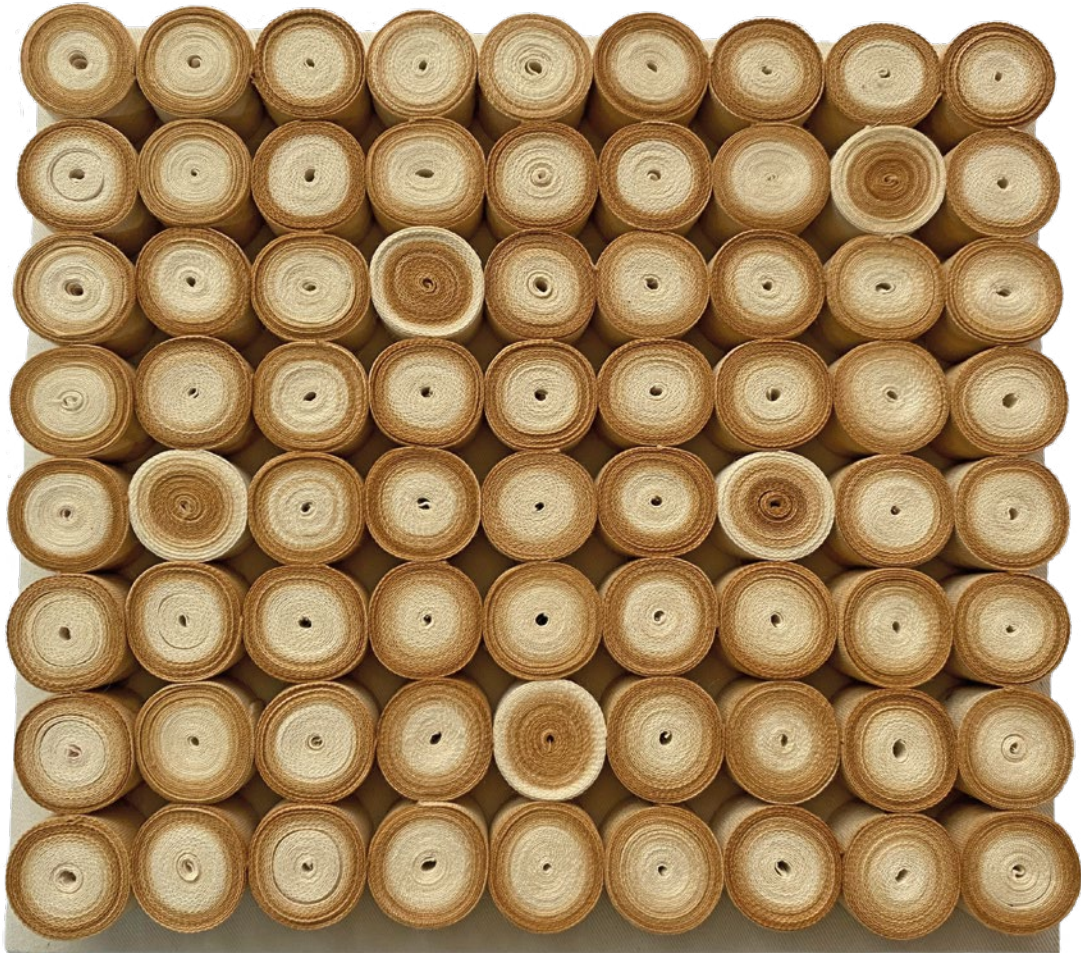




Astrid Velasco Montante*

Beauty as Identity

The Work of Patricia Álvarez



Cocoons, 18 x 20 cm, 2023, dyed ribbons on fabric.

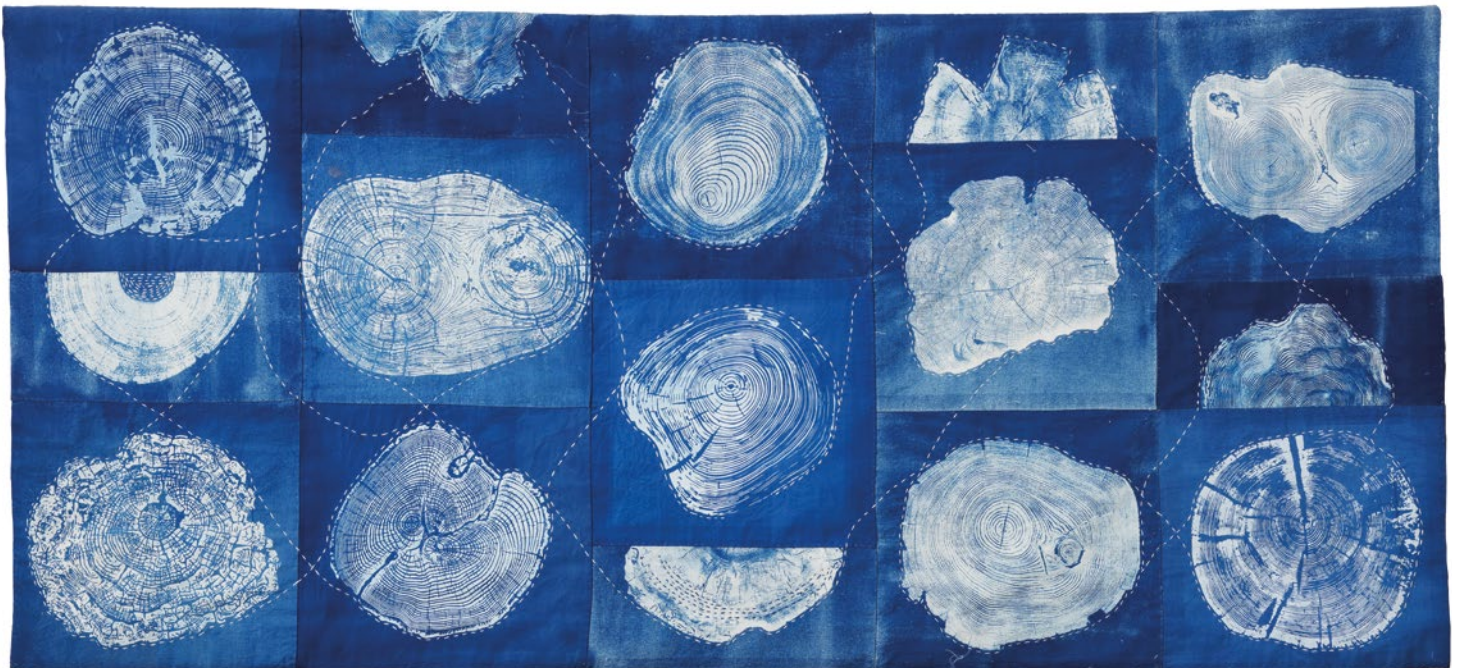
In everyday Mexican culture, textile art (also known as fiber art) is ever present, especially given our strong tradition of embroidery, weaving, and handcrafted folk attire and ornamentation. Yet, contemporary art working with threads, fabrics, and other materials is in a category of its own, since such work involves individual expression that not only pleases the senses but also proposes something new. It creates ideas and concepts through that which is depicted, putting unique aesthetics into play.

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Photos courtesy of the artist.

Patricia Álvarez's (Aguascalientes, 1956) art transforms elements of the everyday. This, in itself, carries meaning, as she uses materials from everyday clothing — used garments, various kinds of fabric, buttons, teabags, threads, labels, and stamps — to create a personal aesthetic that has little to do with folk art. Despite its extraordinary technique (admirable for its meticulousness and delicacy), her art goes beyond the realm of craft, proposing a plastic experience that is closer to painting and visual poetry. In her representations, she lays out a series of symbols, concepts, and metaphors through the elements she deploys in each piece. While textile production is evidently involved — and implies both the sensuality of texture as well as the paradoxical desire to touch, while at the same time having to protect the work from being handled — her pieces are also charged with allusions to environments, whether natural (the world of vegetation or the celestial, for instance), imagined, or philosophical (as when transferring memory to the object). We are faced with a discourse that transcends the material, pushing us to reflect upon the memory and intimacy of the objects that comprise her work.

The piece *A Bird's Flight* (*Vuelo de pájaro*, 2000) assembles vintage handkerchiefs with ribbons, and these handkerchiefs bear their own history through the initials of their previous owners, which are embroidered onto them. At first glance, we could view this as conceptual art. Yet, the exercise of observing its details configures a very intimate experience that evokes the trajectory of a bird's flight and the notion of the handkerchiefs' personal use and history. The metaphor of flight, which ties the temporal to the spatial, leads us to consider a territory (or map) while imagining the histories of these objects —we return to the past, to the domestic space, and to the emotions we transfer through our fondness for things.

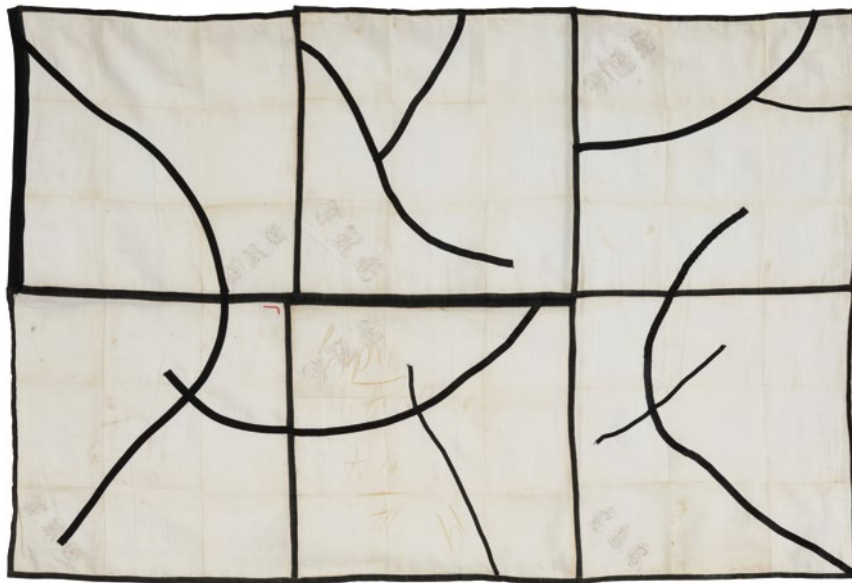
Each piece reveals an aesthetic that is subtle, intimate, and feminine (if such a feature can be gleaned from plain sight), whose exquisite image, concept, and color palette undoubtedly elicit awe and admiration. The artist puts visual metaphors into play and captures the simple beauty of shapes.



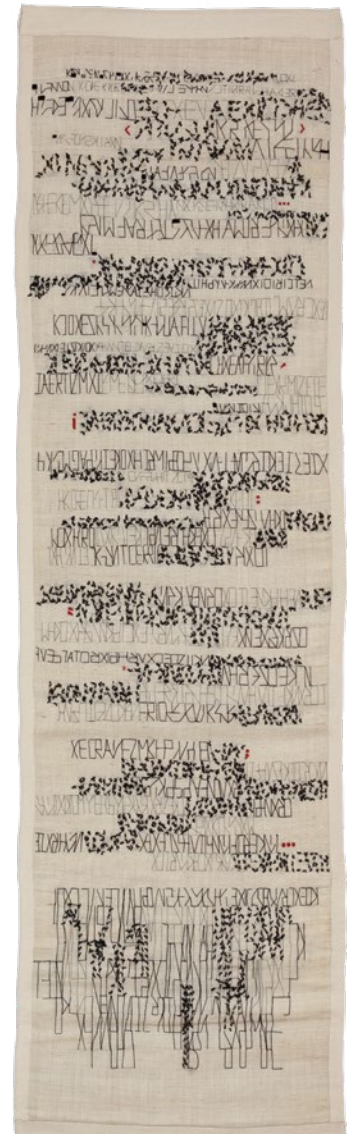
Prints IV, 59 x 126 cm, 2021, blueprint and embroidery on fabric. From the *Identities* series.



Voice I, 73 x 153 cm, 2020, embroidery on linen. From the *Identities* series.



A Bird's Flight, 65 x 97 cm, 2020, Old handkerchiefs, found and assembled, ribbon on fabric.



Alphabet, 195 x 57 cm, 2022, silk thread on fabric. From the *Identities* series.

Patricia Álvarez possesses an extraordinary sensibility when it comes to transforming materials and executing her work. Her creative process begins with introspection, an admirable synthesis of the visual, and meaning. Her poetic gaze recreates what she sees, imposing the weight of symbolism and the skin of beauty. Though she sometimes begins with a sketch, her pieces ultimately demand a specific form of expression that emerges as she works.

Her methods are far from fast. Time is important, both in what she portrays and in her sewing process. Even her quest for materials is a permanent work in progress as she considers each snippet she comes upon in terms of its potential. Thus, a kitchen hairnet can turn into a *Blossoming Medusa* (*Flor de medusa*), as buttons, fabric, labels, and teabags abandon their original essence and mutate into landscapes, flowers, grids, and poems.

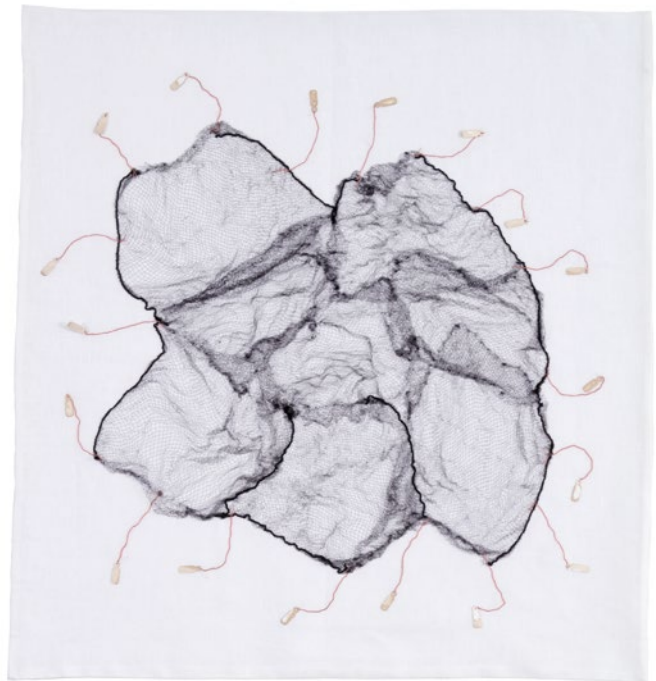
The pieces, which she crafts with extraordinary patience, are telling of her gaze—floating above all things. The self is situated in a place where the landscape overwhelms, but where the path is deconstructed. This gaze may land on a given word, the visual dimension of the



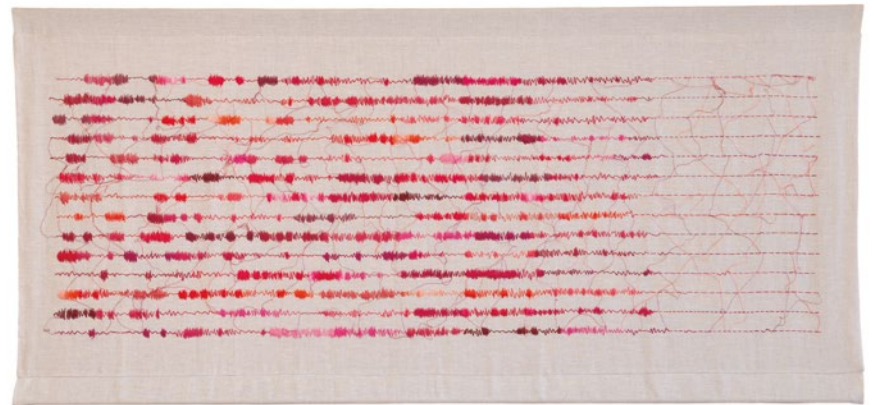
Looking at the Clouds II, 82 x 60 cm, 2020, appliqués and embroidery on linen.



Landscape with Mist, 120 x 48 cm, 2021,
Assembled fabric and embroidery on fabric.
From the *Identities* series.



Blossoming Medusa I, 67 x 153 cm, 2023, nets tags, and thread on linen.



Voice I, 73 x 153, 2020, embroidery on linen. From the *Identities* series.

sign being expressed through the texture of letters, words stitched with thread, or a stamp on a label. Perhaps one might stop to take in the way she seems to paint through embroidery, as if on an ancient piece of parchment paper, a sound graph, or an electrocardiogram, like in her series *Identities* (Identidades).

The bird's-eye view with which Patricia resignifies what is seen sometimes lands on the small things: a golden leaf that speaks to the elegance of autumn, or a dandelion whose embroidered threads come off as planetary. This is how Álvarez synthesizes notions associated with the figurative: desire, memory, time, the universal, the idea of constellations, identity, words, nostalgia . . .

This form of putting signs into aesthetic play in order to create a poetic discourse, provoke reflection, and forge atmospheres makes the work of Patricia Álvarez highly moving and undoubtedly memorable, sparking us to become aware of the time, memory, identity, and affection ensconced in the objects we use. MM