

Susana Alfaro's Tonal Painting

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It is very difficult to talk about Latin American painting without mentioning regionalism. There may be a global aesthetic that assigns attributes to the painting from each part of the world; that way we have a predetermined vision for each nation's art. But that is not Susan Alfaro's case. Her work stamps her as a citizen of the world, and not only because she is an untiring traveler.

Her painting becomes universal art because the theoretical and formal concerns underlying her images are those of contemporary painting without borders. They are paintings of Space, Time and Atmosphere. The written discourse must expand the painted work, not make its poetic. It is important to say that Alfaro's images transcend "chromatic folk art regionalism." She goes far beyond obstreperous local color, substituting it with a structure of chromatic com-

position. She turns her painting into a field of mental action, as Leonardo da Vinci said more than 500 years ago. It is not primitive or naive painting. On the contrary, it is painting of elaborate strategies of meaning.

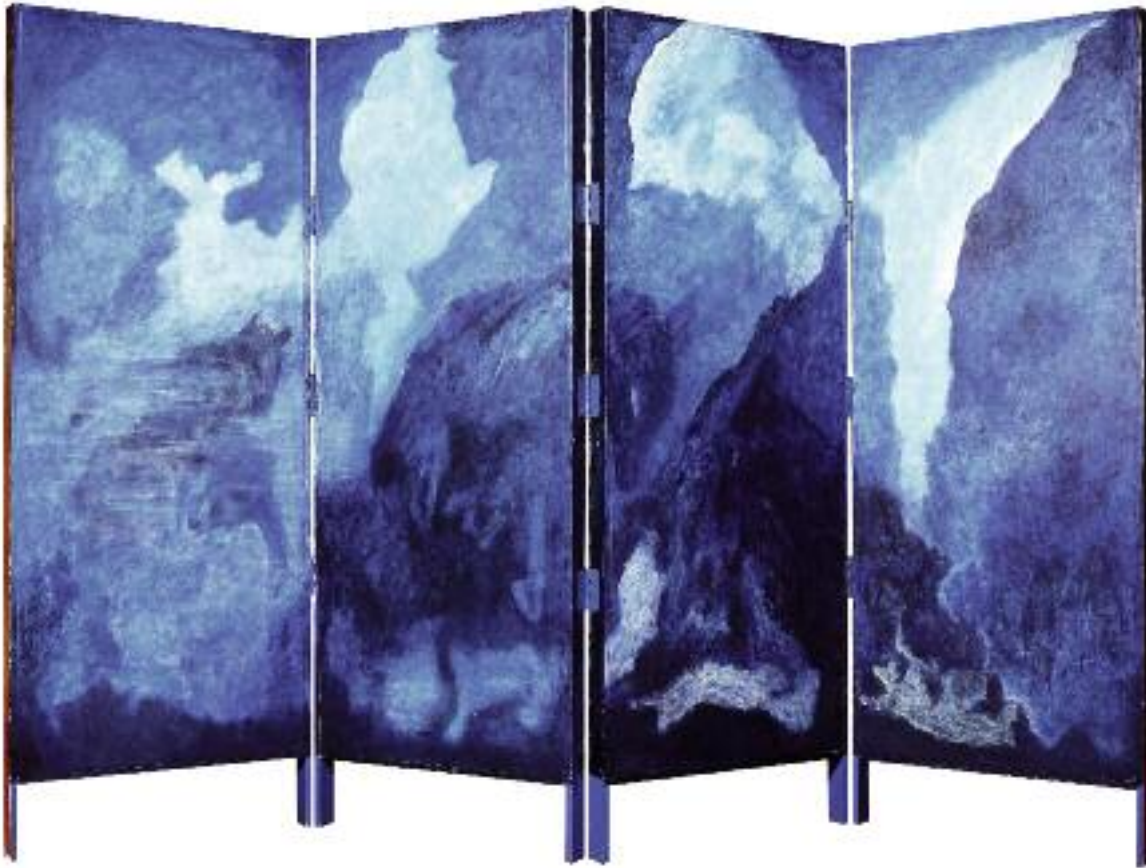
Susana has spent many years researching composition in music and the visual arts. This has been no trivial matter: her professional training in both disciplines has allowed her to develop projects that relate to the possible interpenetration of both languages. The essays and theses she has written in this field are very interesting, and we find in them the origin of the idea of tonal base as a structuring concept in her painting. Tonality and the scale are concepts common to both music and painting. Using them makes it possible to construct ambiances and atmospheres. That is why her works combine playful strategies in crafting them, but are based on a mature reflection about the structuring concept. Again, that is why they evoke spaces of vast dimensions that stretch beyond their format.

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◀ **Previous page:** *The Broken Wing*, 120 x 90 cm, 1994 (oil on canvas).

In a Garden..., 90 x 120 cm, ▶
1993-1994 (oil and tempera on canvas).



▲ *Two-Sided Folding Screen*, 180 x 240 cm, 1992-1993 (encaustic, tempera).

The painting, in this case, seems to hide the conceptual elements that structure it. This is due to the freshness with which it is created. Any painter who subjects him or herself to the rigors of art knows that atmospheric unity can only be achieved through a correct grading of tonal contrast. In her works, Susana Alfaro applies the breadth of the scales of chromatic values and hues. The painter's well-educated eye knows that it is more difficult to paint the difference in light in shadows and half-tones without resorting to the high contrasts that easily capture the viewer. This is not painting of simultaneous contrasts nor of chromatic dissonances. It is of images achieved in chromatic and tonal harmonies. On the other hand, for Alfaro,

each canvas, each surface is a "field." In it, there is a debate between a possible total abstraction or the recovery of the world through representation of object references. This is one of her internal demons.

Each of Susana's works is like an event. It implies a temporality, but not one of time as a represented theoretical figure. Painting, from mannerism to romanticism and even impressionism, captures time associated with the representation of the scene. The temporality in Alfaro's paintings is not that of a mythological scene, nor that of the real or the virtual of "cinetic art." Her concept of temporality alludes to the moment of execution: again, music and painting transmit their essences. We speak of time-execution that is expe-

▼ *The Wait*, 120 x 90 cm, 1998 (oil on canvas).





▲ *The Dream*, 115 x 175 cm, 1994 (acrylic on paper).



◀ *Music... Woman?*, 60 x 40 cm, 1988 (oil on paper).

rience, the experiential plane and reflexive action: this is what time is like in Susana's painting, more than a definition of a perennial event, which is only recovered by memory based on the painting-image. Thus, music and its execution penetrates these images, even if the influence remains distant from the viewer.

The "generation of the break" appeared in Mexican visual arts in the 1960s. It was a group of painters and sculptors whose proposal was a break with the nationalism expressed in the "nopal curtain."¹ Our artistic history and aesthetic expression paid the price of the loss of the artistic sense that brought us together as a Mexican nation in the twentieth century.

The best legacy of contemporary Mexican art breathes in Susana's sim-



▲ ...*The City When It Rains*, 12.5 x 19 cm, no date (color etching).

ple paintings, its direct descendent. Silvestre Revueltas, Carlos Blas Galindo, José Clemente Orozco, Rufino Tamayo, Alfonso Reyes, Julián Carrillo, Manuel Enríquez.

Susana's work, together with that of those who give Mexican art its visage, achieves the maxim of the great Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier: "We only reach the universal from our specificity." ■■■

NOTE

¹ The nopal is a Mexican cactus that nationalist painters, among them the muralists, adopted as a symbol, and that therefore is frequently found in their work. [Editor's Note.]



Polyphonic Reflections, 60 x 40 cm, ▶
1988 (oil on paper).

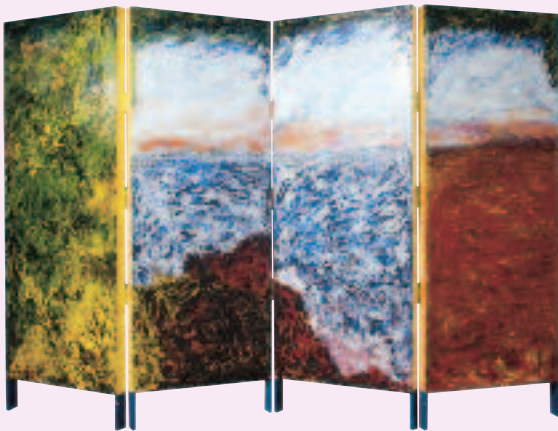
Susana in the Eyes of Other Artists

Susana Alfaro, with her vast cultural knowledge and solid technical training, continues her pilgrimage through the world of painting, a world in which she who speaks the least is the most eloquent. I feel that her route is excellent, even though external voices push her to audacity but not to her truth. She knows this and tenaciously struggles to remain alone and be able to freely pour into her painting the accumulation of dreams nesting in her heart. The road is a long one since it is very difficult to be oneself and not the reflection of nothing. Along that road will be all the anxieties possible, but also all the joys. I have faith in her vocation and hope that it will take her very far; this is one of my fondest desires.

LUIS NISHIZAWA



▲ *Female*, 100 x 80 cm, 1998 (acrylic on wood and canvas).



▲ *Two-Sided Folding Screen*, 180 x 240 cm, 1992-1993 (encaustic, tempera).



▲ *Massacre*, 80 x 110 cm, 1998 (oil on canvas).

Susana Alfaro stops time in her etched atmospheres, in her insinuated landscapes, in her delicate textures. Everything is stopped, quiet; nothing alters that apparent calm, an instant, a glorious instant, half a sigh, that moment is sufficient for Susana to perpetuate time. Now I understand the medieval alchemists a little more; she uses etching technique mysteriously and achieves her purposes: resin here, soft-ground there and her firm determination to contribute something discovering and discovering herself, showing us through her efforts what her work and her talent contribute to our rich graphic legacy. Total silence and time stopped, integrating harmoniously into art.

JESÚS MARTÍNEZ ÁLVAREZ

Texts on this page were taken from the catalogue, "Lo orgánico por sí mismo" (The Organic in and of Itself), Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Galería Luis Nishizawa, México City, 1992.



▲ *Homage to Manuel Enríquez*, 80 x 100 cm, 1999 (mixed techniques on canvas and wood).

INDIVIDUAL SHOWINGS

- 2001 "Portrait of a Composer," Homage to Manuel Enríquez, Seminar of Mexican Culture, Mexico City.
- 1998 "Painting Exhibition, Fourth Festival of Visual Arts, ENEP-Acatlán," State of Mexico.
- 1996 "Graphic Works, Homage to the Poet Jaime Sabines," Jaime Sabines House of Culture, Mexico City.
- 1996 "Gathered Images, Graphic Works," Study of Elena Martín, Madrid.
- 1994 "Painting Exhibition," Domecq Cultural Institute, Mexico City.
- 1994 "Homage to Manuel Enríquez," Rufino Tamayo Gallery, Oaxaca House of Culture, Oaxaca.
- 1992 "The Organic in and of Itself," Luis Nishizawa Gallery, National School of Visual Arts, UNAM, Mexico City.
- 1990 "Painting-Installation," Concert Hall, University of Northridge, Northridge, California, U.S.
- 1989 "Sonorous Atmospheres," La Salle University, Mexico City.
- 1988 "Color Monoprints," Domecq Cultural Institute, Mexico City.

SELECTION OF COLLECTIVE EXHIBITS

- 1999 "At Risk. 25 Visual Artists," San Ángel Cultural Center, Mexico City.
- 1998 "Art and Spirit," Oia Gallery, Santorini, Greece.
- 1998 "Nishizawa and His Students," Topete Gallery, Mexico City.
- 1997 "Century-End Images," Historic Center Festival, Mexico City.
- 1997 International Miniprint, Cadaqués, Spain.
- 1996 Second University Art Fair, University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUCA), Mexico City.
- 1996 Cadaqués International Miniprint, exhibits in Japan, England, France and Spain.
- 1994 Homage to Luis Nishizawa, Mining Palace, Mexico City.
- 1992 "Fresh Paint: Young Latin American Painters," André Malraux Gallery, Yerres, France.