

Johanna Calle

PLANTA PAR

From February 3rd until March 23rd, 2024

Galeria MPA / Moisés Pérez de Albéniz is pleased to present the second solo exhibition in its space by the artist Johanna Calle, entitled *Planta par*. The show consists of selected works in which Calle continues her research into drawing, using unusual materials such as steel or wire mesh, and techniques such as typing and writing as lines on a drawing. Evocative, delicate, and of grand beauty and visual poetics, Johanna Calle's works address different themes related to social portraiture, the margins, everyday life situations in Colombian society, law and economics, history and social chronicle, as well as the conventions of language, and she translates them into images through her drawings.

In her work, the only perceptible colors are the ones of the materials used and the shades of the paper that serve as a base. The artist embraces this apparent lack of color, which conforms to an austere expression, seeking to connote more through the simplicity and forms she generates through her drawings. Each element carries a meaning, allowing her to construct an image that exploits its symbolic potential.

The spiritual symbolism of plants has transcended throughout history, giving them meanings beyond their physical existence. In this context, plants have become powerful metaphors for human life, manifesting concepts such as longevity, family connection, and the search for spiritual harmony. In the exhibition *Planta par*, Johanna Calle presents a series of works that explore the symbiosis that exists between humanity and nature; it is not only an artistic representation of elements of the Plantae Kingdom, but also a recognition of those beings that choose to be united voluntarily, or that somehow history has brought together.

The work "Herbarium" brings together samples of decayed leaves collected near Johanna Calle's studio in Bogotá. These leaves come from an endemic tree called Sangregado (*Croton Magdalenensis*). The collected leaves were eaten by the larvae of a foreign butterfly, which can devour a 15-meter-high tree in twenty days. The artist closely followed the deterioration of the foliage from the onset of the infestation until the complete disappearance of the leaves. On one of the pages of "Herbarium," Johanna Calle transcribed Sylvia Plath's poem "Suicide Off Egg Rock". She captured an adult specimen of the Lepidoptera *Sangalopsis*, the red and black butterfly that has recently attacked this botanical species. On each sheet of the set, he transcribed a phrase from the poem: "The words in his book wormed off the pages".

In the works "Perímetros" (perimeters) and "Ramas" (branches), Johanna Calle transcribes the 2011 "Ley de Víctimas o Ley de Restitución de Tierras" (Victims' Law or Land Restitution Law) on notarial paper and old account paper with a typewriter. This law recognizes, for the first time, the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia. Calle explores the terminology and linguistic architecture of the law, focusing on the differences between terms such as 'forcibly expropriated', 'displaced', and 'those who abandon their land'. According to Johanna, "This law is a transitional legal regime that establishes mechanisms to return the land to peasants who were forcibly dispossessed or who were forced to abandon their land for reasons of public order". The law seeks to address the consequences of the conflict, with a focus on the recognition and rights of victims. As the old land records were handwritten, misspelled, or illegible, they lent themselves to inaccuracies and manipulation of information, so one solution would be to provide evidence or improvements, including planting useful plant species such as fruit or timber trees. Often, these trees also serve to delimit the boundaries of their lands.

¹ Calle, Johanna, Fabry, Alexis y Tatay Helena. *Johanna Calle: Dibujos, dessins*. Maison de l'Amérique latine, 2017, página 121.

In the series of works "Obandos", the transcribed texts are about agrarian reforms that tried to be implemented in Colombia (without much success) throughout the 20th century. In addition, in these works the artist shows panoramic photographs of Colombia at the beginning of the 20th century. The text runs just below the photographs, sometimes in a repeated, superimposed, cut, or misaligned manner, and even invading the photographic images. Photography has always played a fundamental role in Johanna Calle's work. With her husband, Julio Pérez Navarrete, they have been working for almost two decades, researching and gathering a vintage photographic archive (The Pérez & Calle Archive), which they then use in their works. This is what happens in the series "Horizonte" (Horizon), in which we find different texts typed on old anonymous panoramic photographs, in which the text delimits the horizon line.

In the series of works "Narcisos" (daffodils), she shows us male silhouettes, formed from texts typed on sheets of beads. Through these works, and based on a text by William G. Doty ²(which she transcribed to draw the figures), the artist talks to us about myths and different masculinities, which have educational, socio-cultural, political, and economic roots. She also establishes a parallel between the handling of money and the masculine, drawing the silhouettes on sheets of account books, and how she handles the idea of dominance through the proximity and attitude of the figures.

Following the idea of economic issues, in the works of "Imponderables", Calle reproduces with wire mesh cut-outs the structure of accounting books, which she then transfers onto cardboard. Calle breaks and deforms the grids, and the resulting image, which can sometimes resemble an urban grid, a broken fence, or barbed wire, is decontextualized. "When there is an economic crisis or bankruptcy, economic order cannot be re-established, just as social ruptures cannot be repaired"³. This grid, which should give order to chaos, becomes chaos itself.

In the same line of work, we find the series "Resistencias" and "Anotaciones", in which the artist explores different ways of approaching writing, using steel (steel wire, springs) to shape the words, but legibility is annulled in this way, leaving us only with the idea of language. "Calle creates linguistic and symbolic abstractions that denote vulnerability, fragility, precariousness, resistance, and transgression"⁴. Language, also as a mechanism through which we order reality, loses its functionality, and we are left with only the sensation of it.

Finally, and concerning language, we find the series of works entitled "Prosas". Each of the pieces is made up of a single letter, anonymous and of a personal nature, subdivided into different tubes, which the artist transforms into an object. An object that contains the memories, desires, and wishes of a person we do not know, nor do we know to whom they were addressed, so we lack the context to understand them, and whose reading is annulled through their transformation.

Johanna Calle (Bogotá, 1965) graduated in Art from the Universidad de los Andes (1984-1989), after which she took a Master's degree in Fine Arts at Chelsea College of Art in London (1992-93). With a production that is both delicate and forceful, Johanna Calle has found in drawing and graphics a special way of referencing the problems and inconsistencies that permeate Latin American society. Starting from different forms of writing, Calle appropriates manuscripts, letters, musical scores, mathematical matrices, or shorthand techniques in a kind of permanent play between lines, words, and signs. Her recent solo exhibitions include *Têxteis*, Galeria Marília Razuk, São Paulo (2022), *The Absence*, and *Galeria José Bienvenu*, curated by Alexis Fabry, New York, USA (2019), *Dibujos / Dessins*, Maison de l'Amérique Latine, Paris, France (2017), *#35 Aniversario*, curated by Javier Hontoria, Embassy of Colombia, Madrid (2016), *Silentes*, Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico (2016), *Silentes, 1985-2015*, curated by Helena Tatay, Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotá, Colombia (2015).

² DOTY, William G, *Myths of masculinity*, NY, Crossroad Pub Co, 1993.

³ Roca, José y Martín, Alejandro. *Johanna Calle Des(orden)*, Seguros Bolivar, 2014, página 23.

⁴ Fajardo-Hill, Cecilia. *Variaciones. Dibujos de Johanna Calle*, Casas Riegner, 2010, página 9.