



Carlos Alarcón

# Myth Gatherers

## The Sculptures of Maribel Portela

Agustín Arteaga\*



Jesús Sánchez Uribe

◀ *Hunters and Gatherers*, 2000.

**Previous page:** *Group of Goddesses*, 2002 (ceramics and engobe technique).

Down through the history of Man, myths have been built day to day: some reflect man's traditions in terms of his daily life, others capture his aspirations, desires or fantasies. The latter create a world parallel to reality, as important or more for the fulfillment of life's cycles.

Maribel Portela is one of the few people who in her daily life consciously recognizes all rituals as a part of her, from the moment she opens her eyes until she closes them again at the end of the day.

In the same way that, in ancient times, nomads lived by hunting and gathering, today we all are gatherers

\* Mexican art critic.

and nomads. We journey endlessly within an enormous universe that, though perhaps limited physically to our immediate surroundings, because of technology, we can wander through television or surfing the Internet. Otherwise, we are gatherers of things as diverse as match boxes, photographs, dreams, or works of art and —why not?— money.

Whatever our weakness for accumulation may be, it will be reflected in our way of life, building our own rituals.

With her cheerful, intense, overflowing nature, Maribel Portela reveals to us a world she is a part of, the world of gatherers of dreams and objects. As if in an act of contrition, as a sculptress, she brings to light a never-ending series of characters who can be identified by



Carlos Alarcón

▲ *Goddess of the Heart*, detail, 167 x 48 x 43 cm, 2002 (clay and metal, engobe technique).



Carlos Alarcón



Jesús Sánchez Uribe

▲ **Right:** *Gatherer of the Future* 177 x 65 x 48 cm, and *Hunter of Glances*, 158 x 56 x 40 cm, 2001 (clay and engobe technique).

◀ *Goddess of Abundance*, 85 x 29 x 32 cm, 2002 (clay and engobe technique).

Maribel Portela  
reveals to us a world she is a part of,  
the world of gatherers of dreams and objects.

their dress or symbols with the activities of the spirit. Her beings emerge from a distant past but are immediate presences. She looks for human continuity in the primogenial, linking archaism with modernity; it is difficult to place her surprisingly simple terracotta creations in time.

Maribel's latest work shows that she has matured, or should I say become aware of what in previous stages was a magic world inhabited by an infinity of small sized characters. Then it was a mirror of the crowded contemporary metropolis, and in general, of this over-

populated world, leaving to each one the possibility of playing the role of the dramatically expressive anonymity of being part of an amorphous mass.

Today, her works have grown considerably in size, multiplying the expressiveness that the small format provides. It is not just a matter of mere monumental transference, but of magnified introspection. As her characters reach an average height similar to that of many human beings (1.60 meters), they attain the possibility of facing a reflection on an altered mirror. In them, what lies on the other side of us is re-



▲ *Landscape*, 20 cm, 2001 (gourd and wood).



Carlos Alarcón

▲ Goddess of Strength, 179 x 53 x 57 cm, 2002 (clay, seeds and engobe technique).



Jesús Sánchez Uribe

▲ Cat, 54 x 24 x 18 cm, 2001 (ceramics and clay engobe technique).



▲ Circle of Life, 60 cm, 2000 (wood).

flected, the being that is primitive, spontaneous, natural, full of symbols and myths, fears and anxieties, dreams and desires.

Maribel Portela resolves naturally the creation of Man. Technically, her pieces are impeccable, based on the premise of purity and honesty. They are what they are, clay constructions that register the gesticulation of their creation; simple, straightforward, self-sustainable, a return to the greatness of mother cultures. Ancestral echoes are captured in her pieces, reflecting sparkles of the Middle East and the West, of Mesoamerica or Mesopotamia. Before firing, she adds the oxides that make

volume another aspect of creation; paint is not added, it is integrated and indivisible, but this does not deprive it of its own impact.

Compositions that alternate line and point rhythmically shape organized textures, cadences that account for private rituals. Clay skin turns into codex skin, into map paper, into an individual, human cartography.

Maribel Portela's magical world gives us the opportunity of recovering our lost memory of the everyday, of identifying ourselves with an essential part of the chain of life, so as to recover our deprived fantasy, integrating it into the collective mystique. **MM**