

GESTURE AGAINST OBLIVION

17.02–04.06.2023



SUSY
GÓMEZ

GESTURE AGAINST OBLIVION

Imma Prieto

Delving into memory. Plunging into and being permeated by images, words, by gestures. Uncertainties that trace a history that isn't always remembered. Engaging in an exercise that is nourished by memories requires understanding that we're hoping to recover something that we don't know in the present. Memory is an essential part of our history: of our... (shared) history? Does that mean, then, that the things we forget also belong to other people? What would we be without memory?

It is significant that, in classical culture, one of the titans, Mnemosyne, was the personification of memory, who, together with Zeus, engendered the muses. It's interesting to think about how, before the act of creation, we usually invoke the muses. And it's interesting to imagine that the gift of creativity is engendered by memory, by a kind of memory that cannot be manipulated, a memory that is ancestral and direct, open and accessible.

Susy Gómez (Pollença, 1964) has been doing research for years focused on a collective history that surrounds the universe of women, looking at how others see us and how we see ourselves, and with great subtlety she says to us: "Do they see us? What do they see?" Gómez has been able to generate an iconographic corpus through a paradoxical use of images. Erasure or cancellation as an emblem that demonstrates the lack of a real gaze regarding the universe of women. Monochrome bodies and a gesture of colour that cancels out the imposition of the canon. Some of her photographs are based on images collected previously from magazines and popular publications. She traces a gesture across them that,

Susy Gómez, *Quantum. Gest contra l'oblit*
[Gesture Against Oblivion], 2022-2023 (detail).
Courtesy of the artist

ultimately, liberates censorship. She is not nullifying through the act of crossing things out; on the contrary, her pictorial markings are liberating and freeing. At the same time, she has worked on her own personal memory. A way of getting in touch with her most intimate self, without concessions or indoctrinations. A path of investigation that does not need to be visible in her work, but which undoubtedly nourishes it. Movements of maturity in which age is of no consequence; the aim, rather, is to face up to reality and history honestly and ethically.

In May 2022, she presented the project “Quantum” at the Galeria Horrach Moyà in Palma, a series of paintings that merge her knowledge and experience. As we said before, there is a constant feedback loop in play: just as Susy has constructed her artistic work, her works have constructed her in turn. But with “Quantum” a new phase begins, one of existential maturity especially. The wisdom that it shows is absolute and ancient, and yet, we are seeing it for the first time because of our collective forgetting. The iconographic universe she generates plays with images in the same way that poetry does, through nuances and awakenings. It’s a pictorial space that speaks to us about everything we’ve forgotten, that reminds us who and what we are. We can dive into those worlds, our own, by drawing on universal or, also, personal, knowledge. It’s all there, in front of us, in a pictorial action that acts as a mirror. What is on display now in the museum goes beyond a simple change of scale—although that is also part of it. The installation highlights a gesture and a woman’s drive, in a way that is historical and contemporary, social and artistic.

Throughout the history of art, there have been relatively few exercises of this kind, concise works in which, through a spatial unfolding, the pictorial language points to the invisible, accepting its role a means

of accessing something beyond: Claude Monet’s *Water Lilies* or *Nymphéas*, now hanging in the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris, where we are invited to meditate through the paintings, the imaginary movement that the water evokes in us, as is reflected in the texts that accompany them and even in the audio-guide recordings; Mark Rothko’s frescoes in the chapel that bears his name in Houston, a place consecrated to communion with a superior being, where painting emerges as an element of transcendence, and the question becomes: what superior being? Aren’t human beings themselves part of that divinity?; Barnett Newman’s *Stations of the Cross* series at the National Gallery in Washington, which makes reference, again, to one of the major monotheistic religions; or, to cite one more, *Lepanto*, the Cy Twombly’s *Lepanto* series at Museum Brandhorst in Munich, where historical narrative becomes a space for connection and translation. They are all a response to the desire to transcend pictorial space; suggesting that what we see on the surface isn’t what we should be seeing. But, somehow, despite the fact that they all belong to what we might call a universe of abstraction in terms of their technique and visual language, they all refer to something specific: nature, religion or history itself.

Turning back towards a reflection on memory, let’s return to some of what we said at the beginning and think about what lies beneath this “Gesture Against Oblivion”. The piece intertwines various registers that become memories and open a new horizon towards the future, towards a way of rewriting history. While, on the one hand, there are personal questions that emerge—lessons that, as we pointed out before, are varied in their natures (from what can be read as an artistic evolution to the most personal aspects, despite an assertion that everything returns to existential themes)—on the other

hand, she works with art history as well, making her own voice heard from the present and defending pictorial practice on the part of women. We must be able to say: this type of exercise is courageous and compelling, it is a subtle and silent cry, but she is raising her voice. She is responding to years of historical imposition, a history of art that has reserved all the major pictorial spaces for men. Susy Gómez deploys her quantum universe without fear of the infinite; she inhabits the rooms of the museum based on a complete and respectful dialogue, while allowing her compositions to be, and to become, a place beyond themselves. Gómez has returned to the traces of a stroke, a memory that was also present in her very first work, more than 30 years ago. Finally, it is worth highlighting the reflection that is generated and that appeals not to a personal history or to art history, but to a history of humanity, centred on a loss or, perhaps, a primordial forgetting.

Memory has always occupied a central place in philosophical debates and discussions. While we pointed out early how the importance of memory is recognized from Greek mythology, in other foundational texts, such as Plato's *Dialogues*, specifically *Phaedo*, we find an indication of how the ancient Greeks associated life with illness, with a transition during which we find ourselves lost and disconnected from a primal source. In the same source, we also learn that the soul, when separated from the body, despite being freed from the corporeal prison, can only endure if it preserves its memory... it can only endure if it preserves its memory.

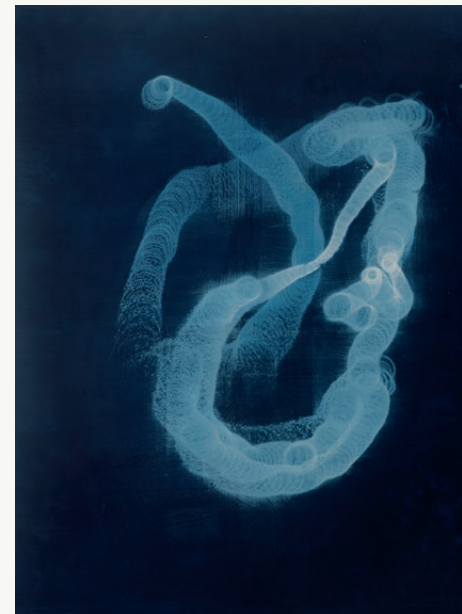
In that sense, our entire existence is a kind of struggle to remember, to reconnect with that ancient source. From different approaches and psychological currents, we have also been told that part of our traumas or ailments originate in our subconscious, in everything that,

although stored in our memory, we have forgotten or blocked out. We might cite psychoanalysis, but also other disciplines associated with the Gestalt school, or recent therapies that combine a range of beliefs, techniques and conceptions based on the idea that part of healing is centred in our consciousness. In any case, while we won't focus on any of them specifically, since that is not our aim here, we are interested in reasserting the idea that part of our ills or sufferings originate from the fact of living without a consciousness of our existence. This all becomes especially vivid when we consider how the word *somatize*, which is related to pain in the body, comes from *soma*, and that the soma is the cell body of the neuron. A nucleus, of sorts, that is home to millions of pieces of information. Due to advances in science, we know that our DNA contains endless information and memories, which is why many of our diseases can be genetic—that is, inherited. But do we inherit only the consequence, that is, the disease, or also what leads to it, that is, the cause?

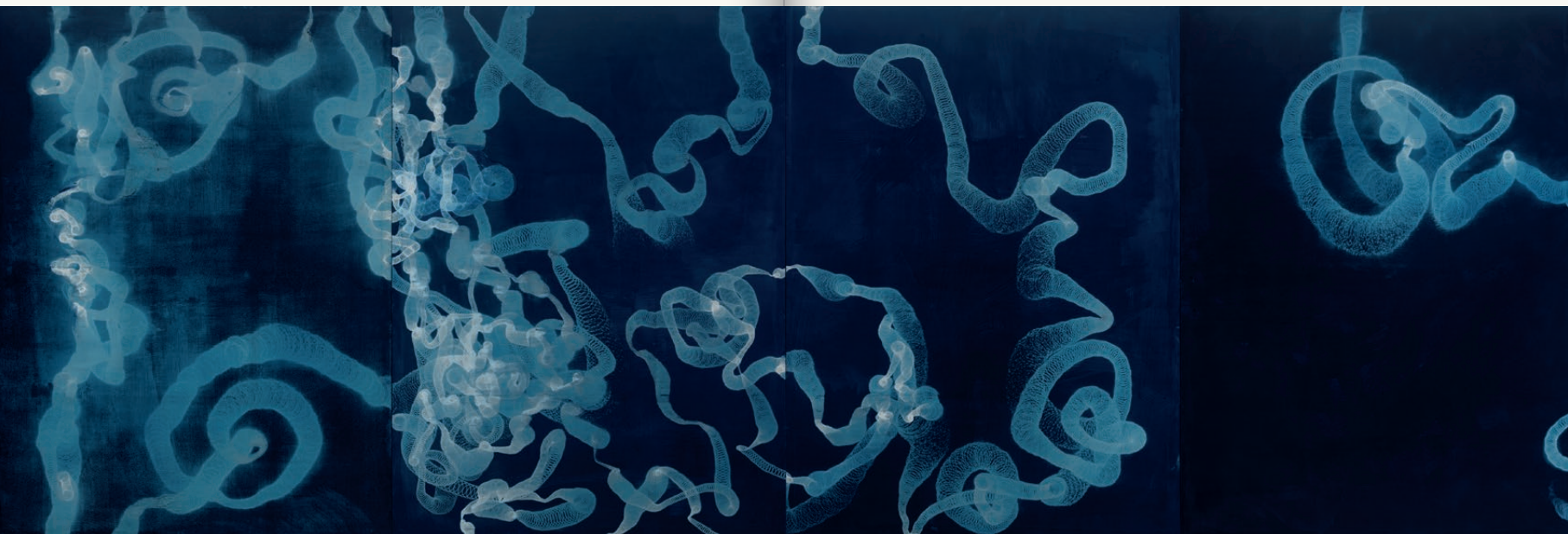
Susy Gómez's compositions remind us of rhizomatic, neuronal, matric, or aquatic bodies; they are living organisms that contain memory—not only hers, but everyone's. They invite us to meditate, to be conscious, to remember an origin and a coming together.

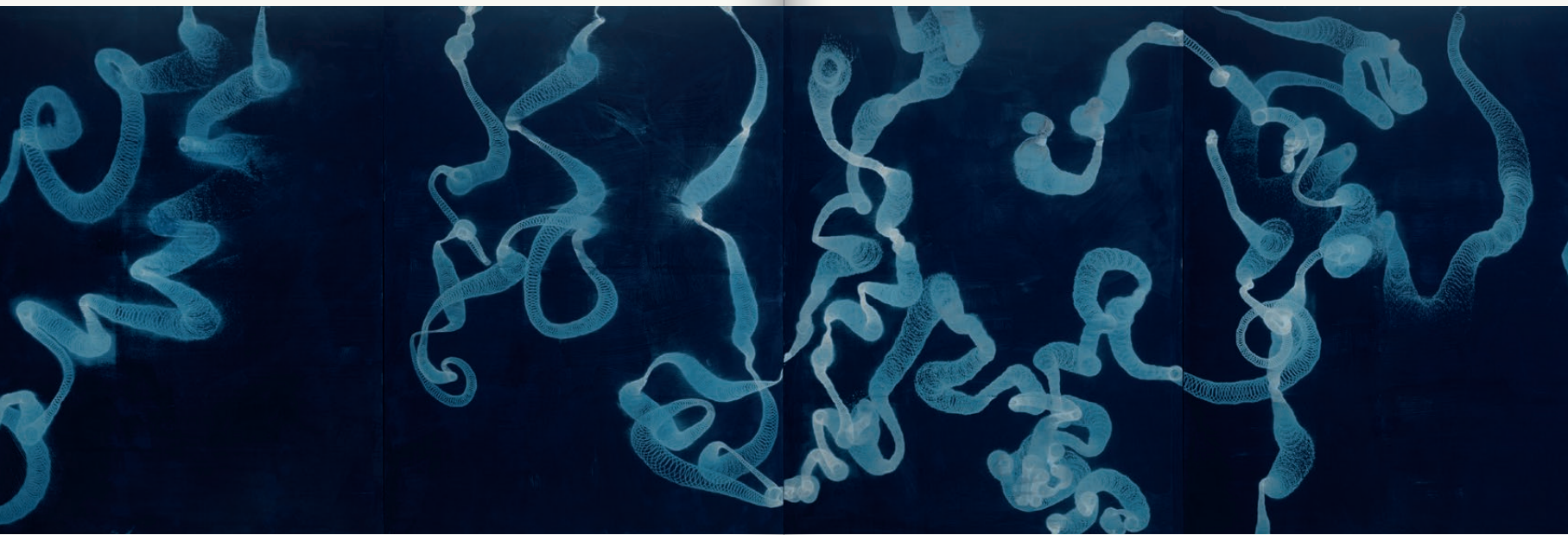
The beginning of this century has been founding, expanding and integrating, giving rise to a practice that follows that same pictorial path, but at the hands of a woman. An artist's body that is inspired by the references it contains, its own references and shared ones, internal not external, traces of multiple memories. A porous gesture that embodies universal time and space. Susy Gómez looks into the world and into her own world, and she gives us the opportunity to stop and *see (ourselves)*. She opens up a space to prevent forgetting, to let us be based on the history that has come before us. Thus, she

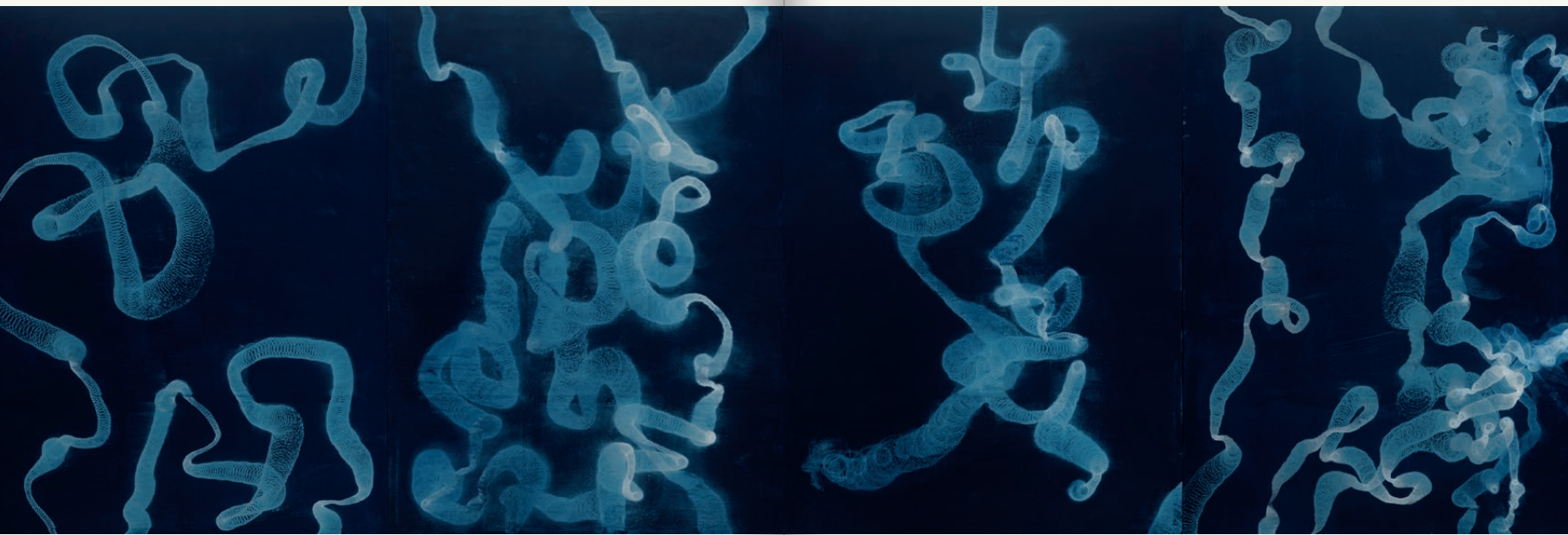
combines ancestral and intimate wisdoms; she recovers what we are in essence, without filters or religions. Perhaps the origin of our contemporary malaise lies therein, in having forgotten that we are beings who contain something more than matter. This exhibition is an offering, an invitation to meditate on what we have been and what we are, since that is still what shapes us. Susy Gómez pulls us into her “Gesture Against Oblivion” with the hope that we will reconnect with what makes us what we are.



Susy Gómez, *Quantum. Gest contra l'oblit*
[Gesture Against Oblivion], 2022-2023.
Courtesy of the artist









SUSY GÓMEZ: ON FLOATING SPIRALS AND OTHER WEIGHTLESS BEINGS

Tania Pardo

In the famous interview given by French artist Louise Bourgeois with the critic and historian Donald Kuspit, published in 1988, she said that she became an artist as a result of her family situation and, specifically, because from a young age, she had done drawings to help repair the tapestries that her mother worked to restore. The desire to reproduce all those allegories represented in the large-format textiles, along with her own daily life and the psychology of parental relations, helped her to construct the visual corpus of her adult work.

Throughout the history of art, autobiography has been one of the pillars supporting the discourses of many different creators, just as emotions, memory and the construction of identity are some of the ideas that permeate the work of the artist Susy Gómez, who burst onto the art scene in 1993 with an installation for Espai 13 at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. The work was made of fabric sewn together and suspended from the ceiling in the form of a spiral, which allowed viewers to access its interior, and which was associated with the idea of a maze in relation to the imaginary of femininity and its corporeal memory accumulated in textiles. That hanging fabric referred to the most intimate, domestic sphere, as the theoretician and critic Manel Clot observed at the time: “Susy Gómez seems to have brought all the elements in the exhibition not from her studio, but from her home, as if everything belonged to her, as if everything were part not of her personal world but her trousseau or her most intimate accoutrements and clothing and fetishes, part of

herself.” The piece displayed some of the characteristics that have appeared repeatedly over the years in the work of this artist, such as the idea of self-referentiality and a notable autobiographical component evidenced through the use of everyday objects. On the other hand, the undifferentiated use of materials and techniques—photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, installation or video—also shows the significance of intuition in Gómez’s work as a relevant part of a process of liberation, supported by emotional and creative thinking rather than rationality and analytical thought. By incorporating language into so much of her work, Susy Gómez seems to announce emotional states, as is the case with many of the titles of her works: phrases that are fragments of text and which, read in succession, seem to come straight from the artist’s diary, *Voy a apagar la luz para pensar en ti* [I’m Going to Turn Off the Light to Think About You] (1995), *No sé decir las veces* [I Can’t Say How Many Times] (1997), *No decía palabras* [I Didn’t Say Any Words] (2001) or *Ahora te veo* [Now I See You] (2008), but which she shares with so much generosity, so that we, the spectators, can imagine what has happened or is about to happen. Because, although the artist uses recognizable, commonplace elements—a bag, an apple or a flower—to make many of her sculptures, how those objects are displayed reveals them as mental spaces that she uses to form visual stimuli with a certain strangeness and complexity. They are altered objects that she also gives an intimate quality, and which, throughout history, have been associated with the feminine practice cited so often by Linda Nochlin, and which could be compared with the practice of other artists from her generation, the 1990s, such as Ana Laura Aláez, Eulalia Valldosera or Victoria Civera. That decade advocated the recovery of earlier conceptual practices, especially ones related to the female body and reflections on identity and gender.

Susy Gómez’s objects also show a sense of sophistication and double meanings that makes them similar, in their strangeness, to some of the ones used in the work of Mona Hatoum, and, for their metaphorical meaning, to certain pieces by Rebecca Horn. In that sense, the Mallorcan artist uses metal in some of her sculptures to reflect on the symbolism of the material itself by relating it to the allegories of certain ancestral cultures and spiritual sounds which she used to make many of her well-known dress sculptures. With those garments, she confronted the absence-presence of a body capable of generating a void while also constructing a theatricalized setting on a disproportionate scale. The result: a stage of sorts that, acting as a landscape, transforms the exhibition space into a symbolic and mental territory, thus endowing the object-based setting with a new, completely open meaning. Because Susy Gómez’s work is neither linear nor closed off; rather, all of it belongs to a completely timeless genealogy of connections and relationships.

And although the artist has used various techniques throughout her extensive career, I would argue that it is painting, in the different ways she approaches it, that has been her most faithful companion. From her first canvases, where a number of bodily fragments appeared timidly outlined, to the inclusion of pictorial representation in her celebrated works begun in 1994: photographs of female models taken from fashion magazines that she later altered using different materials, mainly paint. This manipulated surface was photographed again and enlarged to be exhibited not hanging on a wall, but resting on the ground, thus giving it a sculptural meaning by disrupting how the image was presented. Because that’s what Susy Gómez does: she restructures things, transforms them, completely shifts their meaning. But the artist goes even further, gracefully moving from one support

to the next: she goes from drawing on paper to canvas, and from canvas directly to drawing on the gallery walls, where she writes the names of friends and relatives. Or her performance called *Volar apoyada en lo que no vuela* [To Fly Being Held Up by What Can't Fly] (1997), in which, suspended from a harness, she dipped her feet in paint, which she then deposited on copper plates, generating new relationships between mechanical elements and chance. Painting with her feet, painting while rebelling against the manual gesture, performing the pictorial event using her own body like Janine Antoni did when she used her hair, stained with black hair dye to energetically splatter large white canvases laid out on the floor. It is a way of altering the pictorial action and transferring the gesture of the hand to the head or the feet, replacing verticality with horizontality through a radical display reminiscent of what Lynda Benglis did in 1969 when she spread litres of different pigments across the ground. Susy Gómez's work also contains a dimension of desire since it strains the physical limits that are held up by paradox and open readings.

Over time, Susy Gómez has also been losing interest in recognizable forms, in tangibility understood in terms of figuration. Starting with her exhibition *Metallica*, held in 2018, she began to explore the intersection between art and spirituality. Some of the acquired knowledge that runs through her latest work includes an interest in family constellations, the cosmogonies that exist in relationships of kinship and the spiritual exploration of one's own limits, as well as psychoanalysis, combined with her interest in shared experiences and a clear introspective dimension.

All this is evidenced in two of her most recent works: on the one hand, the exhibition "Quantum", shown at the Mallorcan gallery Horrach Moyà, made up of paintings

that could be understood as meditative images constructed using random effects that give rise to organic and contemplative forms; and, on the other, the performance *Equilibrium*. Both projects serve as a prelude, as a prologue, to this new exhibition, which, under the title "Gesture Against Oblivion", consists of a series of huge canvases that take on the character of an installation showing floating, circular forms. This contemplative abstraction is associated with timelessness and focuses on connections between vital states and emotional states, understood as a reconstruction of memory that serves as the foundations for the present. On the one hand, she uses the term *quantum*, which in physics refers to the minimum amount of energy that can be emitted, propagated or absorbed through a wavelength, which she now metaphorically relates to the complexity existing between matter and creation.

The spirals seem to circulate through a weightless, liquid surface, somewhere between something pictorial, a sculptural language and an installation. With this piece, Susy Gómez creates a poetic, monumental atmosphere that is also delicate and fragile at the same time. A place of multiple branchings and glazings that come together in rhizomatic forms and that contain a contemplative abstraction reminiscent of Eastern forms coming from Asian philosophies, because, as Estrella de Diego points out, "Susy Gómez's works have something Eastern in them too, elegant, disjointed and dispossessed at the same time, as though the opposites had stopped clashing and had harmonized in an amazing place, which is frozen in time. There is something extraordinarily fragile to them and extraordinarily powerful."

But these spirals, suspended against a velvety blue background, should not only be understood as a use of colour for pleasure; they are also forms that are given a

symbolic value in relation to nature, since the spiral also evokes a physical and spiritual archetype.

In all this unfurling of surfaces, inhabited by circular forms, there is a firm gesture in favour of silent introspection and meditation, as well as an interest in recalling the need for quiet contemplation, in opposition to the productive life demanded of us today by Western societies. Because “Gesture Against Oblivion” gives priority to an enveloping experience and brings us closer to metaphysical landscapes with no horizons or, what boils down to the same thing, and in the words of the artist, “to a place to reconnect with the ancestral matrix energy, which has no point of view or perspective, but rather a simultaneity of times and spaces”. Because Susy Gómez always returns to the beginning, to the centre of the spiral.

Gesture Against Oblivion
Susy Gómez

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