

Las Imágenes de / The Images of LILIANA WILSON

by Marjorie Agosín, Translated by Mónica Bruno | Texas A&M University Press

Las imágenes son constantes en el proceso de desvelar y revelar miradas. Personajes desplazados inciertos viajeros se insertan en el espacio en busca de luz de sombra de los objetos transitorios que aprisionan como las rejillas pero a la vez revelan un deseo de habitar en el mundo que los deshavía que los expulsa.

Las imágenes de Liliana Wilson son principalmente rostros que miran y no miran que se cubren los ojos con tabiques con simbólicas mordazas pero al igual permanecen suspendidos en un instante en un momento del pincel cuidadoso que les permite asomarse al mundo decir y ser.

Es esta pintura de aguda sensibilidad hecha con cuidado casi con una devoción al detalle. Pareciera que la pintora busca en la técnica cuidadosa de cabellos labrados en forma de hebras de oro oscurecido o en la perfección del cuello de la mujer que mira hacia el horizonte (*Bearing Witness* (2002)) un deseo de armonizar la belleza de los detalles con el insólito paisaje que los enmarca.

En estas pinturas de Liliana Wilson cada uno de sus personajes nos cuenta una historia se revelan ante nosotros con transparencia y recato. Es decir la artista logra captar por medio de imágenes enigmáticas capciosas la complejidad de estar y ser en la vida. Sorprende que tan solo *Las amantes* (2002), sea una de las pocas imágenes en que aparecen dos figuras humanas. Pero aquí son mujeres que no representan a la figura tradicional de la pareja edénica de un hombre y una mujer.

Aquí nos encontramos frente a la presencia de las dos Evas que miran valientemente hacia la inmensidad de un horizonte indefinido pero no obstante un horizonte. Es imposible olvidar estas pinturas insertadas en un imaginario simbólico post-moderno que se inserta en la violencia civil como en la imagen, *War* (2001), o se plantea como un desacato en *Las amantes*. Las pinturas parecen pulular en espacios más allá de la memoria y del tiempo motivadas por una existencia etérea y surreal.

El camino (2001) es una obra de extraordinaria belleza y profundidad acentuada por la mirada de una mujer que no se ve que está de espaldas pero no obstante está rodeada de una belleza que solo presagia y augura futuros de magia y esperanza.

La pintura titulada *La concha* (2002) pareciera cobrar sugerencias y enigmas inabarcables. La concha sugiere una plenitud de cosas. No ocupa el espacio del mar pero sí el del

cielo como si recobrara una cualidad mítica misteriosa. La concha es sonido luz intimidad, es pequeña es una imagen movidiza y circular que desafía los confines del tiempo y del espacio pero a la vez está ahí soberana del espacio del cielo de la tierra ocupándolo todo y negándolo todo. La pintura se



La diosa del amor (2002)

asemeja a una meditación a una evocación de la naturaleza en su materialidad más pura como a la vez la luminosidad que el mar y la naturaleza nos brindan, como la dependencia de la naturaleza en su magnanimidad y el ser humano. A pesar de que las imágenes aparecen desconectadas la concha y el niño hombre conviven, existen en la hibridez de las presencias como de las ausencias.

La obra de Liliana Wilson continua creciendo explorándose a sí misma y transformándose de acuerdo a las inquietudes de una Historia y de un imaginario que va mucho más allá de las cosas inmediatas pero abarca espacios metas e imágenes que transfiguran el hoy día para acentuarse plenamente en el único espacio posible la creatividad que existe en la intimidad de las personas.

La pintura titulada *El camino* (2001) o la extrañamente hermosa titulada *La diosa del amor* (2002) [arriba] son capaces



La caída del ángel (2004)

de trascender y recrear el potencial humano por medio de colores y formas centellantes pero más que nada por medio de lo que estas pinturas no dicen. Wilson magistralmente es la maga de la sugerencia, de lo que no dice y su pintura es como una hada que en la penumbra enhebra imágenes.

only need to close my eyes to clearly remember the images created by Liliana Wilson. The memories of her art are everlasting because her art narrates stories. Related to the popular art of Latin America and social protest art, Wilson is a painter of exquisite sensibility as well as deep and creative aesthetics.

Wilson's paintings contain multiple universes. Her work is essentially narrative in nature. The adolescents that appear in her paintings seem to tell us stories; they have the ability to beg for our gaze and wish to be recognized. Liliana is obsessed with marginality and the innocent desire for money that these defenseless beings have. Paintings such as *Lottery Dreams*

(2000) demonstrate a complex desire to possess money in a stratified world. This is the world of Chile, of Latin America, and now that of Latinos in the United States. The figures may change slightly, but the themes and dangers touching upon these themes remain the same. That is to say, they are figures, suspended on the edge of the abyss, but they also are creating and weaving hope.

Her work always surprises, disconcerts, elates, and saddens us. The spectator always wants to know more, understand and feel more. The viewer wants to get closer to those paintings that always seem to tell a story that warms our hearts. The level of empathy and compassion that her paintings engender is part of her greatness as an artist.

Wilson belongs to a generation of Latin American artists who had to or who wished to abandon their countries due to the dictatorships that dominated them, as was the case of the Southern Cone. I think the most significant element of her work is the departure from Chile, represented in her broken

bodies, divided women, and pained spaces. Exile allows Liliana to imagine Chile but at the same time allows her to be free of concepts, techniques, and forms of painting. If the tortured body and truncated heads are permanent representations, there is also a way to paint them with blues and golden hues so they appear innocent. Her painting belongs to the magical thinking of the indigenous Latin American cultures, and her figures have a profound complexity. The preoccupation with social justice is the unifying and redeeming thread for Wilson's work.

Her departure from Chile recovers the Latin American imaginary in its full splendor and vast pain. I am moved by her paintings of the heavens, the disappeared bodies, suspended in a colorful landscape where golden hues predominate. There are sleeping bodies, dead bodies, and unclaimed bodies. The concept of heaven seems extraordinary to me because it alludes to an imaginary heaven where the bodies of persecuted youths find their place. The images of beings displaced by state violence and poverty perturb me and fascinate me. The image of a fallen angel, *La caída del ángel* (2004), a fragile child from some Latin American nation, falling abruptly to earth, seems to indicate that even the messenger spirits of angels have abandoned them. The image of enormous protective wings also appears in the painting *Rodrigo Rojas* (1988), the youth who at the age of nineteen was set on fire in Santiago and later died. The violence of the military dictatorships is always accompanied by victims with angels' wings, innocent countenances that seem to linger beyond death.

The horror and violence in Wilson's work are generally accompanied by animals that are completely white, almost surreal, projecting a false transparency, a false order linked to deception. The dispossessed are always light; their bodies resemble fallen angels who have yet to lose their faith. We see a surreal element, almost a magical realism, in the objects that levitate, in the faces of men filled with an animal's cruelty and the reinterpretation of myths such as *Bella durmiente* (*Sleeping Beauty*) (2004) or *Alma* (*Soul*) (2009). Wilson has a genius for storytelling as well as detail.

Immigrants and borders belong to a period related to her own escape from her country, her sense of history and belonging. Now Liliana Wilson, as one of the few plastic artists in Latin America, identifies with the souls of Mexicanos who cross borders, with broken bodies, and arrive in a country that promises to be a paradise. Her work represents history and symbols, the border crossing between Latin America and the United States. The faces of immigrants, the wounded, and the constant presence of marginality are recurring themes in Wilson's paintings. They are always rounded out by beauty, color, details, dream-like qualities, and hope that surpasses death—like the painting of the disappeared in heaven.

The women are another essential element of Wilson's work. Her feminine imaginary is varied and complex. The images always seem to be surrounded by mystery as well as figures in movement floating on a blue background. At other times they are angels in the immensity of the universe, where each figure seems to encompass the vastness.

In these imaginary visions of women, I am surprised by the girls, in all their purity and complex innocence, as in the painting of *Alma* (2009). The child is suspended in a clear, open space, as if floating on a shell. There are several images of girls with seashells. I stop to observe the image of the shell, its sweet roundness. I also think about what the seashell signifies

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within the female imagery; it represents the secret and occult, women's sexuality. Having the shell in hand is a powerful message. It reminds me that women, from an early age, possess the gift, mystery and secret.

Seashells are examples of that which is hidden: they are cavities and secrets, memories and histories. They also represent women's confinement, the spiral of their bodies. In Liliana Wilson's paintings, the seashells are a symbol of liberation. In the triumphant hands of her protagonists they resemble the images of Eve in paradise, holding a snake in her hands and being the one in complete control of it.

Wilson's paintings show complexity, from her beginnings as an exiled woman who recovers her history to the woman who can so audaciously retell her story. We observe the evolution of her art from the marginality of exile to the communion with dispossessed beings she finds at the border, uniting her experiences with that of other disappeared and dispossessed beings.

The reader will find a world filled with color, movement, and history of beings in search of hope. Wilson's paintings are a call to this search that begins with the need to denounce social injustice and learn about the struggle of minorities. In the twenty-first century, Wilson's topics are even more poignant in their full gamut of images, from the desolate exile to a geography of pain symbolized by poverty.

Wilson is without doubt one of the most exceptional Latina artists in the United States. She has skillfully linked the stories of Chile with the stories of the border towns. Her art is at once deeply individual and collective. She reveals, with absolute authenticity, a world of wonder and confusion.

I need only close my eyes to dream of her vast imaginary, the power of her art, so unique in retelling stories of invisible and forgotten beings that become grand. ♦

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