

The Work of
Lucía Vidales

Painting that Inhabits the Depths

Tania José*



▲ *Gravediggers*, 140 x 170 cm, 2016 (oil on canvas).

If we look closely at Vidales's canvases, it is very noticeable that they are dealt with not only as material, but also as a result of a multiplicity of contradictions that question the "right" or "pure" way of producing and appropriating art.



Accumulations, ▶
variable sizes, 2016 (oil and
encaustic on wood).

A host of colors come together on a canvas before our eyes. Greens, reds, and blues intertwine and swirl together. If you look closely, you can see a multitude of shades and hues not superimposed on each other but merged symbiotically. If you get a little closer, you can see at the extreme right of the canvas an almost human figure holding a kind of tool in its hands with which it works the scene of *Gravediggers* (2016), a painting in which Lucía Vidales Lojero (Mexico City, 1986) leads us through different densities, shades, and hues along the pathways of color as a pictorial material.

For Vidales, painting is not just a support; it is above all matter for experimentation and reflection on her artistic practice and what makes her work a visual invitation, seducing and simultaneously confronting the observer with other times, leading him/her toward worlds inhabited by fantastic, chaotic, noisy beings. At times, these beings that people her oeuvre make up scenes linked together by scattered phrases that make her work a road for witnessing the emergence of the depths through color and its materiality.

In addition to working as an artist, Vidales teaches in the design department at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), and one of her concerns has been to ensure her

*Art critic; indiikimi@gmail.com.

** Photos courtesy of Lucía Vidales.

students have the basic theoretical tools they need.

This concern can also be seen in her art, which includes painting, graphics, and sculpture. So, it is by no means a coincidence to find in her pieces the stamp of theoretical reflection materialized in their titles and the way she works.

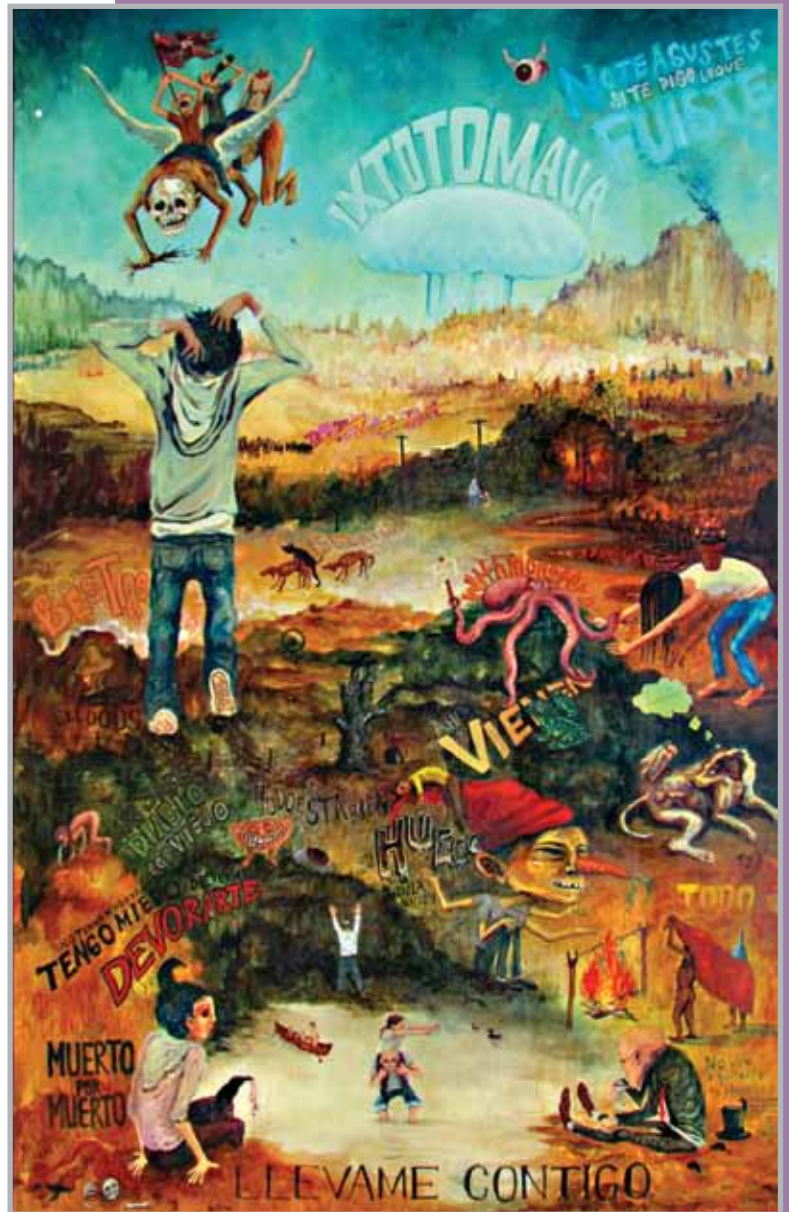
Examining Vidales's oeuvre offers multiple aspects to choose from. One of the most obvious is perhaps the grotesque, not so much in her style as in an aesthetic that questions the hegemonic canon of representation. At the same time, it is an option for generating other paradigms of visual representation present in their composition. Another aspect is children and the malice that these beings, idealized as pure and innocent, can harbor. This is very interesting since it makes it possible to appreciate the way in which the painter questions the relationship of human beings with evil and the "improper," transcending its mere destructive aspects to locate its subversive potential.

But the paths to deepening our understanding of this young artist do not end there. Another outstanding trait in her work is the question of deformity, present not only in the figures that wander through her canvases, but also in the use of different resources and her way of applying them, whether on wood, Masonite, or in oils. All together, they generate what she has called a kind of "pleasurable madness."

However, beyond these elements—or, we could even say, underneath them—lies another pathway, just as disquieting and questioning as the others: color, not only as an essential component of painting, but as a resource that makes more powerful the artist's themes, forms, and questions about the possibilities of painting as language in a context where it would seem there is no longer much to be said.

PAINTING AS BODY

When you visit Lucía Vidales's workshop, time is transformed. The topics of conversation hinge on the canvas, painting, and reality. This is a chaotic,



▲ *Take Me with You*, from the series "I Want to Go Home," 190 x 120 cm, 2012 (oil and encaustic on wood).

For Vidales, painting is not just a support; it is above all matter for experimentation and reflection that makes her work a visual invitation seducing and simultaneously confronting the observer with other times.

deformed reality of violent colors, on the one hand, and, on the other, the social, political, and artistic reality where her work is situated not as a mere object, but as a subject able to interact with the observer.

In this sense, Vidales says that painting as a support is not simply a plane or a thing, but that it “includes all the links that we are able to relate to it with.” Perhaps for this reason, standing in front of one of her paintings, your attention is so focused that it becomes almost impossible not to want to get closer to discover the details, the nuances, the scrapes on the wood, or the reliefs produced by the layers of oils that spill off the surface and give the painting a body that comes out to meet you.

Vidales asks herself about the possibilities of painting beyond the canvas. These reflections, she says, are part of a still-unnamed project that seeks to bestow this material with a kind of body and turn it into a three-dimensional object constructed using what she calls “waste” or “scraps”; that is, the remainders of other paintings, pieces of acrylic or oils that, when manipulated, form irregular bodies, kinds of eyes, intestines, and mouths, adhered to windowpanes like stickers, or that are stuck together like different layers of translucent, multi-hued skin.



▲ *Landscape Like Skin*, 30 x 25 cm, 2017 (oil on canvas on wood).

When you observe these “scraps” or “waste” from other paintings, the first thing you notice is an element of play, of interaction with the material through manipulation that gives the work “life” and dynamism. Another thing that jumps out at the viewer is a concern with the support that abandons the canvas to make the oil or acrylic the pillar of the painting and make color the substance that provides different densities and transparencies. In the words of the artist, the project’s objective is that when this painting made of “waste” interacts with light and space, it becomes a kind of living being, susceptible of transformations and changes.

Having gotten this far, beyond densities and transparencies, what is the role of color in the work of Vidales?

ANOTHER ORDER OF COLOR

The artist’s emphasis on color is one of the fundamental crosscutting themes of her work. If we look closely at her canvases, it is very noticeable that they are dealt with not only as material, but also as a result of a multiplicity of contradictions that question the “right” or “pure” way of producing and appropriating art in general and painting in particular. Vidales says, “Perhaps those colors that have been called pure . . . are that weightless light that goes from the grasses to the fire and from the fire to the clouds, with no weight or roots.” However,



▲ *The Path of Contradiction*, 150 x 240 cm, n.d. (oil and encaustic on wood).



▲ *I Thought I Shouldn't.*

In her canvases, the paint becomes a living material: the density of its layers of color has the necessary vitality that the artist raises in a singular fashion through a series of relationships, tensions, and questions that make her work a place in which depth overflows, becomes light, and ascends.

“another order of color [exists] that weighs and inhabits the depths.” This other order, contrary to making a priority of the spiritual or the concept, is distinct because it makes pictorial matter —that is, color as such— evidence of the process of the construction of the work.

What does it mean in the case of Vidales’s work to make the pictorial evident? In the first place, it means making painting clearly a process of human labor more than the result of divine inspiration or abstract, timeless genius. In this sense, her works have a direct relationship with a temporal category and, in particular, with the present. The references she makes to classical painters are a way of having her oeuvre dialogue with other times, not as a mere evocation, but as a resource for talking about the present.

Another way that the process of construction of each work is made evident is the materiality of the color. That is, the paint itself is a signifier: the multiple layers of paint from which the artist makes the black, red, ochre, and ultramarine hues emerge, which range from the shiny to the opaque, as well as the body-language of her strokes, glazes, shavings, or unfinished spaces that allow color to be a presence capable of inhabiting the depths. In her canvases, the paint becomes a living material: the density of its layers of color has the necessary vitality that the artist raises in a singular fashion through a series of relationships, tensions, and questions that make her work a place where depth overflows, becomes light, and ascends.

When you look at Vidales’s canvases, you inevitably think about the way her painting is linked to reality. When attempting to define realism, the writer José Revueltas resorts to his experience during a visit to a leper colony in Guadalajara in 1955.¹ His experience, narrated using abundant images and references to classical painters who depicted deformation, monstrosity, and the grotesque in their works, leads him to say that “reality has its

Examining Vidales’s oeuvre offers multiple aspects to choose from. One of the most obvious is perhaps the grotesque, not so much in her style as in an aesthetic that questions the hegemonic canon of representation.



▲ *Fireflies*, 120 x 100 cm, 2016 (oil on canvas).



Another outstanding trait in her work is the question of deformity, present not only in the figures that wander through her canvases, but also in the use of different resources, whether on wood, Masonite, or in oils. All together, they generate what she has called a kind of “pleasurable madness.”

◀ *The Strange Death of a Painter in 1986*, 120 x 100 cm, 2016 (oil on canvas).

own internal movement, which is not that whirlwind that it immediately appears to be, where everything seems to be hurling in a thousand directions at once.” Revueltas calls that movement of the interpenetration of contrasting elements, of accumulation and quantitative and qualitative transformation, the “tough-minded” or dialectic side of reality, which makes it possible not only to observe it, but to grasp it.

We can say that Lucía’s works are situated in this terrain: more than evoking reality, they grasp it. What reality are we talking about? Without a doubt, the reality of a country beaten down by violence, turned into a grave from which bodies emerge every day that are not only that, but also evidence of a deformed system that “seems to be hurling in a thousand directions at once,” chaotically and grotesquely.

More than images, Lucía Vidales presents us with painting of processes and other ways of understanding and grasping time; it is experimentation that reveals fragments of answers to questions about painting as reality, as material, as the result of human labor that questions the human in its multiple variations, where what has a name —and even what doesn’t have a name but nevertheless exists— are all at home. ■■■

NOTES

¹ José Revueltas, “A propósito de *los muros de agua*,” in *Los muros de agua*. (Mexico City: ERA, 2014), pp. 7-23.