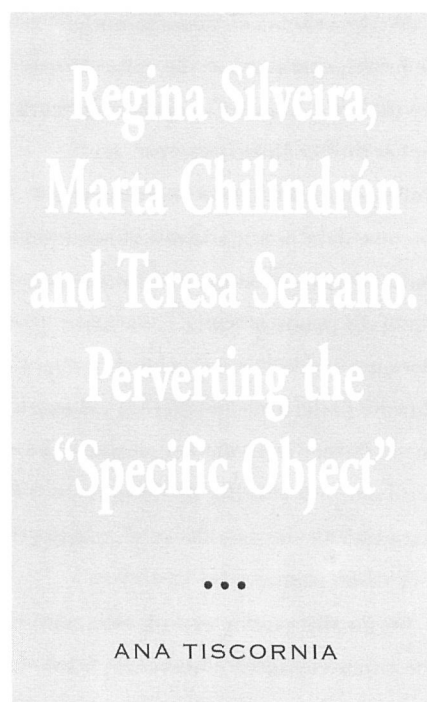


A white stone bowl, like a soup bowl, rests on a matching saucer. From a distance one can make out a black stain that spills over both pieces, suggesting a decorative motif. But to approach a bit closer is to strip away the sense of calm customarily associated with the unremarkable object: the black silhouette is in fact the shadow of a revolver cast across the cup and saucer, which are joined fast in solidarity. Inoffensive things, reverted, elicit caution. Somewhere, in some real or virtual space, some literal or metaphorical (but sufficiently nearby) position, the body casting this shadow threatens.

Years ago, I went in search of a work in the network of display cases belonging to New York University in front of Washington Square. I lingered a while and noticed that the glass panes were not entirely empty. To the contrary, the shadows of the architecture itself were painted there at a given moment of the day. The union with the real shadow would be perfect only for a moment, beyond which all would be pure illusion. The subtlety, the illusionist's gesture, made a case for the innumerable ways of interpreting reality. But beyond the metaphor, there is a meditation on the power of representation to meddle in the imagination.

Soon the shadows of motorcycles began to appear on the cabinets. Enormous black stains, like unleashed animals, overtook the spectator. They were the shadows of defiant motorcycles, but again, an analysis of the symbolism and of the potential correlations between



the protagonists is only one part of the discourse. The other part – where the given transgresses the expected, where the shadow of one thing can become something else and an object or subject can refer to another object or subject – is the multiplication of meaning that is made possible by art's artifice.

The furniture was there as well, the shadows of the absent furniture, of conjectured postures, of imaginary lights, where an entire system of representational logic makes the most suspiciously impossible situation possible and credible. Beyond the furniture there were entire rooms stretching out among the flat fibres of the furniture, put into the perspective of infinite points of view: one of these, perhaps, might allow the reconstruction of the illusion of reality in order to negate it and, ultimately, to reaffirm the illusion itself.

The maker of these visual operations is the Brazilian artists Regina Silveira. Born in Porto Alegre and based in São Paulo, her luxuriant production

in many different media is a guided exploration through very specific concerns. *"I am profoundly intrigued by the nature of visual imagination when its intention is to simulate visual reality: I am also quite interested in virtuality that is able to falsify visual data."*

Silveira's interest leads her to use the acme of illusionist resources – perspective – in a perverse fashion. Perspective is a Renaissance technique originally designed as a way of approaching reality in order to emulate and to become confused with it. Regina uses perspective in order to keep reality at a distance, in order to go deeper into illusion's possibilities. In this discourse on art and its codes lies what Ana Teresa Fabris has referred to as Regina's metalinguistic dimension. The mechanism that betrays itself as artifice when put into the service of distortion. Distortion that ultimately is an absolutely abstract hypothesis and fulfills the artist's goals: *"to create the impossible"* or *"to test the apparent form of appearance."* By using the system, she undermines it.

Regina's perspective is complex and uses various points of view and different systems of projection at the same time. It thus becomes a metaphor for the gazes and for the opportunity of a place for each observer, creating what she herself calls a *"poetic system of points of view."*

The type of images selected come from universes that speak of many things, yet all share the common denominator of banality and simplicity which are sought as an operative principle. Banality itself is what allows us to call ourselves "normal".

The objective, achieved through the most extreme distortion possible (without the image becoming unrecognisable), is to question this “normality” by presenting “ambiguity, metamorphosis and paradoxes”.

Of course, spaces and objects of daily use (and some of frequent abuse) – an office, furniture, rugs, motor scooters, armoured tanks as well as quotes from Duchamp and Man Ray – cannot escape interpretation. Here the artist herself speaks of the feminine gaze. *“Part of my work reflects an approach that comes specifically from knowledge derived from my experience as a woman. My images are not only banal, but they also belong to a universe of interests, culturally understood as feminine for their particular proximity to common objects. The perspectival distortions and the projected forms that I apply to furnishings and to small objects and to interior spaces are mechanisms for transforming what is banal into something strange and fantastic. The resulting deformations might also be seen as a subversion of the feminine gaze. The ironic use of rugs and china as the bases for projected shadows again forms part of this subversive strategy and is integrated into my interpretation of the domestic world as a catalogue.”*

Many things are destabilised as a consequence of her work, in which absences proclaim a manifest presence or even a responsibility or threat. But the magnitude of the achievement in no way negates the delicate irony manifested in the work and the humour with which Regina plays her game. Perhaps only a keen feminine gaze can risk the perversity of a fork, a plate and a teacup with a sort of benevolent smile.

*Anamorphism, Simulacra and Inflections* are some of the titles chosen by the artist in order to anchor her work; in her philosophical concerns she anticipates what in the near future will become data in a fundamental equation for analysts of post-modernism. Despite the fixed points of contact, the artist does not seek alliances; instead, she lays down a pattern of directions in reference to art history from the Renaissance up until our own era. But the form is paradoxical; she uses the system for a critical distance.

Finally, parody extends even into the geometric rigour of the work; it is a rigour that appears extreme yet in fact is born of a “free geometry composed of a handful of elements within a few invented rules.” This should be enough to alert us to the illusory nature while inducing us to continue reinforcing it.

Much of what has been said thus far about Regina Silveira’s work could be reiterated when considering the work of Marta Chilindrón, a Uruguayan artist who resides in New York. Chilindrón, however, works in three dimensions in order to construct her “objects-situation”, which in turn, using their physicality, allude to the frontiers between two-dimensional flatness and three-dimensional spatiality. In this border zone it is not known if the objects are growing out of the plane and building themselves up, or if, to the contrary, they move toward the plane, folding themselves and disappearing. This ambiguity, while suggesting narrative metaphors, underscores the discursive emphasis placed on the processes. The thesis is additionally reinforced by the use of neutral surfaces and hollow, untrustworthy appearances for the

objects in question, which in some form or another refer to dematerialisation.

Perspective as a resource is fundamentally a system of representing a three-dimensional or “real” object in a two-dimensional drawing. In restoring three-dimensionality to the flat representation, Chilindrón is returning it to the world of real objects as a new object, freed from references. She is making concrete what is no more than an abstraction. In this sense, she would be constructing what Donald Judd called “the specific object”. However, this apparent relationship with *minimalism* – brought to mind as much by the orthogonal reticle as by the work’s structure – is refuted by that “non-specificity” of the surface. Moreover, it is in some fashion perverted by the many quotations that, on a symbolic level, propose spatial transgression.

Since what Chilindrón is assembling and disassembling (or vice-versa) are rooms or small groups of related furnishings – references to daily life, interior and intimate – the specificity of the self-referential object is changed; it now pertains to the linguistic medium that denotes and connotes human beings.

Chilindrón’s groups are designed in order to function on a scale where things maintain their dimensions in accordance with the summoned reality; in other words, with human contingency. Thus this furniture becomes the record of the tracks that are embodied by absence. A bed, a chair or a set of shelves can even be imagined as part of an anthropomorphic process; they are at once both containing and contained, exterior and interior.

The artist’s concern with the

connections between forms. between interactions and their results, is closely related to the humanisation of the object as it reclaims its own space that goes beyond physical limits and establishes communications in an energetically immaterial territory.

Owing much to Chilindrón's first works (extremely foreshortened self-portraits), this series also maintains the perspective of the feminine universe and of a domestic environment that is again "culturally understood as feminine" and which appears smuggled behind a cold, distanced appearance that is usually the hallowed ground of masculine work.

The play of paradoxes that is established subtly undermines these gender-based territorial designations, making use of an enjoyable impertinence in order to address the tenets of certain artistic dogmas of our time.

Teresa Serrano, from Mexico, is another artist who coincides (although from a different front) with the dislocation of the "specific object", displaying it as the exercise in illusion that it does not want to be.

In some ways similar to Silveira and Chilindrón, Serrano reveals the ideology hidden behind that which aspires toward presenting itself as an ontology of form and material; she consciously decides to organise her discourse within the realm of representation.

*"For me, metaphor is not only allegory or image or symbol, but rather a procedure and a way of exposing reality"... "In my work I speak in a somewhat subversive fashion, taking advantage of exclusively masculine efforts, such as the construction of those mats that are used to protect the horses during the bullfights, transforming them into*

*feminine sculptures that speak of nature, femininity, protection, sensuality and strength."*

In the work entitled "Untouched" – a stainless steel structure with unmistakably Duchampian references – Serrano operates in synchronicity with the American artist Maureen Conner; she gives the structure a human scale and thus dismantles the self-referentiality of the ready-made in Duchamp's discourse. We might consider this work as an example of Serrano's general strategy.

The strategy is confirmed in the use of rationalist geometry in order to speak of nature and organic subjects: *La Montaña, el Río y las Piedras*. Continuing with her use of industrial appearances, in the neatness of execution, in the choice of metal, the polish and the mirrors that seem to escape the line drawn by the human hand in order to confront them in the fickle lace that veils and protects it. In certain moments these fabrics seem to be the object's dress, lending it an erotic charge while proclaiming the hand-made quality of the stitching. Indeed, this stitching that refers to the feminine tradition comes from a model – the protection hung over horses in bullfights – that is traditionally made by men. The pure, primary colors incorporated through technical processes into the fabric are used without the slightest concession to pictorialism, yet their sources belong to symbolic representation. *"Brown is the earth, blue is water, green is for the plants, red is for flowers, blood and passion and yellow is for the sun and autumn."*

This same method – subverting the rules of minimalist codification by making use of an object that nonetheless shares their appearance – is repeated,

in reductive form, in a discourse dealing with fertility.

Minimalism, with its clearly masculine tendencies of inspiration and execution, might be said to have left a conceptually weak flank exposed, which has been taken advantage of by both conceptualism and feminism. In the '80s and '90s, the artists who capitalise on these experiences are primarily women, and they develop them with an operative liberty conferred by a historic period that does not force them to align themselves within a conceptually dogmatic framework.

Serrano cultivates this attitude in her work and causes objects that insist on their material identity to return an image, in her permanent attempt to humanise them but making them, in her own words "traces of a thinking body". In this regard Serrano is connected to Chilindrón, not only in the anthropomorphic marksmanship of her ideas but also in the recovery of a focus that is tethered to science: thus all of us, in the end, whether subjects or objects, are made of the same thing. Berta Sichel opens her essay on Teresa Serrano's work by quoting Susan Griffin: *"The geography of the atom has been explored. Its parts have names: the electron, the proton and the neutron"* and goes on to construct a parallel with Serrano's *la montaña, el río y las piedras* which is proposed as a territory to be explored.

In short, that object – Judd's "specific object" that was specific because it spoke only of itself, or the object that is filled with the desire of undermining illusionism – is supplanted, in the work of these artists, by another object with a different specificity: that which speaks about processes and their designs. It is an object which has had its soul restored.