



# PLASTICITY IN **JUAN RULFO**

Eva Malhorta\*



*Do You Remember, Justina?*, carved acrylic on wood, 122 x 122 cm.

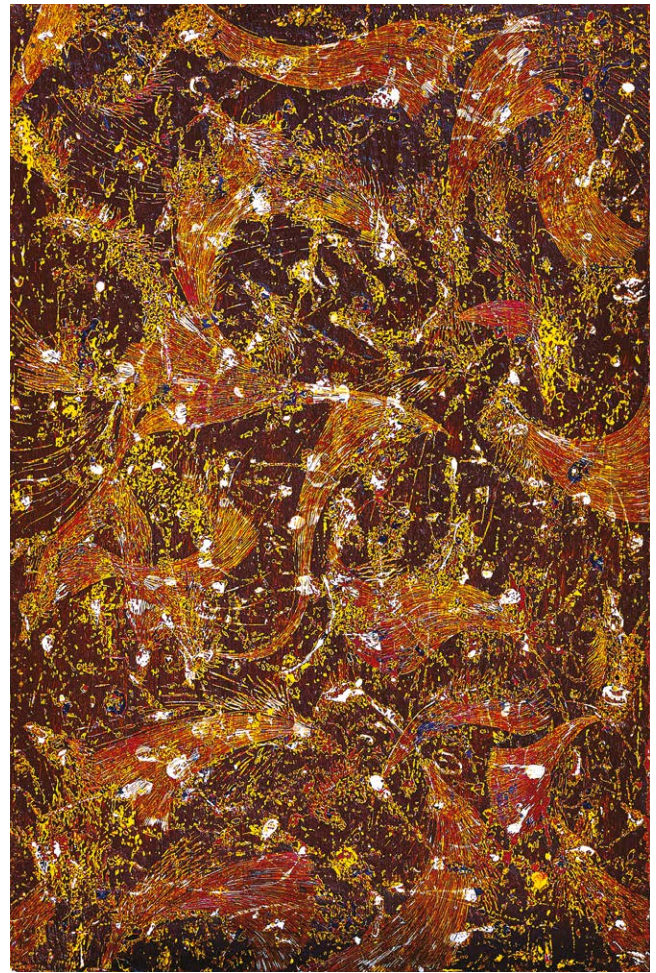
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Like an abstract painter, Rulfo pushes readers to use their imaginations to finish his pieces. Deploying the poetics of the people, he gives a lot using just a little—as a haiku would. His narratives are full of inconsistencies. Some critics have even accused the author of being a charlatan. The images of air and water that Rulfo uses to create movement also allude to time, yet time does not come off as a chronological marker but as exchangeable. The same is true of Rulfo's use of space: it's projected and retracted, expanded and shrunk, appearing and disappearing like planes in a two-dimensional painting in which perspective and optical illusion are at play.

Seemingly disconnected characters appear and disappear. Their communications tend to come in the form of prayer, or sometimes as internal monologue. Providing scant descriptions of his characters and settings, only a few are given names. Rulfo doesn't specify age or gender—with the latter sometimes fluctuating. He only hints at the order in which things occur, and even so, the order is changeable.

As a visual artist, I interpret Juan Rulfo's work abstractly. Like him, I believe that the more abstract, the broader the interpretation and the more poignant a piece can be. My



*Colorado*, carved acrylic on wood, 121.9 x 81.28 cm.

interpretation captures the emotions that I feel and the images that arise in me when I reflect upon the themes and form of Rulfo's work.

When I create a piece, I am first led by a strong feeling that might emerge from an experience, perception, or inspiration. When I select the colors, I let instinct or inspiration guide me. Then, on a wooden plank, I apply twelve to twenty layers of acrylic paint of various colors, allowing each layer to dry before I apply the next. Then, using a gouge, I engrave the painting, shaving it off and exposing colors, lines, and shapes—again, letting inspiration direct my hand. Invariably, the gouge unearths plenty of surprise elements. In combination or individually, the colors carry special properties that come together in unpredictable ways.

To Rulfo, writing was no trick or mockery. Nor was writing a mere intellectual exercise or game. No. His work deals with a wide range of universal topics: the philosophical concerns, tragic failures, yearnings, passions, vanity, fears, weaknesses,



*Back to Comala*, carved acrylic on wood, 241.3 x 241.3 cm.



In my visual art, my process is organic and guided by intuition, thus revealing my passions and emotions, which, in this case, respond to the characters in Rulfo's work and to my own experiences.



*Pedro Páramo*, carved acrylic on wood, 241.3 x 162.56 cm.



desolation, values, and treacherousness of humans. He deals with their psyche. He emphasizes and identifies with the dispossessed, the abandoned, the marginalized and exploited—and he does so unsentimentally. His characters are all imperfect, but even the worst of them have redeeming qualities. For instance, Fulgor Sedano, the sadistic right-hand-man in *Pedro Páramo*, is humanized thanks to his passion for the land. The merciless Pedro Páramo is able to empathize with Father Rentería because of what Pedro's son Miguel did to Father Rentería's brother and niece.

The novel *Pedro Páramo* starts with the theme of a father abandoning his son—a topic that resounds deeply among emigrants and exiles. Rulfo also deals with this issue in his short story "North Pass." The Mexican government's abandoning of rural Mexico after the Revolution of 1910 pushed people towards urban centers and the United States. People deserted their land to avoid starving to death. During his travels through Mexico as a travel agent, Rulfo witnessed this indifference and neglect. There is a reason why Jesús "Chucho" Monge's song "Mexico lindo y querido" is considered the country's second national anthem. Very few emigrants can

bare to listen to Monge's song without tearing up. It goes like this:

"My dear, sweet Mexico, if I die far from you,  
let them say  
I'm asleep, let them bring me here to you,  
my dear, sweet Mexico,  
if I die far from you."

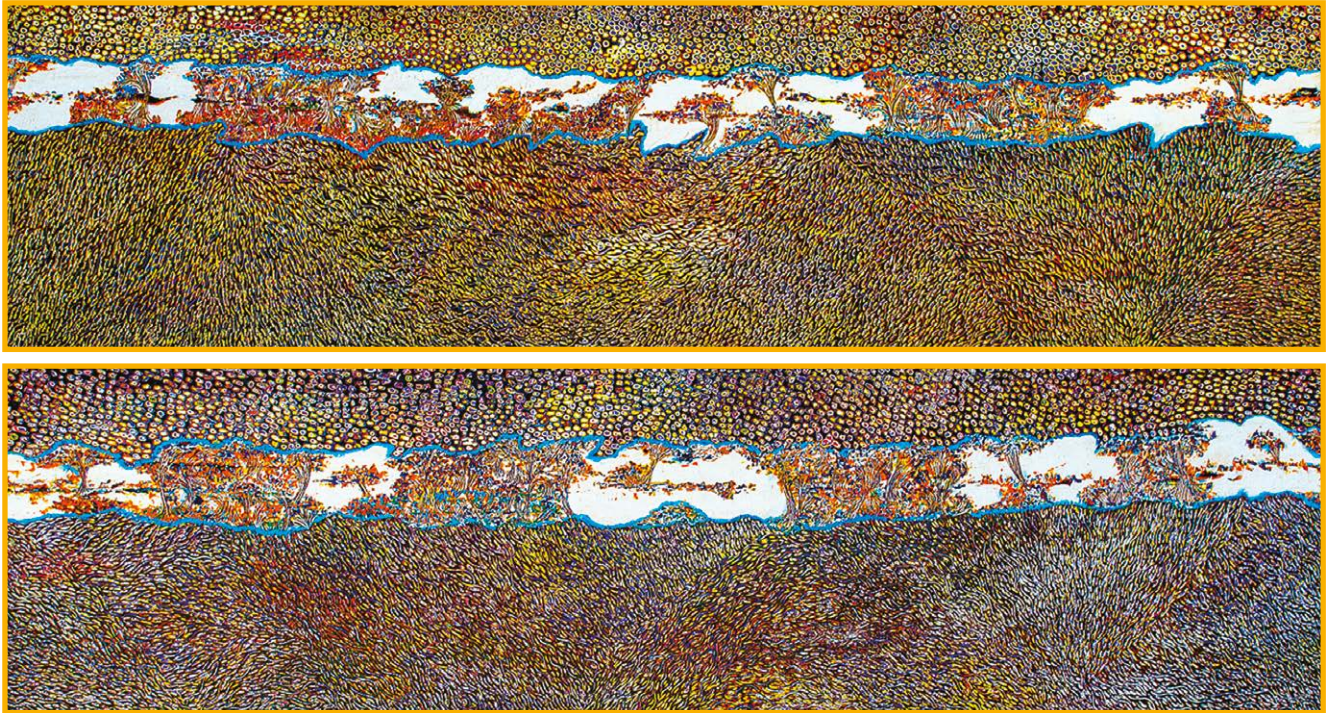
—"México lindo y querido" by Jesús "Chucho" Monge

Rulfo was aware of this national pride, even among Mexico's victimized and dispossessed. In an interview with Silvia Lemus, Rulfo asserts that the Mexican temperament is notably fatalistic. He says that the Mexican people "put up with things," citing the popular refrain that "the people put up with everything; they put up with depravity, corruption, theft, devaluation . . . everything." But when the journalist asks Rulfo about the chance of another revolution, Rulfo sentences, "No, not in Mexico. Mexico is a very solid country in this respect." Rulfo explains that "we already had [ . . . ] a revolution that cost one million lives. It would be difficult for there to be



*It's That We're So Poor*, carved acrylic on wood, diptych, 121.9 x 99.4 cm each.





*They Gave Us the Lands*, carved acrylic on wood, diptych, 33.02 x 121.92 each.

another rebellion.” He adds that, in Mexico, after every six-year presidential term, an election ushers in new hope, since every president brings in a new vision for the country, and this hope is what makes it so that a new uprising against the government doesn’t erupt. Rulfo states that, in Mexico, “there’s a strong sense of nationalism, and Mexicans won’t do anything against their own country” (Televised interview of Juan Rulfo by Silvia Lemus, 1973).

One thing that unites those who have emigrated to other countries is that they love what they’ve left behind: their family and country. Rulfo himself sustains this belief in his interviews with journalists, and his work exposes the paradox of the abandoned child who doesn’t forget, but loves, misses, and seeks his father up until his very death. In Rulfo’s work, that father symbolizes the country. The short story “North Pass” clearly supports with this theory. A son asks his father to take care of his wife and children while he emigrates north for work, since he can no longer support his land and pig farm. The father refuses, and the child reproaches his father for never having done a thing for him, as he didn’t even teach him his own trade. The father ultimately caves in, but when the son returns, he finds that his father sold off his lands.

In my visual art, my process is organic and guided by intuition, thus revealing my passions and emotions, which, in this case, respond to the characters in Rulfo’s work and to my own experiences. **MM**



*Susana and the Kites*, carved acrylic on wood, 121.9 x 81.2 cm.