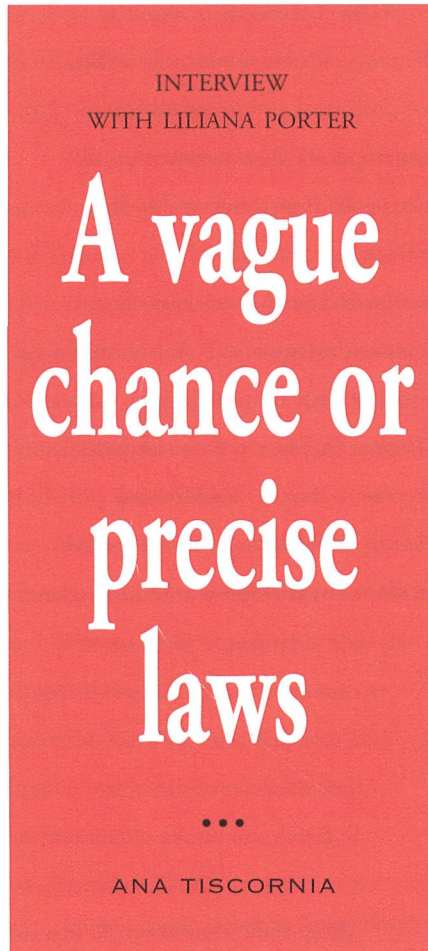


## TERRITORIES

*Liliana Porter was born and raised in Argentina. She has been living in New York for the last thirty years. In spite of the fact that she has spent most of her life living outside her country, her visual imagery, her concerns with certain themes, her confessed admiration for Borges and her ways of relating to the world, speak of her condition as a Latin American from the South. I mention this characteristic not to classify Porter, but because it might explain the fact that all of Porter's work constitutes a metalinguistic exercise which questions the frontier between reality and its representation. A large body of graphics works, paintings and drawings - both two-dimensional and three-dimensional - reflect a process in which a personal poetics establishes itself as a critical tool in such a way that it erodes that division between the real and the virtual until it becomes invisible.*

*Porter's last series of works points to a conceptual approach and new hypotheses, which are an inevitable consequence of the methodical exercise of doubt that Porter has been proposing in her work. The following conversation is not only an attempt to approach her work, but also a philosophical game developed by Porter with the same freshness and humor, as if she were speaking of every-day life.*

**AT:** Looking at your present work makes one think that you have arrived



at a new stage, a stage in which your questions about the possibility of a trace separating reality and representation, have shifted to the conflicts between reality and reality itself.

**LP:** Yes, I think this is because I am now making photographs. Photography is supposed to be closer to reality (at least in our perception) than painting, even if the latter has realistic elements. I think that little by little, from constantly looking at and analyzing the object and its reality, I got closer to the fictionality of the object, of the touchable object (the one that,

thanks to our sense of humor, we call "real"). Now I realize how fascinating it is for me, that is, the fact that the reality of an object represents another thing. Imagine a little pig made in ceramic or a plaster saint. The toy essentially is a metaphor.

**AT:** Does what you are saying coincide with Baudrillard's statement that illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible?

**LP:** Well... What I do not understand in Baudrillard are the words "no longer". Was it really possible before?

**AT:** That should be answered by him. But, was "the real" ever possible?

**LP:** Reality is always possible in the realm of abstraction. Reality is God.

**AT:** And if you do not believe in God?

**LP:** God is a word that confuses. God would signify the name of the last revelation.

**AT:** Are you using the word "revelation" in the way that you usually do, quoting Borges?

**LP:** Yes, Borges says that aesthetic pleasure is the imminence of a revelation, and in the same way I say that God would signify, not the imminence, but the revelation itself. A revelation that we call God so as to abbreviate it.

**AT:** Then, that means that "reality" does not exist?

**LP:** Yes, it does exist. Didn't we say that it was God?

**AT:** But God's revelation, when does it happen?

**LP:** Why are you in such a hurry?

**AT:** I'm not. I assure you. I am only asking myself whether it is possible to believe in a social project that could become a reality.

**LP:** Yes, it is possible. Ideas are the only reality, and these ideas make social agreement possible. Here it's important to be aware that it's our responsibility to create those ideas, and that if we don't, then, they do not exist.

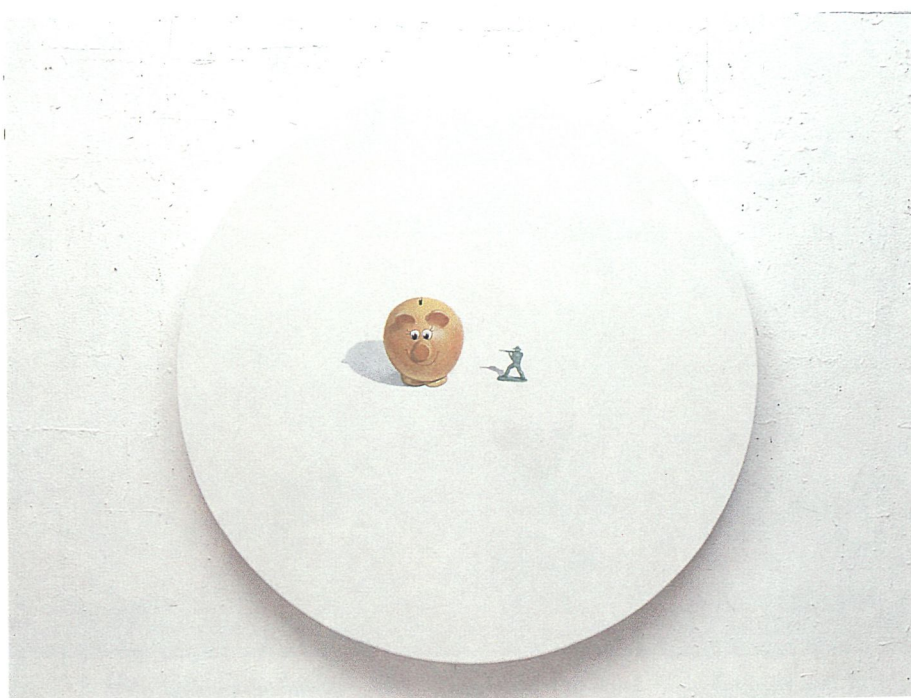
**AT:** Then, reality is a *social* construction in addition to being an *individual* construction?

**LP:** Surely. For that reason, there are so many apparently or actually contradictory realities which converge at the same point. Religions, for example. Or when Borges says "el vago azar o las precisas leyes" (a vague chance or precise laws). This coincidence was always fascinating for me, the fact that ideas that seem to be opposed, are indistinct when they become extremely specific.

**AT:** What role do toys play in your work?

**LP:** The toy is the recipient of our subjectivity. Therefore, it is an entity capable of becoming, through us, either banal or significant. Every emotional relation with a toy is our creation: its sense, its intention and its weight depend on us.

**AT:** That idea is curious because we accept that the toy becomes alive when children relate to it, but in the case of adults, we disbelieve in its potential for becoming significant. Yet, adults decorate their homes with other kinds of objects that we distinguish from toys, despite the fact that these objects may be glass elephants. What do you think about that?



*Peligro de muerte, 1994.*

**LP:** Personally, I make no distinction between what we call "toys" and what we call "ornaments".

**AT:** Then, perhaps what is important to you is the possibility of establishing a relationship with these objects in the same way that children do?

**LP:** Once I said that my work is like seeing a movie with the lights on. One cannot totally surrender to the illusory space of the screen because the lights make us conscious of the

artificiality of the virtual space. The same happens with toys. I have to give in to the relationship that I establish and, at the same time, I have to be aware that what I am building is another metaphor which speaks about my visions and my questions: a metaphor that describes the world and describes myself.

**AT:** How do you choose the toys?

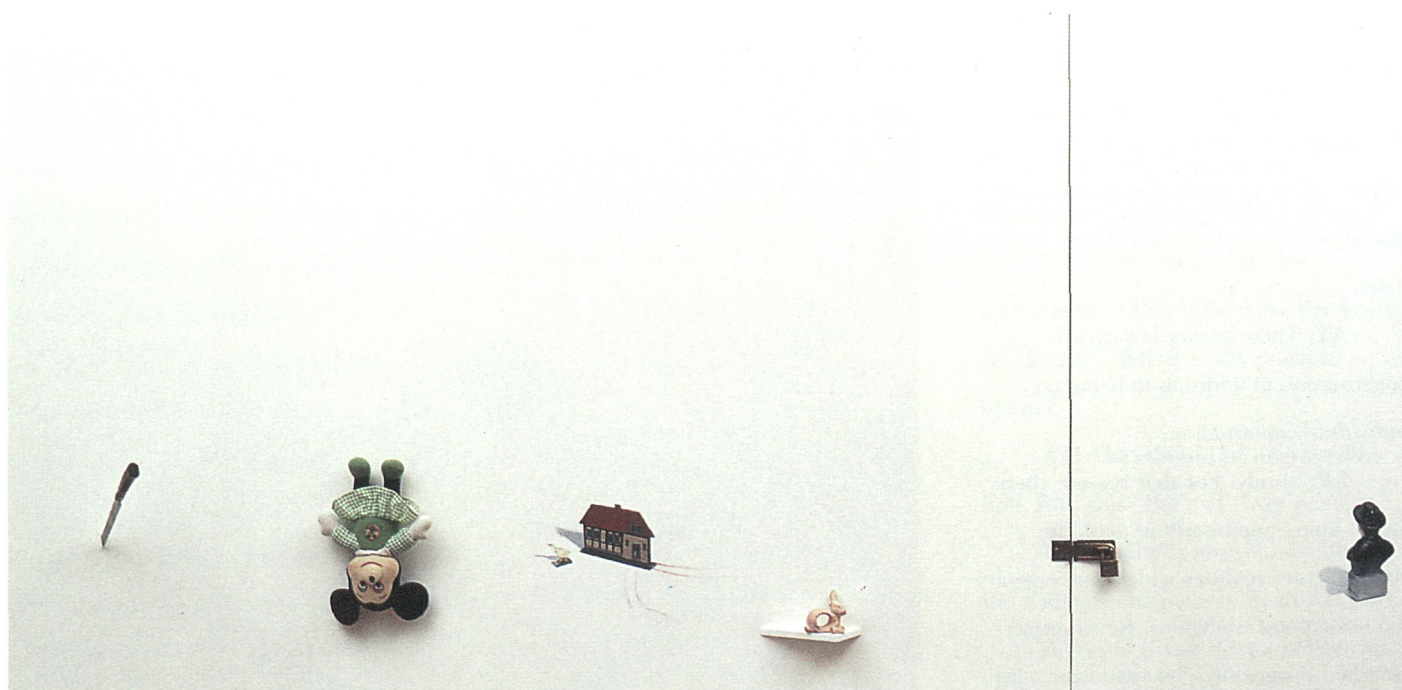
**LP:** I don't know. When I find them I recognize them. For the last series, "Dialogos" (Dialogues), I was interested in toys who had eyes that look at us. There are objects that are ambiguous, half defenseless and half dramatic. Some of them look astonished. Those are the ones that I like the most, because it seems that they do not understand what is going on.

**AT:** And is there any possibility of understanding?

**LP:** There is no possibility of understanding if, in trying to do so, one is searching for a ready-made explanation. There is only the possibility of creating. In meditation, the method is not to think, and then, instead of being less conscious, to be more conscious. Rather, it becomes pure consciousness. Suddenly I realized, that this

the postmodern conclusion that ideologies are the only possible reality. But they actually relate to themes that I had a found through reading Borges. I am interested in Baudrillard because he speaks about these themes; however, this does not mean that his conclusions are similar to mine. In fact, I have not read a great part of his work,

them. One day, I took one (a vase with flowers) and I wrinkled it; I then placed it on a piece of paper and called it "Chinese drawing". I did not know what it meant, which is why it was a "Chinese" drawing. The funny thing is that this is a *double* "Chinese" drawing, because on the one hand it is intrinsically Chinese - whether I



*Misunderstandings, 1993*

surrendering to not understanding, leads you to the substance of understanding.

**AT:** That means that you are not skeptical. In spite of the fact that your work seems to have points of contact with postmodernist trends, it seems that you do not arrive at the death of ideologies, but at something quite opposite.

**LP:** My Subjects ("Simulaera", "Mutations", "Resemblances"), have sometimes been read with reference to

**AT:** Explain the role of your recent series which was called "Chinese drawings," and its relationship with the idea of not understanding.

**LP:** In Argentina, when one does not understand something, one says that it is "Chinese". Obviously, we say that because we experience Chinese culture as a very remote culture. I found those "cut-up drawings" in Chinatown in New York and I felt attracted to them immediately. Without knowing how I would use them, I started to collect

understand it or not - and on the other hand, there is the fact that I really do not understand it.

**AT:** This is not the first time that you have wrinkled something to convert it into an art work. Is there any relationship between this work and the series "Wrinkle" that you did in the late '60s?

**LP:** Well, when one wants to know how something is made, one often breaks it. This also happened in the "Wrinkle": it was a mode of appropriation that had to do with the

passage of time, life, the beginning and the end. In the "Chinese drawing," this process of wrinkling and re-setting the object in a specific shape, involved a segment of time, during which the thing becomes mine.

**AT:** What makes your last works (like "Mutaciones con Diet Coca," "Mutaciones con platito del Che," and "Simulacro") so dramatic?

**LP:** I think that what makes them so dramatic is their confronting silence.

**AT:** But when Che Guevara appears on a dessert dish, is his silence the same as that of the other characters?

**LP:** The object "Souvenir of Cuba" would not have existed, if Che Guevara had not existed. In order for that banal object to exist, a lot of things must have happened, and the only one that is rescued, is the stereotyped image which is transformed into a souvenir which is an ornament. This is the dramatic thing- the painting makes a statement about the passage of time and its consequences. The drama lies in the inapprehensibility of reality, in its impenetrability, in the banality of the meaning, in the empty space, in the emptiness of meaning.

**AT:** Is the drama in "Rabbit" (the rabbit with the broken ear) the same as the drama which you've just described?

**LP:** There is a relation: the rabbit with the broken ear is a clay napkin-holder; therefore, the pain that we experience in seeing the broken ear does not have to do with that object but with its connotation.



*Chinese drawing, 1993.*

**AT:** How would you describe the process that guided you to the new pieces?

**LP:** I believe that there was a moment when what I wanted to do became clear to me. It was around 1964 or 1965, when I still saw myself as a print-maker. Then I decided to stop and think. I realized that when one says too many things, one says less than when one says *nothing*, because when one is silent, it seems that one could be about to say *everything*. Then I started to work in a reverse manner: instead of creating presences, I started to create absences. I

started to work with shadows and with banal objects that were not loaded with meaning. I started to discover the relationship between art and the thing, between representation and the thing, because if art is a representation, but then after a while you discover that the thing itself is also a representation, then what happens?

**AT:** What happens?

**LP:** You become more and more aware that the thing is nothing without representation, and then, once again, all that exists is the person who sees things and names them.