

Delia Cancela: how to bring an image to the world

Images are not created in isolation, but emerge in networks of meaning relationships. Perhaps the 20th century –a prolific attempt of provocative associations capable of challenging imposed hierarchies and orders– is responsible for our fascination with returning to images hoping to reveal unknown links and new bonds of meaning. It is this perspective that will guide the analysis of works made by Delia Cancela between the late 1970s and the early 1990s.

The complexity of this venture becomes obvious when we encounter an artist who participated in settings as varied as the Torcuato Di Tella Institute or the European fashion scene in the last few decades of the 20th century. However, the idea here is to identify features present in her production, not to strengthen meaning, but to recognize certain recurrence in her poetics.

Thus, for instance, in the film footage of the collection *Impressions by Pablo et Delia*, presented in 1979, it is possible to distinguish processes of collaborative creation that have featured their work. Those dresses first shown at Théâtre Le Palace belonged to a complex genesis that contrasts with the organization and order suggested by the grid of seventy-six drawings that depicted each catwalk run. Up to the last very minute, each person behind the scene gave the dress its final shape.

From the 1970s and until the early 1980s, collaboration between Delia and Pablo Mesejean had turned creation into a joint venture. In the following decade, however, work dynamics changed completely not only because of Pablo's absence but also because of new production conditions.

Some of these features can be seen in the printed material displayed –Delia's designs for a French clothing company. The manufacturing process of these pieces started when her drawings –first made with tempera or watercolor– were reproduced in specialized workshops and then multiplied in a *rapport* until they reached their final size. The next step consisted in printing them on paper to correct mistakes and try different color combinations before finally transferring them to the cloth. In their huge dimensions it is still possible to see hand-made corrections, stamps from Lyon workshops and cuts made by Delia in the following years.

However, we only have access to those dynamics thanks to her repeated disclosure of production processes. Showing them entailed both stressing the importance of experience in the production –as in the final paragraphs of *Yiyish* magazine presented with Pablo in 1968– and uncovering certain internal mechanisms of art institutions or fashion. The revelation could take place, for instance, by making models parade with waste bags –used to distribute clothes

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to the specialized press- or by dressing the administrative staff of the Di Tella Institute with Cancela-Mesejean clothes.

At least two other aspects stand out in the pieces exhibited. The first one is a finite iconographic repertoire, where certain figures appear and disappear, as if one attempt to combine them could give rise to new images. The second one - essentially formal - is based on a particular relationship between color distribution and the use of lines in her works.

As if they were corrections to the catalogue of pleasure and desire of the *Nosotros Amamos* manifesto, some figures appear time and again in Delia's work, images that we feel we are coming back to even when we see them for the first time: flowers and plants, clouds and skies, hearts and faces with huge eyes or cats displayed on the cloth appear to be the continuity of tanned bodies, trendy songs and happy endings.

The need to settle the link between line and color results from that combination of elements. In some cases, as in pieces that seem to evoke Matisse's cut-outs, an economy of representation turns into clear shapes with clear outlines. In other cases, that relationship becomes more complex and reveals Delia's fascination with old engravings, those in which inks do not totally match in the series of prints. There are features that may be traced back to her light boxes, her images inspired in Bonnard or even in those designs exhibited in *Experiencias Visuales '67* , where the line reached up to where color was no longer found.

Complex creation processes, exhibition of procedures, recurrent motifs and relationships between line and color are just four aspects that are not characteristic of a given production universe -fashion or art- but rather threads that prevail in Delia Cancela's work. In this sense, the exhibition exceeds its role as such to become a space of condensation where those relationships are clearly shown not only in the assembly but also in the selection of this set of works made during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

It is the territory in which images are built, where they are brought to the world, that Delia's works propose visiting. An invitation that brings back the words she used for her performance *Cut and Paste* in 2000: "Come inside, look, it is for the pleasure of the eyes".

Agustín R. Díez Fischer

Delia Cancela studied at Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes and participated in Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (ITDT) in the 1960s. In 1965, together with her partner Pablo Mesejean, she held her first exhibition *Love and Life* in Galería Lirolay. After living in Paris during 1967 thanks to a French Government scholarship, Delia and Pablo took part in *Experiencias 68* and held the *Ropa con Riesgo* fashion show at ITDT. At the end of the decade they left Buenos Aires to settle first in New York and finally in London in 1970.

In London their pieces got immediate recognition and were published in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* or *Queen* magazines. Since 1975, settled in Paris, they presented their collections at events where actresses, models and dancers combined fashion shows with performance. In the following decade, Delia Cancela held individual exhibitions at Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC) and several institutions in Europe and Asia. Living in Buenos Aires since 1999, she presented her retrospective at Centro Cultural Parque de España in Rosario (2000) curated by María José Herrera.

She has participated in numerous exhibitions such as *La Consagración de la Primavera* (2010) at Fundación Osde and *Arte de contradicciones (Art of Contradictions). Pop, realism and politics. Brazil - Argentina 1960* (2012) at Fundación Proa. The Victoria and Albert Museum has pieces by Delia Cancela and Pablo Mesejean in its collection.

Likewise, Delia has been presented several awards, such as the Directorio award for her career, granted by the National Endowment for the Arts (2004), and she was designated an outstanding personality of culture by the City of Buenos Aires Legislature (2013).