platonic prism, these are subjects that paradoxically do not support anything: they lose their usefulness in order to acquire significance.

The metropolis is Torres' preferred scenario. She is fascinated by its impermanence, by the artifact: she fixes instants in ceramic and bronze allowing one to perceive an aesthetic delight rather than a critical reading about the triviality of urban artifice. Beginning with the literary titles that she gives her pieces, Paloma Torres traps the urban landscapes in a pentagram of wire loops —a web of electric cables—, to freeze what is ephemeral and flexible. Her subjects —as well as her materials— crystallize the ethereal, solidify fluids. They fix a time and define a space. Her forests of tattooed columns, like *Buildings with Bindings* and *Buildings with Cables*, depart from the literality of an architectural reference, to distance themselves in the process, to retreat into their essence and from there tell their story, their parts, their unions and their scars. In *Urban Ensemble*, the bronze columns converted into

a representation of a conglomeration of skyscrapers, cylindrical and terraced, on a human scale, depart from the germinal reference to become abstractions in the sensuality of the material, in the repetition of the parallel platforms, in the tension generated by their proximity. The phalluses in *White Landscape* are probably the most sensual anthropomorphized pieces. Columns without capitals or torsos without heads in which, from beneath the bindings one can distinguish the shape of a column or a body. Paloma Torres creates images—with objects—those already extant. She reaffirms them and interprets them.

Architecture is not made from space and stones, but from impressions. It is not a building that is constructed, but an idea. Sculpture, on the other hand, is made of matter. Of clay that is handled—made by hand—caressed and baked. And for both—architecture and sculpture—the important element is not the space but the atmosphere it generates. And this, in the recreation of an urban atmosphere, is where Paloma Torres leads us.



John Doe

Trajectory, contrasts, contiguities

Teresa del Conde

I

It is worth taking a look at Paloma Torres' curriculum. She is an artist whose training at the National University ENAH consisted of practicing work in all the disciplines of the plastic arts, although she paid special attention to engraving. Tenacious and obsessed with perfecting her skills—even today she keeps this tonic— Paloma earned her degree and continued working with masters such as Nunik Sauret and Carlos García Estrada. Later on, she spent some time in Stanley William Hayter's famous atelier in Paris, as well as taking courses in the School of Art at the Louvre, which is a practical training in the sense that it offers subjects such as history and theory of art while actually viewing the innumerable creations of all the periods that make up this infinitely rich collection.

Some time later she did an internship, which was definitive, with the Canadian René Derouin, ceramist, sculptor and architect whose nomadic life has been a defining factor in his trajectory: He has traveled the length of America and has visited Mexico on several occasions, one of these—not the first— during the earthquake of 1985. His most recent visit was for the inauguration of his exhibition *Identity, Migration and Mixed Race* at the Universal Forum of the Cultures, in Monterrey, Mexico. His participation in the exhibition at the Parque Fundidora was greatly acclaimed.

Paloma recognizes how important such an encounter was for her and the learning experience derived from it, but it is impossible to deduce how much the master in Quebec influenced her work, although the fact that Derouin had built his habitat "with his own hands", as if he were a vernacular architect, must have certainly made an impression on her.

Well traveled, one might even say peripatetic, Paloma has exhibited her work in cities all over the world, visited many regions and has worked in situ in workshops of very different types. Recently she spent some time in the village of Ceramic Art in Fuping, Shaanxi, China, where she shared experiences during her stay with twenty-five other colleagues of different nationalities. Before that, she had been in touch with Japanese print makers, such as Toshi Yoshida, who is the last of the great artists of the Shing Hange

(New Prints) period, entrusted with maintaining the tradition, to a certain degree, but combining it with Western elements that were used in Impressionism, a movement that in turn was inspired by Japanese prints of the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ Yoshida, who had also visited Mexico, turned toward abstract prints of an informal nature during the last stage of his life.

This comment arises because all Paloma Torres' incursions in the field of printing have been fundamental for her to transpose them into her formulations about volume. But there is something else that I should mention. As she is the daughter of Ramón Torres, the architect, she has been nourished since childhood on the elements of construction: grids, rows of bricks, jambs, piles, beams, concrete casts, not to mention *maquettes*, plans, surveys and isometric perspectives. She absorbed architectural design ever since she was in kindergarten.²

What might be called her passion as an artisan—which is common among such famous artists as Francisco Toledo—has led her to ceramics, but not the ceramics of objects or receptacles, of which Gustavo Pérez has given us such fine examples, almost synonymous with perfection in this craft, but rather for another type of work, linked as I have suggested, to elements of construction that take on the role of sculpture in ceramics. If it were possible to build an inhabitable mini-city in ceramics, I am sure she would accept the challenge, or at least this idea is illustrated by one of her recent works: *City Structure*.

Not long ago she declared that she was interested in "the bones of the buildings", that is, the skeleton of a construction.³ In this declaration there lies, implicitly and simultaneously, her ecological vision of the ambits, the contemporary forests of concrete that are not likely to disappear, but that artists sometimes endow with elements that turn them into improved environments. One of the artist's most recent public creations is a fountain located in a luxurious hotel at the Riviera Maya, in the coast of Quintana Roo.

1. Vid. Laura Allen, *A Japanese Legacy: Four Generations of Yoshida Family Artists*, Minneapolis, Institute of Arts, 2002.

2. Ramón Torres, the architect, was head of the project and coauthor of the Faculty of Medicine of the Mexican National Autonomous University (UNAM), among other notable buildings of his design. He was recently awarded the Atolani Prize. He also designed an impressive residence in Oaxaca which has become one of the obligatory buildings to visit on any tour of that city. This is the home of the painter Sergio Hernández who has his studio next door.

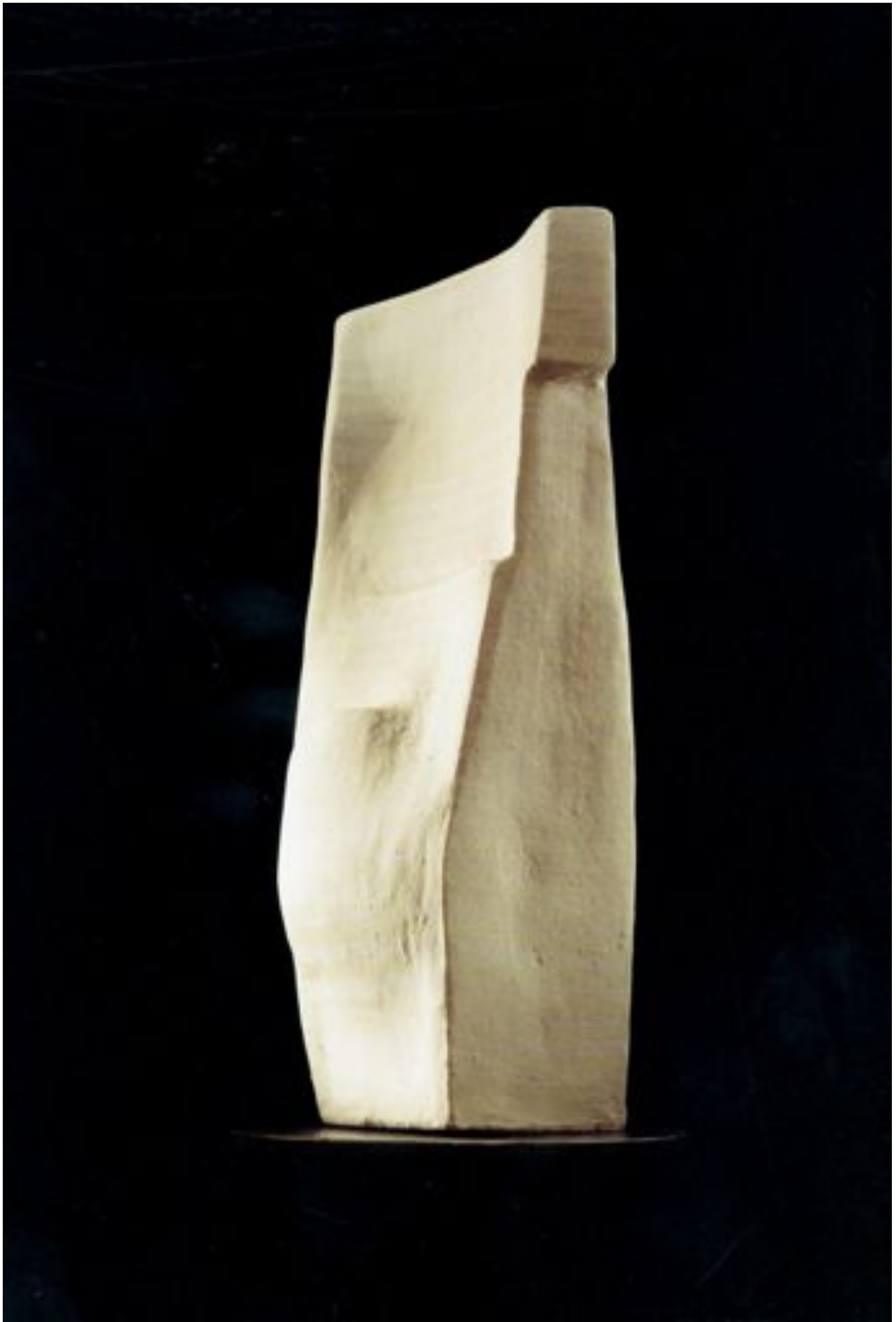
3. Paloma Torres, apud José Lara, "Notas de hoy", in *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* [on line], section Sala de Prensa, México, Coahuila, 20 January, 2005. <<http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/saladeprensa/2005/20may/principal.html>>

[Consult: 24 January, 2008.]

It has always seemed strange to me, that articles or papers on ceramics in English should be found under the term *pottery*, which comes from *pot*, a pan or receptacle. And, that a maker of ceramics should be called a *potter*. The Greek word *keramikós* has its etymology in *kéramos*, which means not only ceramic objects like jars and vases, but also bricks, roof tiles and even prisons, although the word is also the equivalent for *clay*. One of the most beautiful places in Athens is the Kerameikós, the museum of funeral sculpture which was formerly a prison, hence its name.

When a potter is a creator, and Paloma Torres certainly is, the same as those who have at certain times formed part of a group that included her, they often inherit not just one but several traditions, and she has assimilated them all, even if her production is not utilitarian. It has often been said that the best ceramist in Mexico (the most perfect in creating the ceramic object, in my opinion) is the aforementioned Gustavo Pérez. He has made utilitarian objects, although the lucky owners no longer use them in this sense because his pieces outclass any possible everyday functions, as could be seen in one of his recent exhibitions: *A Retrospective Look*, presented in the Franz Mayer Museum in 2005.

I feel compelled to say that Paloma Torres' style represents the opposite notion to that of Gustavo Pérez, but my statement is not quite accurate, although the intentions of one and the other imply contrast. It is worth bearing in mind that there are aspects of ceramics that are implicit: the reiteration of one same module, the play of light and shadow, the sensual situosity that pieces frequently display. Someone once said that there is something archaeological about ceramics and, of course, this is true. In the burial sites of so many ancient cultures, including our own, there are always pieces of pottery, the same as in Mycenae and Tirinto. What can truly be said is that all artists that work in ceramics simply love their material, I think they love it above anything else, as another ceramic sculptor once confessed to me —Adán Paredes. This happens whether they combine the clay —as does Paloma Torres— with bronze and other materials, wood, copper, etcetera. Perhaps what I am saying is that it is something within the collective unconscious: this molding the clay is an ancestral activity and the first pieces of pottery to gain consistency were sun-dried, before Prometheus brought fire to the world and they could be baked. This might be the reason that one of the contemporary bestselling novels, *The Oven* by José Saramago, takes as its central point an old pottery factory to which its owners feel bound for life. The subject is a metaphor which reverts, as the title shows, to the myth of the Platonic cave. The description of the oven and the firing process reveal that the famous Portuguese author had close contact with what he describes, which also explains the quantity and quality of the production of tiles and mosaics that Portugal has been famous for since early periods of history.



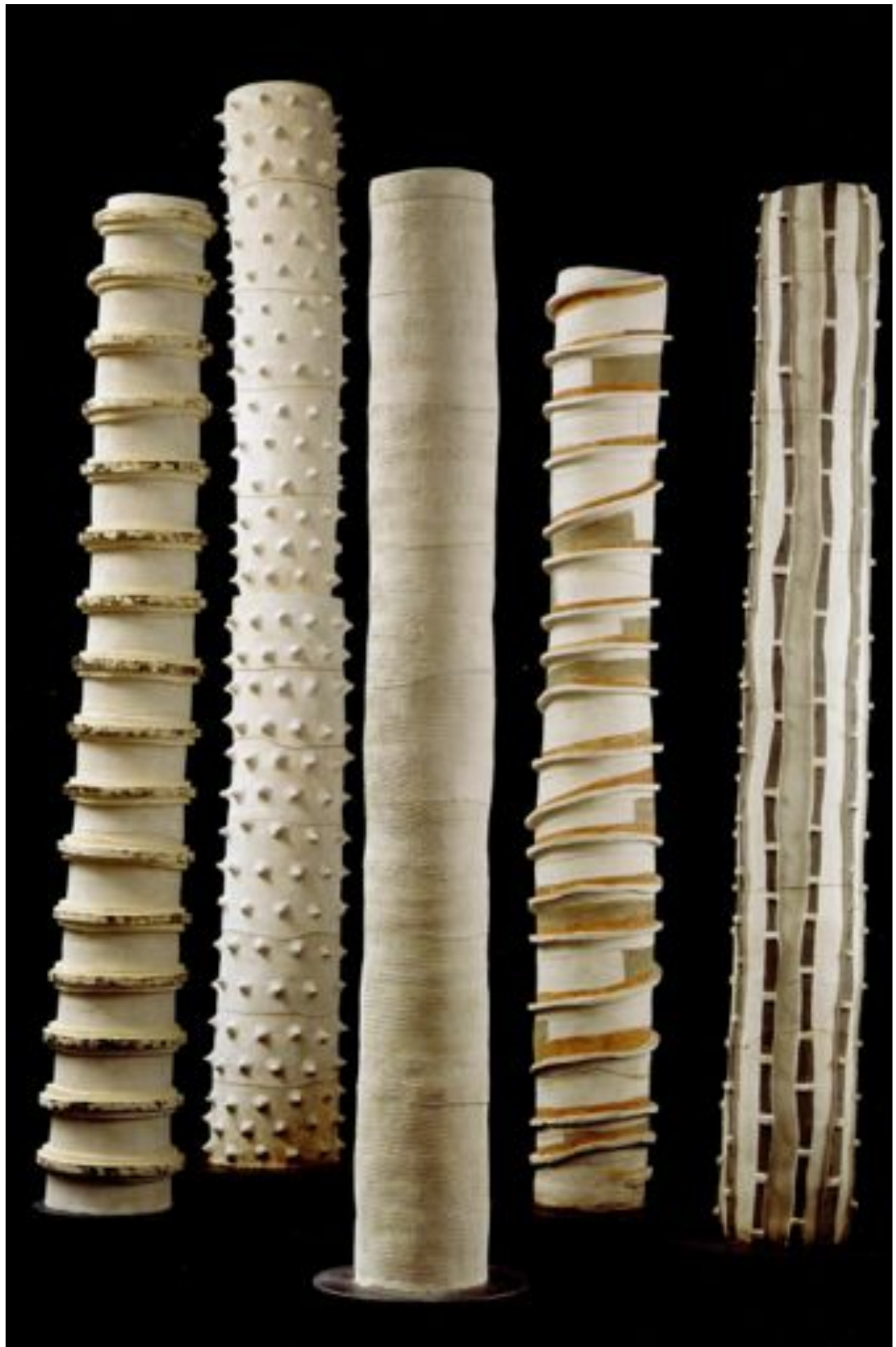
Paloma Torres facing an obstructed horizon

Luis Carlos Emerich

Although Paloma Torres' work can be viewed as a progressive and diversified homage to the basic elements of architecture through a contemporary reassessment of clay as a material for sculpture, today, in this first exhibition presented together with the photographs that set a specific frame of reference, and therefore establish the context of her latest projection, the aesthetic and social reading gains potency and becomes a stimulating paradox.

While Paloma Torres' columns, walls, frames, spheres, buttress and reticular reliefs all refer to primary elements or universal archetypes, they make one think of a common humanist ideal which, however eroded and buried by the winds of progress, continues to be yearned for as the lost purity displaced by alienation. Nowadays, taking as reference the construction of the San Antonio overhead speedway in Mexico City (which I have witnessed, and in certain way been seduced by the involuntary plasticity of the forms generated by such a construction), it may be stated that the conceptual basis of her work has gone through a process in which the creative stimulus became reflexive, and whose best conclusion is a proposal, rather than a paradox, of a series of dualities.

For one thing, it is possible to prove that a city that deals with its permanent congestion of traffic and saturation in housing by using desperate invasive measures has been the inspiration for such a beautiful work of sculpture that it limits its critical implications. In addition, one can also claim that the erection of a colossal concrete myriapod that runs over, under and through residential areas, carrying on its tortuous back thousands of automobiles all going at high speed, has been the trigger for this yearning for precisely what it has destroyed: the urban landscape understood as the human need to look the future. To this duality we must add the artistic value of discovering that beauty can exist in a monster, together with the sensuality of kneading the clay and molding it to create objects that resemble, to a certain degree, our immediate reality but are aesthetically the opposite. Then, this reveals our yearning to recover the lost horizons, against all expectations and against the current of present day trends in art to sacrifice manual skills to impersonal and technological production.





A choreography in clay to be seen through the skin

Alberto Ruy Sánchez

When you touch clay it moves, you must learn to dance with it.

Peter Voukios

One could not throw a shape properly until you understood its internal choreography.

Michael Frimkess

Potters have acknowledged that the performing arts of music and dance with their emphasis on action and repetition hold truer analogies to the field of pottery than either painting or sculpture.

Garth Clark

A separate Universe

Paloma Torres holds a unique position in the recent history of contemporary art. And, the more one lives with her work and gets to know it, the more certain one becomes that her importance is sure to increase. There are many reasons for this: the more immediate are conclusive. Her pieces need and deserve to be reviewed and thought about by touching them with ones eyes and the eyes of one's skin, because her work is a seductive invitation to think with one's skin, following and developing the invitation of the writer and art historian Damián Bayón. He invites us to stand in front of contemporary art with an enormous sensorial disposition —to open our minds to the senses and to think with our eyes.

Therefore, by following this way of thinking, not only with our eyes but also with our skin can we begin to understand the unique artistic terrain that Paloma Torres has established. The singularity and discreet daring of her creative work set a tension with the materials she uses and with the

nature of the pieces she has made in clay both in a traditional and a contemporary manner.

Tension, in this case, is creative. It does not restrain but rather impels; it is not a contradiction but a paradox. It is like a tense bow that shoots its arrow to mark a new range, extend the limits to a further horizon. Because, precisely, by using each of the plastic qualities of ceramics, Paloma Torres, the artist, adds an unexpected dimension of emotive materiality to an entirely contemporary language, a profound dance with the clay.

The strange thing is that she is not just one more contemporary artist who makes ceramics almost as if the material she works with did not matter. She is not a painter or a sculptor who merely uses clay as one of many materials. If from the usual field of ceramics she is more of a sculptor, as a plastic artist in sculpture she is a master ceramist; her skill in the craft and her creative passion are those of a ceramist. But neither can it be said that her pieces are headed in a natural way toward the normal forms of being of ceramic works. She is a sculptor and ceramist who sees and feels in another way, and the two combined become a third way.

It is as if her fascination with the past of ceramics is not necessarily the ground upon which her work is based, so that this never becomes a bind or a limitation. Her creative attitude is amazingly agile and even seems carefree; but in both areas are her skills evident and her practice long. Neither history of creative usage and customs seem to influence her work. She does not gravitate within the evident tradition of sculpture nor to the known context of the ceramist, because she does not tread either path but flies through both ambits with her own lightness of being.

Paloma Torres reminds me, particularly, of a now famous answer given by a potter in the village of Metepec, Mexico, when he was asked if he considered himself an artist or a craftsman: "I'm only a lover of clay", he replied. This reminiscence makes me think that classifications are always external and the creator does not necessarily experience them as they are felt from outside. Creative practice is something else. In the case of Paloma Torres it is a third way—new, paradoxical and very different.

Art historians classify ceramists into those artists who concentrate on the qualities of molding the clay on the wheel and those who achieve excellence in their pieces by playing with the possibilities of firing in an oven. The wheel potters and the oven potters. Paloma Torres does not allow this classification for her pieces; her work has the qualities of both and neither one more than the other. She molds and she fires, but her best work stops at neither of these stages, it continues to evolve.

In any case, contemporary sculpture is usually divided into the artists who create forms known as *closed fit* forms and those who make *open fit* forms; matter that seems to have been carved by the wind only on the surface without penetrating them or those that have holes in them and the wind can flow freely through them. Again, the forms created by Paloma Torres literally do not allow this classification; they appear to be carved, as if

they were *closed fist*, but the subtlety of the surfaces often have the complexity of *open fist* in that thin area we could call its skin. And this is achieved as much by the varied formal abstract language generated by Paloma Torres as by the fact that they are made of clay.

Another external classification divides abstract art, such as Paloma's, in an art that is true to geometry and another that is true to natural shapes, more sensual and organic. Again, Paloma Torres' work is unthinkable only from the perspective of abstraction: her pieces are full of forms that are at once organic and geometric in their composition. And they are this—some more so and others less so—as much in their surfaces as in their entire composition.

Paloma Torres is an eccentric abstract sculptor as well as a heterodox ceramist. Doubly unorthodox, she creates her own canon. Situated on the margins of both these territories: that of contemporary art and that of the ceramist, she has created something 'other'. She invents her own space for her art: a third territorial option, which, for the present, is her very own, or rather it belongs to her art. And here, in this new continent of clay and lines of expression, of abstract pieces that can be almost felt as close bodies, of fragility and transcendence, of intelligent installations and paradoxical traditions, her creativity—her vision of the world—is unarguably the center of a territory peculiar to contemporary art.

Paloma Torres' Universe

Her very name raises
her own vertical forest
and takes flight.
Her hands
bring to light, life
ancient forms
nobody has known,
they touch us all
and sing in our ears
before beginning
to dance and
glide through the air.
It is the ritual bird,
swift, almost invisible,
a blot, a blur
on the fragile tip
of a walking totem.
The other is a horizontal
tremor,
of a heart
climbing a whirlwind.

I find myself and
lose myself in
her forest of
the rings of Saturn,
in her brittle universe,
in the celestial scaffolding
of her uniquely
resistant soul. Where I
wish to enter, to rest
these hallucinating eyes,
the better to see,
with my hands,
all this wondrous anatomy
of a world apart,
that eventually,
is in our skin.



