

FULGORS

BY AVELINA LÉSPER

Neither child nor afternoon know you

Because you have died forever.

Absent Soul, Federico García Lorca.

Memory cannot be killed. Federico's face, a beautiful woman, birds' feathers, sand, red blood, overflowing blue. Ximena's paintings are an exploration into a past that should explain its outcome, unravel and expose a life, narrate it with the same shamelessness that both History and Poetry have already displayed toward it. These paintings are a spiritist invocation amidst a feast. Lorca's poetry strikes with daubs of color that enhance each line: "No-one knows you. No, but I sing of you". And it is Ximena who sings now. With her painting she creates a material relationship with light, with the voice of those who Ximena knew and of those who live in her bloodstream, those who filled her childhood with legends, those who come back in dreams. Sacrifice gives birth to new life, announcing rebirth, poets, doves, roses, orchids, fish, rebirthing through painting. In facing the past, we must forget or excite, flee or fight. This collection of faces and still lifes represents the impossible quest of an artist who confronts her fate with its origins, demanding herself an explanation. These paintings that belong to the artist's own history draw us in to engage them with commitment, draw faces out of passion, the fulgors that shed light on memory, that light the canvas, let us know what we are not meant to know and with intrusion engage us in Ximena's personal ritual. If Ximena, with great courage and from the depth of her heart, exposes herself in order to paint, we surrender to contemplate and know.

No-one knows you, no. But I sing of you.

I sing of your profile and grace for posterity.

Absent Soul. Federico García Lorca.

Everyone loved Lorca. Everyone loved that joyful child, except those who hate poetry . . . except his murderers. The day Federico was assassinated, Ximena's uncle, Carlos Morla Lynch was in the street and upon hearing of his friend's death, upon hearing people cry: "Federico! Federico!" the only thing Carlos Morla could do was run and run, flee aimlessly, wander without destination, escape his own suffering, flee from Lorca's death, from the insanity of what is irreversible. Carlos, like every one, saw in Federico a

beloved brother, an angel who wrote poems. In *Voices of Death* Ximena portrays Federico from genetic memory only: she never met him in person, but was brought up hearing about him, from the verse of the poem that reads, “Like all the dead of the Earth, like all the dead that are forgotten.” This past we do not know, these luminous shadows that haunt Ximena’s life, for the sake of Lorca’s poetry, she explores, she scrutinizes the passions Neruda sang in his poems and deliberately reveals them in her paintings. In these paintings of Ximena’s no-one dies forever, they bring to mind the barbarian violence with which Franco’s soldiers murdered the poet and remind us that poetry cannot be killed, that a dictator cannot exterminate a genius. In Federico’s portrait we see, like Carlos Morla writes in his diary that he, “moves toward us with his hands beckoning wide open, like a brother who arrives.” In the painting he opens his arms slightly, Ximena emphasizes the mutilated hands, portraying the details, she traces his fate lines, his fine fingers. The poet surrenders, exposing himself with nothing to hide, being the essence of his words. Farewell, Lorca who is leaving. He is on a path that splits into two under a sky that is blue and unclear, blurred by a tone of violet. His eyes are clear and bright, the afternoon fades away and Federico stands in a solitary downtown street. The green dome accentuates the ochre and the earthy colors of buildings, the afternoon becomes virtually aquatic, reflecting blue light from Federico’s shoulders. It is a young Lorca who is leaving, who beckons with his arms and bids farewell . . . a gentleman, a dark suit with diplomatic stripes -it is not that he is in mourning- it is elegance. He leaves in a state of beauty so that we can remember him thus, with the dignity his executioners in vain attempted to tear away from him. The poet who was shot dead, mutilated, thrown into a common grave, the poet whose poetry keeps him alive . . . Ximena brings him out into the street, like someone leaving on a trip, like someone boarding a ship and he says, “I only came to say good-bye, to tell you not to forget.”

If I could pluck out my eyes and eat them

I would do so for your mourning orange tree voice.

Ode to Federico García Lorca, Pablo Neruda.

Art is premonitory: announcing a tragic or dazzling future. It is the oracle that mercilessly reveals what we cannot change, that which once named becomes irreversible, inevitable. The tragedy lies in knowing it. Neruda wrote *Ode to Federico* a few months before his assassination, sensing the premonition that in the midst of a war a luminous poet is a great danger to tyranny. Neruda wrote with words that shout, “I could die from seeing you at night, watching the drowned crosses pass, afoot and weeping.” Neruda saw the loss of Lorca, he was already missing him, in his *Ode* he remembered him before he left for ever. This tragic announcement, this terrible revelation is poetry, is art. In *Carlos and Federico* we see two friends together, two dear friends. Federico takes Carlos by the arm in search of protection, showing fragile vulnerability; with determination and nobility Carlos looks out into the horizon: we

ignore whether he is seeing death approach; we do not know whether he is avoiding the painful possibility of separation, that the evenings in which they read *Yerma* may come to an end, that those lengthy conversations with laughter and poetry may finish. All of a sudden, the sun in the mid-heaven lights up their faces: it is the ruthless Spanish sun, a sun that wilts the lands, that ripens fruit, that dries and rots, that impregnates the past with scents. Ximena burns her colors with this very same sun; with soft hues of color, she bathes the reminiscences her uncle Carlos and her grandmother would bring to life in their narrative. Ximena strikes the canvas with light, which she dissolves along shoulders and faces, a light that is ashy, heavy, dusty. Carlos smokes and Federico muses in silence -neither of them see us- they only see their own company, their friendship. Federico was young, eternally young. He remains thus in Ximena's memory, in everyone's memory. Her uncle Carlos remembered him thus when he would re-read his poetry. The resemblance is exact and it is not realistic, almost being a fantastic dream-like re-creation with a wall behind that does not allow us to think where they might be. The sun light is a map that guides us. *Carlos and Federico* is the flash of time preceding a tragedy, the instant that ignores the worst of all griefs, that ignores the stalking pain. In the placidity of the scene, Ximena brings them together again, assuming Neruda's prophesy and decides that it is time they come together again. The wait is over, "I would do it for the tree in which you grow, for the nests of golden waters you bring together," sang Neruda.

The women are running around like mad in search of their husbands' and children's whereabouts, and will never know about them again.

Diaries, Carlos Morla Lynch.

War puts an end to friends; bullfighting puts an end to bullfighters. Either pride kills them or the bull tears their entrails apart. Women pray they come back and when they do not come back, they rush to the bullring, to the hospitals, both furious and resigned. They know that the bullfighter faced a formidable enemy that is now theirs too, loathing not being able to take revenge. The wives of both bullfighters and members of the militia are witches: they pray for them to live and if they die they dig their remains out of the grave with their own nails, and weave their hair into their necklaces. There are two bullfighters. One is alive, his name is Ignacio Sánchez Mejías and he cries in despair. The other one is dead and called *Joselito*. Ignacio looks at Joselito's face, whose body lies rigid and in that mask he has a premonition of his own fate. Joselito sought his own death, insisting on joining a bullfight roster that did not include him and that afternoon the bull fatally charged him. Joselito is blue, having left all his blood in the bullring, his face is at peace. Petrified, he is a sculpture. A drop of blood on the sheet reveals the bullfighter's fatal wound. The afternoon sun sets over his forehead. Ignacio with his feverish face, with the airs of a person sick with pain, touches him with one hand and with the other he gives himself solace, he reproaches his madness, his foolishness and weeps for what awaits him. "He sought for the dawn, but the dawn was no more. He

seeks his confident profile and the dream bewilders him,” Lorca would later sing to Ignacio, one afternoon reminiscent of that moment in which he came across his own fate amidst applause and cheering.

*And now his blood comes out singing;
singing along marshes and meadows,
trickling down stiff cold horns,
faltering soulless in the mist.*

Spilled Blood, Federico García Lorca.

Self-portrait in an encaustic painting, a still life, we see the artist reflected on the silver jug in the center of the composition. A double *mise en scène*: the scene in the background we can only guess, whereas the scene in the foreground shows silver, fruit and birds' feathers falling softly. In the reflections, our attention is drawn to the large window that lights up the scene Ximena paints from life, the objects themselves invent atmospheres, and she allows light to take over time and pursue her. Light pursues her relentlessly so that the painting conveys what her eyes saw in an instant. The dark background contrasts with the silver, a concave mirror that allows us to know, to spy on the moment of creation. The red color of the fruit, of the pomegranates is inhabited by pink hues, by green edges that unfurl and distract the viewer's attention from the background scene. They lay a veil over what there is to see: that there is an art studio on the curve of the jug, paintings on the walls, an easel, a life. *Self-portrait* is a race to stop life, to stop time. The feather lies suspended in the air, the fruit must not wilt, and Ximena ceaselessly paints one or a thousand canvases. *Blood Wedding*, a velvet drape that she draws with light and shade . . . the color red is blood, spilled life, fire. “Blood was flowing with more power than water,” recites Lorca. With this fabric, its folds and creases, Ximena creates the light that enhances its peaks as well as the darkness that delves into the depths of the abysses of the sheet of tragic love. “Cursed be blades and cursed be he who invented them.” Blades cut veins, slice hearts, kill lovers, and Ximena's red velvet is dyed with that blood that she lets flow like a stream in order to reveal her adventure and poetry. It is both a luxury and a shroud. Still lifes are scenarios reminiscent of an unaccomplished flight, ocean sand, birds' feathers that will no longer feel the sky, roses, a ship's figurehead are plans to flee, traces to find a place that can only be reached through painting. She lays out altars with consecrated objects, pointless for life, indispensable for evocation. She places them in the transparency and fulgor of glass, placing them in cages, out of reflection and lightness, she makes a contradiction with what it contains. *The Sea and the Birds*, for Tiresias the sea brought the past; for the stones, the sea erases the past and feathers are traces of what has left. She who carries the language of spirits in her skin, she who dares consult the dead is also capable of leaving with a feather, with pigments, with oils and colors. Ximena creates her own colors that only exist in her paintings, secret formulas from generations of painters, of

sorceresses who blend emotions with pigment. She draws with colors, but she also uses them to give the canvas another dimension, to create textures that invite us to touch the work of art, to feel the color and the variations of hues with our fingertips. They allow us to place the canvas in our memory through touch and sight. With these works of art we know that the color blue is sometimes thin, that the color red has depth, layer over layer the hues of color blend together, they reaffirm each other or disappear, saturating the canvas bringing out both transparencies and opacities. This volume contributes to the figure, to the object, being an accomplice to color. Textures that reveal the pleasure with which Ximena paints. "Matter and poetry confounded," wrote Carlos Morla Lynch in his diaries, unaware that he was evoking Ximena's painting.

Ximena Subercaseaux, Recent Artwork.

Galería Arte Actual Mexicano.

Monterrey, Nuevo León