



The Mystery of the Capitels, diameter of 220 cm, 2008 (graffito on cut paper). Artist's collection.

Betsabeé Romero

Black Tears

Paloma Porraz*

A key figure in contemporary Mexican and international art, Betsabeé Romero's work reflects her interest in themes like identity, human migration, the environment, history and Mexico's culture and art.

More than 30 individual shows in the United States, Spain, France, Brazil, India, Egypt and Australia have made her work transcend Mexico's borders. Her urban interventions have

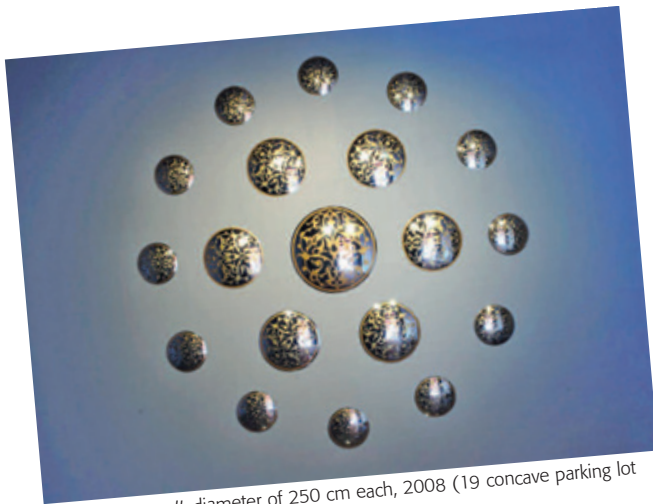
taken place in contexts that have demanded she incorporate local techniques, languages and iconographies.

Betsabeé Romero says that the recurrent use of automobiles in her work has the aim of being "part of a reflection about the contradictions of the consumer society in countries like Mexico...The automobile is a mass produced object, typical of industrialization, high technology and globalizing corporations, and is closely associated with the American way of life. Also, a discourse has been very clearly constructed in accordance with the 'other side of the car.' A car that

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Photos courtesy of Amparo Museum, Puebla.

does not move or change our socio-economic level, a car as refuge, as second home, as an extension of the body, as a space for a first sexual encounter, a space of fragility, the place of an accident and a kidnapping, the place of intimacy.” Automobiles and tires, more than themes, are the underpinnings for dealing with these thematic concerns, which unite Romero with an entire artistic current called “relational aesthetics.”

Romero has frequently intervened in tires since, as she has pointed out, when they stop being useful, they are unwanted waste; when they no longer have treads and everything has been erased from them, that is when she is interested in drawing and engraving on them the



Urban Rosettes II, diameter of 250 cm each, 2008 (19 concave parking lot mirrors with gold leaf).



White Tracks, 110 x 15 cm each, 2006 (4 engraved strips of tire treads incusted with mint gum). Artist's collection.



The House of the Track, 200 x 250 x 200 cm 2004 (engraved bricks, wood, corrugated sheets of metal and engraved tire). Artist's collection.

A house made of bricks
With traces of that family that runs,
That runs away dangerously,
That has been run over many times.

BETSABEÉ ROMERO
From "The House of the Track"
(fragment)

architectural and cultural memory they have left along the way. They are also the prototype of velocity and power, although, in her work, to the contrary, they are an archaeological symbol of memory.

“Betsabeé Romero. Black Tears” exhibit curator Julián Zugazagoitia says that for artists of Romero’s generation, “moving around and contact with other artists and cultures, far from having created an ‘international style’ of art, have fostered a search for their own roots, dealing with the global based on a personal perspective that has come to be called ‘glocal.’”

The exhibition, currently on display at the Old San Ildefonso College, organized originally by Puebla’s Amparo Museum, presents more than 80 works: installations, sculptures, photographs, videos, scale models and documentation of her main projects produced between 1997 and 2009.

This retrospective covers more than 10 years of artistic creation, with emblematic pieces. Outstanding among them is *Maguey-Fiber Car* (1997), which was a turning point in her artistic production since for the first time she worked in collaboration with a community: the Libertad Neighborhood of Tijuana. She transformed a 1955 Victoria Ford, covering it in fabric made from maguey fiber, painting it in oils with nineteenth-century Marian motifs and filling it with 10,000 dry roses. Based on Mexican images and craft techniques, *Maguey-Fiber Car* was exhibited in the "InSite 97" project on the border between Mexico and the United States. In Zugazagoitia's words, "This work expresses the lines of exploration followed by this artist: the cultural contexts; the ephemeral nature of the artistic event; art as a deliberate urban intervention, with the participation of the community; and her concern for documenting her own processes of artistic production."

Another representative work is *Sugar Skin* (2004), presented in the Puerto Rico Triennial, and made of sugar



Skin of a House, from the Accident and Miracle Painting Series, 105 x 130 cm, 2001 (oil on a car hood). Artist's collection.

A car buried
as if fallen from the other side
rejected
Stuck next to the fence
on the edge of
the "OTHER SIDE."

BETSABEÉ ROMERO
From "In the Avate Car"
(fragment)



Exodus I, 125 x 220 cm, 2007 (photograph). Artist's collection.



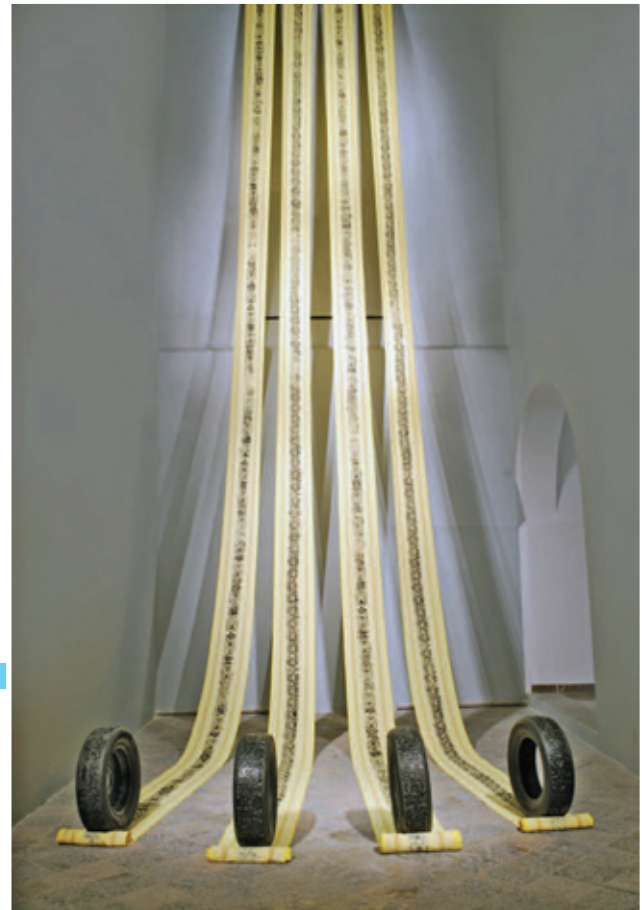
Border Line, 125 x 220 cm, 1997
(photograph). Artist's collection.

and tires covered with iconographies in graffiti referring to the Taina culture from the pre-Hispanic Caribbean.

To adapt it to San Ildefonso, Romero managed to integrate into the exhibition a new work inspired in architectural motifs from the surrounding area of the Historic Center of Mexico City, and a frieze on one of the museum's cornices. These motifs were carved in a tire and printed like a track along the way the visitor will walk so as to not miss any work in the show, creating a unique piece printed on the hallways themselves and that now coexists with other pieces.

In her installation *Hanging from a Thread*, Betsabée produced 10 anemones of light based on glyphs and figures from the Templo Mayor, transforming the space into a sublime environment. The artist takes us step by step through her reflections; her thoughts emerge like a revelation in a discourse that makes us change our way of looking at things.

Using cut paper, a fragile and at the same time resistant material, she builds a print of time, interlacing Mu-déjar, colonial, pre-Hispanic and Gothic motifs like in a stained glass window.



Cities that Leave, various sizes, 2004 (4 engraved tires and prints on cloth). Artist's collection.

In this visual encounter, the elements incorporated into the work retain the identity of each inspiration, each culture, at the same time creating harmony among them. Betsabeé achieves an inclusive conjunction in her work. It is a symphony of light and shadows whose reflections on the walls and floors captivate us.

Like many of the great Mexican artists who have gone before her, given the influence of foreign cultures, Betsabeé has managed not only to drink from her own, but also to pick essential elements of others to create a new form of art: encouraging, unifying and representative of the new Mexican culture.

Betsabeé's work gives us the opportunity of reviewing details of our history in the present, in the same way that the past and the contemporary constantly co-exist in the San Ildefonso Museum. **MM**



You and I, 120 x 110 x 100 cm, 2006
(upholstered vw driver's seats). Artist's collection.

Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso
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www.sanildefonso.org.mx
Open until January 24, 2010.



Urban Mosque, various sizes, 2007 (halves of used, engraved bus tires, incrustated with gold leaf). Artist's collection.