

Article for the book

*la obra de **Marta Elena Vélez***

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RECENT WORKS

By Dora Mejía

When Arthur Danto¹ in his book “After the End of Art” talks about “everything is possible as Art”, which is most the surprising characteristic of Contemporary Art², he refers not only to the most daring postures of artistic creativity of the Twentieth Century, but also to the proposals of present day artists who can work trusting classical resources such as Painting, if it enables them to communicate their artistic intentions that tend to create new meaningful formal entities. Both the daring postures and the faith in classical resources are equally contemporary.

Marta Elena Vélez’s painting can be appreciated, from this point of view, as the resource to an expressive technique to communicate ideas that propose new realities, drawn from inexistence through the interpretation of her vital experiences and through her own procedures that do not resort to traditional representation but instead to strategies that are renovated with by Modern Art, such as the artistic analysis propitiated by the motivations and interpretations of the vital reality of the artist, the critique and transgression of that same reality, the reflections on the creative process which become expressive elements of the work itself and, above all, the creation of new formal entities that contribute new senses to Art.

¹ Arthur C. Danto: North American Art critic and Philosopher, author of “After the End of Art” and “The Abuse of Beauty”, amongst other publications. In Preface to “The Abuse of Beauty”, pages XVIII-XIX, according to him: “(...) the history of the philosophy of art (...) reached a new level in the 1960s when it at last became clear that everything is possible as art. The end of art, as I have used that phrase, means this. See “The Abuse of Beauty [Aesthetics and the Concept of Art]” by Arthur C. Danto. The Paul Carus Lecture Series 21. Chicago-Illinois: Open Court, 2004.

² See the back cover of “After the End of Art” by Arthur C. Danto in the Spanish version Barcelona: Paidós, 2005.

Through her artistic life, painting has occupied a prominent place but her expressive resources have gone beyond any convention and the artist has expressed herself with drawing, photography, serigraphy, *collage*, *performance*, objects and installations, according to her communicative intentions

Marta Elena has achieved, not *without* effort, to give a place to artistic creativity in her life and intensely took to heart her need of expression and her knowledge of the Art of her times. In New York, at the end of the sixties, she plunged in the whirlpool of Pop Art and in the most advanced postures of the times, "For that was a period in which so much that had been felt part of the concept of art had fallen out of consideration entirely. Not merely beauty and mimesis, but almost everything that had figured in the life of art disappeared."³ experiences which would influence, in her had been erased. Contemporary Aesthetics and in her expressive and interpretative liberty, as did her living in Paris of the eighties, where she came close to the masters of Classical and Modern Painting, influenced her creative maturity of the present. Nonetheless, she did not register in a particular tendency or style which would limit her creative intentions.

In her most recent work there is a return to "Classical Painting", as she herself suggests it, by an expressive and playful necessity with the pictorial resource that provides unsuspected findings, with color, with textures, with materials, with procedures and the deepest feelings and reflections on her own experiences and humanity's in the present.

³ See "After the End of Art" (Op. cit.) page xvii: "But by time the decade was over, there was very little was left of what anyone would earlier have thought was part of the concept of art. It was a period of spectacular philosophical erasure. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!"



Cristo, óleo sobre lienzo, 55 x 50 cm, 2007

The keynote of this series is provided by *Christ* (fig. 1). The theme of Jesus carrying the cross on his back can be one of the most widely represented themes in Art in two millenia that have gone by since then, and for her to find a new aspect of it is astounding, to say the least, which makes us consider that the themes are unimportant and that what makes them Art is the way in which they are drawn out of indifference and presented as new forms. This Christ without a face carries the suffering of all human beings and this cross which comes out of the painting is as heavy as all the crosses of humanity. A minimum of painting resources, almost a quivering remembrance, achieve a profound meaning.



2000, Collage sobre lienzo, 16 x 34 cm, 2000

This same religious evoking is present in two works done later on: **Frieze** (fig. 2) and **Pietà** (fig. 3). Nonetheless there is more than the religious event that relates these works with more recent ones, such as the feeling of loss, void, mourning, that runs through the set of works.

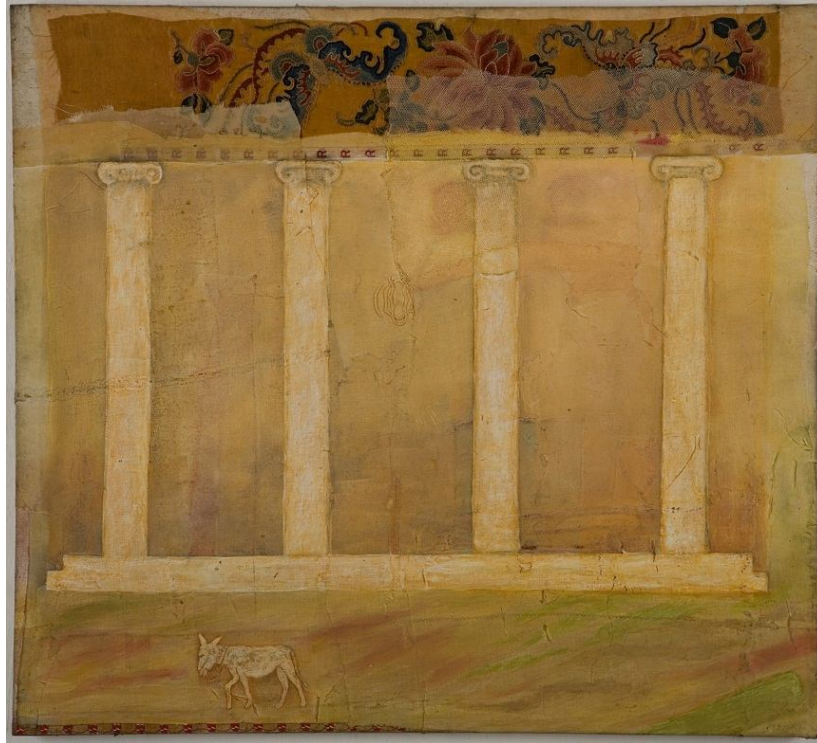
2000 (fig. 10) opens the third millenium with a funereal note, Is it Terrorism? even though there is feasting and a sober elegance in the way in which black and the emblematic characters are dealt with and the total concordance with its frame.

The frame itself can be an expressive putting into execution which detonates the final outcome. In **Africa** (fig. 11) a frame that captivates the artist when she finds it awaits its opportunity. With an express intentionality, a few rags of textile with two little figures associate in form and meaning to create an indissoluble whole with the expectant frame which is then transformed into Art.



África, collage con textiles, 42,5 x 52,5, 2005

Frieze submerges us in an oniric world, in a palimpsests that lets us glance momentarily at vestiges of the superposed remains that gradually reveal an aesthetic procedure as a formal construct that evinces a new visual reality, almost an archetype which seems already known, but which without doubt is brought to existence by the imagination and the expressive subtleness of the artist. Although there exists a religious allusion such as the symbolic temple, surreal, with its imposing frieze, Or is it Christ's donkey which went about unhindered?, the painting involves us and seduces with the enigmatic force of its sensible appearance. The properly pictorial goes much further than that which can be termed Classic.



Friso, bricolaje, 55 x 50 cm, 2000

There is a reflection and an emphasis in the process that are molded as expressive elements and which the painting brings to cohesion and illuminates.

In **Pietà** the sacred theme is represented again. A conceptual and expressive mastery is needed to obtain an unknown result, new, for a theme treated and dealt with as few have been. It is necessary that a very deep necessity of the spiritual background of the artist come to surface to glimpse an expressive possibility so original, in the face of materials that evoke it.

Again, it is the artistic procedure on an idea and materials, more than a religious theme or a technique such as painting, which enables to draw a new form from nonexistence. Who but the artist could foresee or vaticinate the expressive potential of a material such a velvet that recovers an



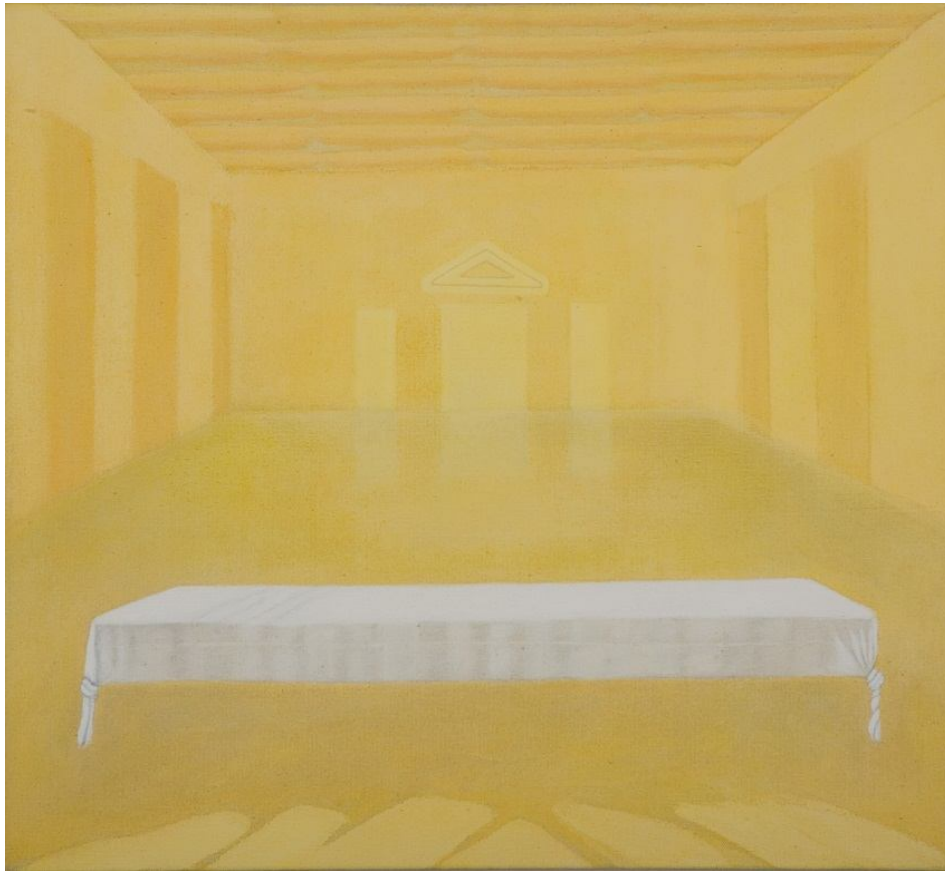
Pietà, óleo sobre terciopelo, 60 x 60 cm, 2007

antique chair and which is afterwards loaded with meaning with the traces of washing and insinuates the invocation of the sacred figures of the *Pietà*? But the mother with the dead child is not a mimetic representation amongst many, it achieves at the same time to become an archetype but with the expressive features of the artist. A little masterly painting which takes resource to subtleties, such as the decoloration of the velvet which adds an unsuspected tactile dimension to the body of Christ. But there is more. The frame of *Pietà* is another expressive resource that awaited until it was found to be able to complete the piece. When regarding the finished work, could it be by any means thought that the frame is not an essential part of the work?



Río Negro, acrílico sobre tela, 54 x 64 cm, 2007

In Black River (fig. 4) the process provides its semantic load to the painting that is being constructed. The moiré of a black dress for a cocktail is subtly manipulated and transformed into an obscure and unsoundable turbulence which and enigmatic character tries to penetrate. Recurring to painting the artist evinces the magnitude of space contributing new significance to the desolate landscape already loaded with symbolisms. It can also be appreciated how the final result surpasses the pictorial concept and how the original inspiration comes through with the minimum resources for its comprehension.



Sin Título, óleo sobre lienzo, 55 x 64 cm, 2007

No title (fig. 5) takes us again to the Religious but this time through subtraction of material. Silence, absence, void, become present without even alluding to them. The pictorial joy, on the contrary, becomes evident, the subtleness of yellow with white which reveal another archetype of an original a thousand times depicted, but which in this case is remembered and presented anew as an icon that admits of the diversity of meanings, and which is given to the beholder as an auto contained wholeness of an eminently pictorial character.



Laguna, acrílico sobre terciopelo, 54 x 64 cm, 2007

Lagoon (fig. 6) comes back to the reflection on the material support or substratum. An irreversible pictorial gesture on the canvas draws out of nothingness a space, a telluric and aqueous presence and a symbolic absence. The movement of the observer on the aqueous surface offers changing visions that range from the reflection of the light of the moon to the cast of rain. It is a hypothetical world constructed masterly with unheard of expressive resources. *Lagoon* refers to a mystical feeling which comes close to that of *Pietà* apart from sharing a same substratum. Does it perhaps evoke the legendary sea of Tiberiades or the ancient sacred lagoons?



Cielo gris, acrílico sobre lienzo, 54 x 64 cm, 2007

Gray sky (fig. 7), **Mud Wall** (fig. 8) and **Summit** (fig. 9) share the fact of being Pure Painting. They are invented worlds that become visible through the imagination and the vital motivations of the artist. There is an evident delight in the pictorial resource but there is also the need of expressing inalienable facts of living reality of the historical present. Eradication, disappearance, peace in danger of death, are evident messages that are contained in these pictorial forms. But once more what makes them art is not the message itself but the way in which it involves the viewer with aesthetic force.



Tapiado, cal y acrílico sobre tela, 69 x60 cm, 2007

The liberty with which Marta Elena takes one work or the other can be appreciated. The distance and openness in **Gray sky** contrasts with the closeness and hermetism of **Mud Wall** and with the expressive force and symbolism of **Summit**.⁴ In the latter there is a notable subversion with the putting to execution of the background textile which is not found in reality but in the imagination and is brought to light by a sophisticated treatment of the violet, which, as together with the hurt dove, takes us back to the mourning of the beginning. We can also point out how the beauty in itself is not a purpose sought by the artist, there are other interests that can be priority to communicate the *sense* of some pieces, as in this last case.

⁴ “Summit” was inspired by “Río Summit” celebrated in Santo Domingo at the beginning of 2008.



Cumbre, técnica mixta sobre tela, 60 x 60 cm,,2007

This takes us to pick up again Arthur Danto's thought on what could be considered "aesthetic joy" which as we saw when he referred to the vanguards of the seventies, would be abolished from the artistic language in that period, but which is later reconsidered. According to his words: "I began to think that the beauty of an artwork could be internal to it, in the sense that it was part of the artwork's *meaning*. (...) The meaning of a work of art is an intellectual product, which is grasped through interpretation by someone other than the artist, and the beauty of the work, if indeed it is beautiful, is seen as entailed by that meaning".⁵ In the end he would conclude that "Beauty is an option for art and not a necessary condition."⁶

⁵ See "The Abuse of Beauty" [Op. cit.] pages.

⁶ See "The Abuse of Beauty" [Op. cit.] page 223.

According to this point of view, for works such as *Pietà*, amongst others, we could say that even though there is an unhidden aesthetic joy, it was hardly foreseen since the final result is more a finding brought about by the association of found elements, wisely articulated: the canvas, the type of traces that emerge, the revealed sacred figures, the frame which awaited in obscurity. All of this speaks more of a found aesthetic beauty than of a sought for beauty, but the result is art in an atemporal sense: there is truth and new meanings with unpublished aesthetic resources and there is aesthetic joy with the beauty of the truthful.

This set of recent works show what Marta Elena is as an artist at present. The other works of the exhibit can be considered as a retrospective of her artistic work and the recent pieces can be considered as an individual exhibit inside this retrospective.

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