

## TRAMA EN AMÉRICA [AMERICAN WEAVES]

**Anonymous women weaver-artists from Argentina's north-central region | Marcela Astorga Andrés Bedoya | Carla Beretta | Gerardo Goldwasser | Juan José Olavarría | Teresa Pereda | Candelaria Traverso**

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### **America, Weft and Warp**

The relation between a textile and a text is not just etymological and conceptual, it is historical too. In indigenous American culture, particularly in the Andes region, pieces of pottery and textiles were communicative objects par excellence; an indivisible unity between the aesthetic and the function obtained in them. The textile was the prime medium for manifesting ideas, given the usefulness of the products and the expressive potential of their medium. The color, the form of the spinning of the fibers, and the way in which warp and weft relate to the scheme in the fabric, form, in this cultural context, fundamental non-alphabetic signs in the processes of preservation and transmission of information. These elements allow us to contemplate a visual semantics which, as in a coherent sequence of words, expresses beliefs and concepts.

And just as, in the precolonial art of American, the distinction is spurious between art and artisanship —Western categories that have been imposed upon original American productions—, the present exhibition offers a dialogical relation between works of contemporary Latin American art and a set of textile pieces from the former García Uriburu collection made by anonymous women weaver-artists from the mid-20th century in Argentina's north-central region. As suggested by the introductory text to the catalog of the Fundación Nicolás García Uriburu, with its title *Guardians of Paradise: Textile Art of the Peoples of the North Country*<sup>1</sup>, the collection recaptures this American tradition in its root motifs, as well as a European influence that saw the new world as an earthly paradise. These embroidered wools offer representations of natural elements such as flowers and plants, geometrical abstract compositions, ornamental figures, and elements from the primal American repertory, such as the *chakanas*, or Andean crosses. These are textiles which, in not being tensed upon rigid supports, recall their original functional use.

We should not be surprised by the persistence of a strong and highly developed textile tradition in post-colonial America, more specifically in the Andean region, directly influenced by the Incan empire and before that, by the regional cultures that flourished in the early, and particularly the classical, period. Nor should we be surprised to find a consonance in these traditions within contemporary Latin American art, whose seeds can be located in the above-mentioned indigenous American culture. These influences can be identified in more or less evident ways throughout the show *Trama*.

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<sup>1</sup> Corcuera, Ruth, *Guardianes del paraíso. Arte textil de los Pueblos del Norte*. Fundación Nicolás García Uriburu, Buenos Aires, 2012, p. 9.

**Candelaria Traverso** (Argentina, 1991) makes double reference in her works to textile production: on the one hand, in the influence of the regional fairs of Northeastern Argentina, through reuse of the synthetic hemp in which articles of clothing are shipped; on the other hand, in the evocation of the ancestral designs themselves of the Andean region, such as the above-mentioned *chakana*, one of her favorite iconographic elements.

Also from an unmistakably Latin American position, **Andrés Bedoya** (Bolivia, 1978) presents us with a textile made from wool, canvas, and human hair gathered from hair salons in his native country. The artist presents the body as the bearer of histories both personal and collective, thus referring to the primordial function of these textiles which, as in the Incan *kipus* or ritual *paraca* cloaks, formed elements of a non-verbal communion. Through his use of human hair -- women's hair -- Bedoya raises questions of gender and race from a perspective that seeks to distance itself from the Eurocentrist colonial position in our territory.

The work on view by **Carla Beretta** (Argentina, 1965) reclaims a part of the history of her native city, Rosario, the home to one of Latin America's major textile factories in the second half of the 20th century, and intertwines it with the tradition of modernist abstraction. In her works, however, a distancing occurs from the use of purely plastic language, in order to incorporate a link with their actual setting. We can discern a palette inspired by the natural environment, but also an expression of her concerns for current-day problems, such as the environmental consequences of the burning of wetlands and grasslands, worked in here with muted, leaden gray hues.

In the case of **Juan José Olavarría** (Venezuela, 1969), embroidered cloths represent monochrome Argentine flags, immersed in the soil of Tucumán, the province in which our national independence was first declared. The artist makes use of this symbol in order to deal with violence, corruption, human rights, migration, among other current themes.

For **Marcela Astorga** (Argentina, 1965) the choice of an organic material is grounded in her deep interest in the notion of skin, in the broad sense of the term. The fabric or texture is imbued with the body that bears it, yet also, in itself, forms a second skin. There is, in these works, a pictorial and sculptural use of material, in which the tactile is given as much play as the visual. The artist takes apart a fabric, disuniting warp and weft, as if making time move in reverse, and calling into question the inherent, functional, traditional use of the textile.

The work of **Gerardo Goldwasser** (Uruguay, 1961) is rooted in family history, and takes as its point of departure a tailoring manual that came down to him from his grandfather, a Jewish tailor who managed to survive, thanks to his trade, by making uniforms in the Nazi concentration camp of Buchenwald. In this case, the embroideries of the sleeves present a variety of possible cuffs for military uniforms. Thus, these designs which at first sight may seem merely decorative, metonymically represent one of the most violent and sinister chapters in human history.

The works by **Teresa Pereda** (Argentina, 1956) harken back to a series of actions in the Brazilian Amazon, manifesting an interest in the environment and the ancestral knowledge of its original populace. The quest, as the artist explains, is for a link with the local knowledge, to establish a direct relation with the spaces and people who inhabit it. The images in the photographs and the video on view here record a ball of wool cast out to roll till it enters a river whose water sinks it and pulls it apart.

All that has been said about textiles, their functions, their uses and their genealogy is useful to recall now in *Trama*. For *trama* is a polysemic term, whose associations linked to the textual have permeated our languages; and if, at the outset, the term refers to the forming of fabric, it equally alludes to connection and to telling: we speak of a narrative thread, a dramatic entanglement, a network of significations. All these and other meanings are can be found as conjured up in this show, through works that seize upon historical, social, cultural, and also subjective *tramas* — "weavings," "linkages, or "plots": *tramas* which, both in their literary and formal sense, may be open or closed, leaving viewers with the pleasant task of hooking themselves, of being pulled, into these pieces' fabrics, their frameworks.

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