

María Tello Sensing Matter

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Photos courtesy of María Tello

Untitled, 54 x 45 cm (mixed media on paper).

*It is as though [the free spirit]
has somehow opened its eyes for
the first time to see nearby things.*

Nietzsche

Barcelona is the city where María Tello's painting comes alive. She lived there in a small apartment on Mallorca Street in Ensanche after finishing her studies in philosophy. She would soon find a place in painting and sketching workshops in the Leonardo da Vinci Academy and the Barcelona Artistic Circle (1986-1991), which led to two exhibitions in the Cartoon

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Gallery, one called "Diversity of the Natural." In the works of this first period, day-to-day objects appear in their silence, surrounded by an aura and mystery, after having moved through the far-off spheres of metaphysics and philosophy, substance and the absolute: slippers, a coffee pot, a table, a lamp or a chair manifest themselves as a perpetually moving syntax. On her return to Mexico City, the surroundings have to become recognizable, as do the landscapes during her trips back and forth to the city of Tulancingo. The result of this re-vision of things was the exhibition "No Place Left."

In 1998, María prepared the exhibition "Flavored" at Casa Lamm's Pegasus Bookstore. The

In an initial sense, our feelings have no form, and this is what María Tello underlines visually with the power of the materials. These works abandon us to the uncertainty of emotion and of feeling as primary data of reality.



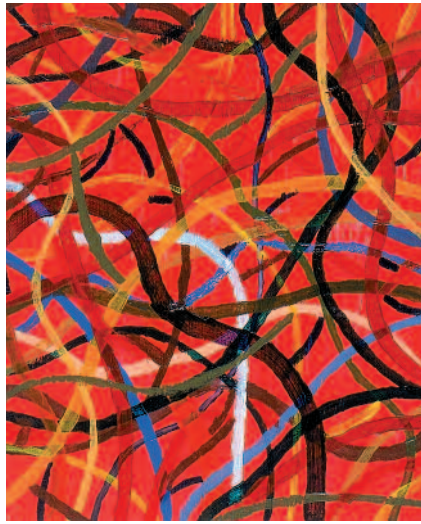
Chair, 120 x 70 cm, 2002 (acrylic on canvas).



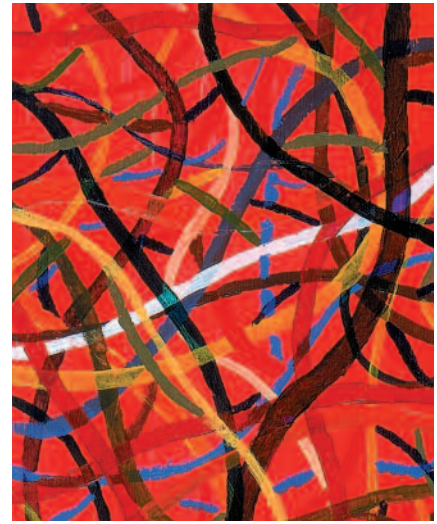
Still Life with Limes, 120 x 100 cm, 1992 (acrylic on canvas).



Crossed Roads 1, 12 x 15 cm, 2004
(mixed media on wood).



Crossed Roads 2, 12 x 15 cm, 2004
(mixed media on wood).



Crossed Roads 3, 12 x 15 cm, 2004
(mixed media on wood).

center of attention was no longer objects from her study or home, but things from the plant world: figs, pomegranates, peas, pears. The primordial tendency to present one and the same object in an ever new syntax transformed itself. The variety of intimate, day-to-day objects is reduced to a single thing. In the manner of Morandi, María would learn to see multiple, movable perspectives in a single object, for example, a pomegranate. In the 1998 collective exhibition “Nothing Like Home,” Tello makes this work perspective into an obsession. In this group of works, the constant, predominant object of study are scissors with different outlines, forms, backgrounds, tones, focuses and contours. This tendency to repeat an object will remain. In the exhibition in Xalapa, Veracruz’s Ágo-

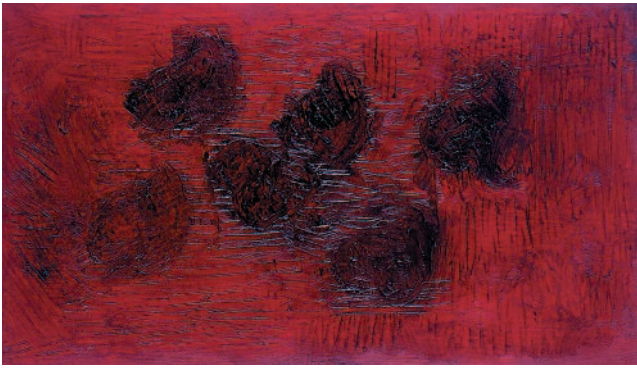
ra and Mexico City’s Café La Selva (2001), the protagonists would be chairs, but now the painter would focus on them in parts (seat and back, the angle of the back or the seat) and would present the object in a normal and inverted position alternately in a series of canvases. Amidst this new attempt, something new would happen. The object began to lose its contours and was lost in the background until it revealed a blurry entity, a human figure, that would progressively take on the character of a specter until it became just a living stain. Thus, María Tello’s painting went through a progressive process of dissolving the reference point. Tello frees her painting of references and of the syntax of ever recognizable forms. She abandons figurativeness. In the history of twentieth-century



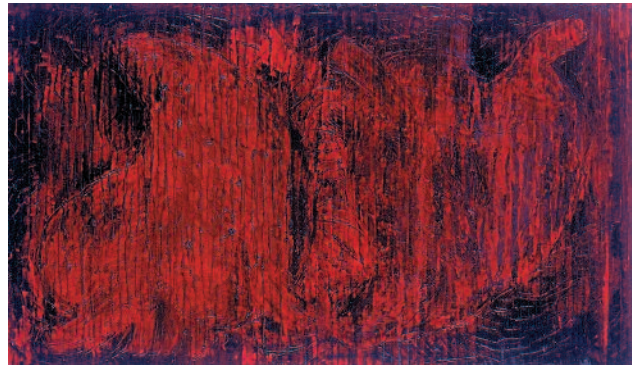
Scissors 3, 16 x 25 cm, 2001 (acrylic on paper).



Shoes, 100 x 80 cm, 2001 (acrylic on canvas).



Red Painting 1, 72 x 42 cm, 2004 (oil on wood).



Red Painting 2, 72 x 42 cm, 2004 (oil on wood).



There's No Place, 120 x 90 cm, 1997 (acrylic on canvas).

If in Tello color takes a place in each cell of her consciousness, and on the canvas, the whole of these works is a living process of becoming.



White Triptych, 90 x 60 cm, 2004 (acrylic on wood).





Quijiniuil, 60 x 15 cm, 1998 (acrylic on paper).

painting, this art was called informal (non-formal) art, abstract expressionism or gesture abstraction.

The idea is to accede to the origin of matter, of undoing form to sense matter, pure materialism. Matter itself becomes the extreme of words and things in an act of absolution of forms, of limits and of precise contours. It is as if María Tello made what Dickinson said her own: "The things to see/by Ear unheard/Unscrutinized Eye." There is a deformation that limits any vision: seeking correspondence with something that pre-exists in the world, when what happens and is taking place is pure creation. And that something is self-referential; it places itself; it is immediately there. The relationship that takes place between painting and paper through the hands in Tello's recent work (2003-2004) is of this kind. In it, we do not discover pre-existing forms to which attention has been paid one way or another. Rather, there is a forgetfulness and erasure of everything preceding it, to be able to pay attention to the world in cre-

ation. It is not that form stops existing, but rather that it is a non-identifiable form, born now of the pure feeling for matter. This should not come as a surprise; in an initial sense, our feelings have no form either, and this is what María Tello underlines visually with the power of the materials. These works abandon us to the uncertainty of emotion and of feeling as primary data of reality. Human beings, up front, see the collision of emotions and extremely powerful feelings and not a structured, connected work. "Shout out a cry of pain! A red cry!" says Clarice Lispector. This new cycle of María Tello's work begins with red.

It is not the blood that we all know flows through the human body giving life from moment to moment; it is the blood that has come out of veins and arteries. It is the world-become-blood, inundated with blood, that clots, thickens, concentrates; the red dribbles off the wood, holds onto the paper, filters through the canvas. In this context of creation in red, an unconnected, frag-



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mented heart puzzle appears. Or a series of red lines no longer than 18 centimeters long in different combinations from which red drops burst onto little white papers. Scars? Wounds?

With the pure power of color and of the material, expression is achieved.

Painting is transformed into being in the world amidst the black, the red or the nothing. The color has a meaning that comes from the language of the matter itself. The color is the language realizing itself in the act of painting, discovering itself in the moment of painting (action painting). The color knows exactly where to be; it takes its place and, on creating spaces and hollows, creates a form.

The canvas takes the place of consciousness and now the artist also shows us life in its labyrinths, with its more or less intricate knots, with roads of whites, blacks or of reds, oranges, yellows, and once in a while, de-knottings. In them, the painter tries out new points of departure and arrival. The colors become bolder, agitated; they move, as though the trajectory of life were being captured in all its turbulence, quivering like water in the flow of a river.

We could think that if in Tello color takes a place in each cell of her consciousness and on the canvas, the whole of these works is a living process of becoming. The series of palettes in blues, reds, golds or blacks tells us that color is life, that it is transfigured and turns around a vacuum that nonetheless can never be filled. Perhaps that is why the colors on the palettes come alive, become more intense. Life is forged on the palettes. And from the perspective of the artist's palette, nothing will be able to achieve a finished form.

Tello shows signs of an open becoming, never finished or formed. The artist, in this creative becoming, needs all the colors and all the shades, the blacks, reds and whites, those whites that with the help of scrapings wash out the very intense pain, the very painful past, until it turns it into shadow, specter and forgetfulness. In the series of whites, the artist completes an exercise of denuding and de-knotting until she achieves life in its silence: empty. **MM**



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