

Esther Villalobos

Text by Felipe Hernandez Cava

From Memory (or remembrance)

I believe that all the propositions Esther Villalobos makes have participated in a tension between concealment and visibility, which is, without a doubt, the best way to enter space and time. The brilliant thing of this personal dialectic, however, is that at all times the profound has been associated with the repressed, understood not so much as what we have left behind in a shadow area but as what has been left behind by the fact that it has not been realized. And it was logical that, sooner or later, the subtlety with which Esther Villalobos has been approaching these hermetic areas led her, as in this last work, to the most essential and defining particularities of memory.

In her own conception of engraving there is a lot of intellectual programs about the search for origins, which is what has led her to develop a kind of calligraphy of nature that has a lot of protopictorial and in which I have only seen artists with great graphic retentive engage in a way of contemplating our surroundings. It is always in a calculated distance for contemplation – by the way – that the spectator must then recompose in front of the pieces to recover the authentic existence of themselves.

In the same way that Humboldt sought the breath of life "not only in the lower layers of the air where dense vapors float, but in the serene and ethereal regions", Esther Villalobos questions here about her own breath with an order that disdains the capricious and that is the template with which her subjectivity forces the object to be the vehicle of one mood more than another, also possible, of knowledge. It orders and isolates the unconscious to make us participants in emotions pregnant with self-awareness, which are worth it to examine the "I" in a penetrating way to benefit from its resonance (what the Germans call *stimmung*). The harmony of this current of opposite directions comes, in the end, not so much from our familiarity or empathy with her proposal but with the fact that we recognize the artist as someone who has known how to make her own, who dominates that balance between sensation and representation. It subjugates us, yes, because we see the way in which she feels lost in her own idealistic existence to catch that breath of life that Hokusai dreamed of getting locked in a line when he was one hundred and ten years old (which, by the way, the master could not reach).

The first and deepest reality, that for any of us remains hidden, the one that conforms us as ourselves, and about which some of us do not cease to ask ourselves as an invocation for consciousness to appear. And the symbols to which Esther Villalobos resorts (those boxes more or less sealed, that proliferation of roots), language of interiors both, serve to affix that as we grow as individuals, or as artists, nothing also grows to complete us, a covert nothingness and that often, inattentive to the experience of recognizing ourselves, it dwells in oblivion. However, if we want to build our own life, we cannot behave like those roots that find theirs already given, but cross the threshold, no less entangled and kaleidoscopic, of a whole reasoned system and penetrate our emptiness, which is where we can be really free and, therefore, "become new". Memory, in that sense, helps us to rediscover what we are in originally and that should be one of the main tasks of art, that unveiling, if not because every time I see most of its manifestations too attached to the visible, to the tangential, to the mere adornment in short.

In other works of Esther Villalobos, I have seen her given to a vision that would liberate life, but in this one, which I consider a synthesis and compendium of many of them, her vision is

determined to get rid of even what a mask may have of magical to go in search of the greatest of transcendences, the one that consubstantially requires the void.

Fortunately, we are all made of fullness and emptiness, and in that land of nothingness I have seen this artist applied again and again to take the measure and extract some reason from those interiorities. The fascinating thing, and she knows it well, is that she will never quite know her finitude. That is why I am disturbed and comforted by this partial glimpse of "the non-existent" within its structures and the vertigo that comes with imagining this lack when it couples them in such a way that the vision is faced with a serious obstacle to scrutinize their depths minimally. In that darkness, jealously guarded, which absorbs and offers equally, is the vital capacity to remember that it is necessary to pierce memory to be free. You see that I am celebrating a contemplation that is all self-absorbed memory.