

# Shoring for the Soul of Paloma Torres

Luis Ignacio Sáinz\*

The torments of the intellect contain a decency that only  
with great difficulty could we find in those of the heart.

Skepticism is the elegance of anxiety.

E. M. Cioran

*Syllogismes de l'amertume*<sup>1</sup>



*Totem Pole*, 375 x 100 cm, 2010 (Zacatecas clay with clay slip).



*Constellation*, ca. 2006 (concrete and steel plate).  
Private collection in Merida.



*Building the Rain*, 350 x 520 x 280 cm, 2012 (bronze and brass mesh).

**P**aloma Torres, all-embracing and expansive, finds her sensitive rationality in her practices and births, and renounces affectation, always emphasizing dual movement in her pieces: from outside to inside, the covering skin, and from inside out, the structure or soul. When doing this, she reconciles in a single mass the basic elements: bones, centering, chassis, remains, canvas stretchers, supports, skeletons, and armatures. With that, she imbues the volumes with originality, meaning, giving the final result transparency and solidity: the re-signification of the material, which articulates the analysis of the

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\* Essayist specialized in social and artistic themes; [sainzchavez@gmail.com](mailto:sainzchavez@gmail.com).  
Photos courtesy of Paloma Torres.

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is an utilitarian piece that  
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space and ingredients utilized, her thinking, and, finally, its assembly. Thus, the strategic resides in the movement that ends by illuminating objects-scenarios-markers. The accent, then, resides in thinking and postulating the conditions of possibility of a personalized space, of grasping the context, of making the landscape subjective. In short, in recovering physis (φύσις) in the second degree: natural elements and natural techniques and techniques of Nature that meld, overlap, mutate, with technological factors and mechanisms, inviting their expressive peculiarities precisely in the renovation of constructive traditions without their historic and geo-cultural origins counting at all.

A composite logic that also disdains the dimensions of the works, or —even better— concentrates on the public formats, conceiving the smaller scales to be mock-ups and drafts: pre-formative exercises. This way of perceiving what is real in all its diversity includes her original partiality for painting, little revisited today, and her absolute devotion to print-making. Although these are miniature engravings, their inspiration is colossal, demanding breadth, profundity, and that *je-ne-sais-quoi* capable of giving them a categorical, rounded air, that flees from questions and seduces us, with the label of wishes fulfilled, with their concrete notion of enjoyment and pleasures. An Apollonian ferocity that gives itself over without reservation to the temptations of freehand drawing.

The artist's discourse robes itself in the intelligence demanded by its very enunciation. She takes it on without sentimentalism, as Cioran, the visionary who lambastes the extremes of being, the distance of the mind, the invasion of emotion, says: the distance of the mind, the invasion of emotion. Her material, formal propositions are located at this mid-point; this is the root of her preoccupation with social use, the softness of her insertion into the urban, the resistance to artifice. Suffice it to remember *Building the Rain* (2015, Canary Wharf, London, made for the Mexico-United Kingdom Dual Year), an almost transparent volume of 3m x 5m weighing 3 tons. In the words of its creator, "It is a utilitarian piece that joins nature and the city. I place a cloud made of bronze wire mesh held up by scaffolding so people can sit in it and inhabit the surroundings. It's not just object for exhibition; rather, I thought it



*Totem Pole with Landscape*, 226 x 77 x 49 cm, 2004  
(Zacatecas clay with clay slip), De Young Museum.



*Chalchihuites Trellis*, 300 x 2100 x 30 cm, 2012, Tlatelolco Cultural Center (INAH).

**Without prejudices, she is seduced by the physical and/or symbolic circumstance where her vicarious realities exist: the false trellis *Chalchihuites* reminds us of the surviving mystery of the pre-Hispanic world.**

should be something that people could use.”<sup>2</sup> After six months of intense work, Machiavelli’s aphorism was fulfilled: “Fortune offers the opportunity, but only virtue affords the possibility of seizing it.”

To this common stock belong the three pieces in bronze and wire mesh used in the installation *Goyas*, floating in a cube of light-staircase in a building dating from New Spain in Mexico City’s Historic Center —this building houses the Program of University Studies of the City, located at Moneda Street at the corner of Seminario, previously called Arzobispado, and San Sebastián), where the splendor of the Mexica erected the pyramid of Tezcatlipoca, whose basement can be seen through an archaeological window, supplying the last virtual support for the levitating tubular beads, transparent deliriums armed with something more than patience: beauty.

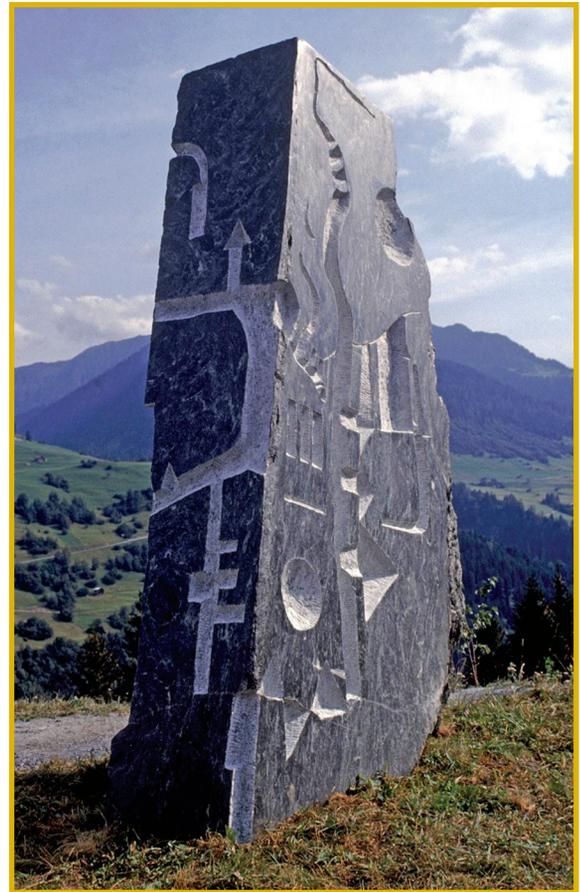
So, since hers is a grammar in waiting and a quest for dialogue with everyday subjects, we can understand her close links to architecture, understood as a spatial preserve for human needs: lodging, transit, comfort, work, service. An even-keeled coexistence with drawing boards and blueprints, models and sketches, surveys, and construction site supervision; cohabitation with project developers, bricklayers, and endless numbers of like professionals: plumbers, electricians, ironmongers, carpenters, tile setters,

plasterers, and painters. The popular saying, “Like father, like daughter,” is true. Our maker of fantastic universes is a worthy heir to architect Ramón Torres,<sup>3</sup> a beacon for the best of our architectural heritage built in the second half of the twentieth century. Paloma Torres is a maker *in extremis* of her own undertakings, flights of the imagination that demand her presence in completing the tasks and hustle and bustle of her atelier. A martyr to the sound judgment of the ancients: knowing how to do things. And for that reason she fulfills the saying, “God helps those who help themselves.”

Without prejudices, she is seduced by the physical and/or symbolic circumstance where her vicarious realities exist: the false trellis *Chalchihuites* (2012, Tlatelolco Archaeological Site, Mexico City), its 3 x 21 meters leaning against a wall without capillarity, reminds us of the surviving mystery of the pre-Hispanic world, a threshold that prepares us for unique visibility from any angle of the Plaza of Three Cultures, which brings together the dazzling spoils of the rival-mirror city of Tenochtitlan; the former monastery of Santiago Tlatelolco built on the vestiges of the College of the Sacred Cross, the continent’s first Hispanic academic institution, home to Sahagún’s sources and the site where the *Huehuetlatolli* were compiled; the old Foreign Ministry building, a project by Rafael Mijares coordinated by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez in 1966; and the homage to Le



*Goyas*,<sup>5</sup> approximately 3 m long each, 2010 (bronze and mesh), UNAM Today Museum.



*The Stone*, 220 x 60 x 110 cm, 1991 (marble), monument commemorating The 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Old Swiss Confederacy, Cumbel, Switzerland.



▲ *Bench*, 2013 (marble), Tecorrales House, Valle de Bravo.

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nature is not an object to be represented,  
but to be created from consciousness.**



▲ *Installation of Columns*, 5 pieces of different dimensions, 2003 (Zacatecas clay with clay slip), Legoretta apartment.

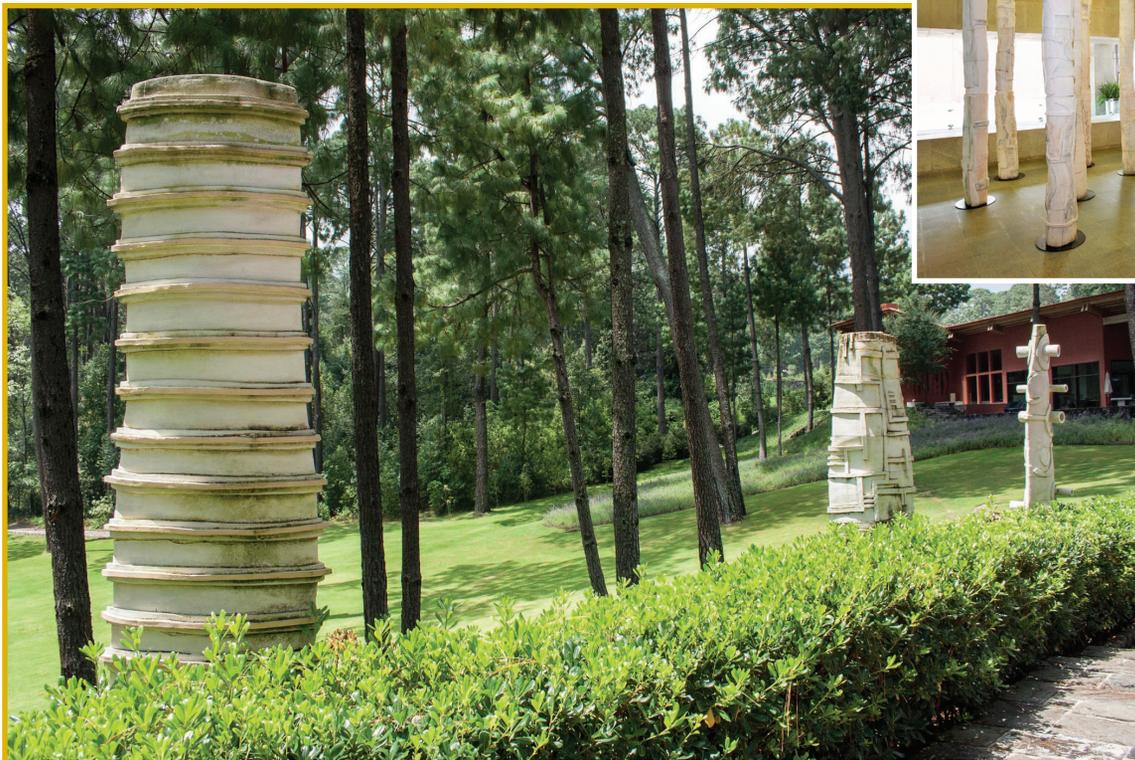
Corbusier, named the Nonoalco Tlatelolco Housing Project, designed by Mario Pani Darqui and Luis Ramos Cunningham in 1964. The green semi-precious stone (*chalcihuitl*) metamorphosed in greyish carbon steel, combined in different sizes in one of its most commonly used forms, that of a disk indicating the high social rank of anyone wearing it as a necklace or pendant and that the ancient Mexicans used as an offering to the gods. Voluptuousness of origin, atavistic beauty.

The amalgam of her three-dimensional compositions included in buildings achieves a notable level of sophistication with her feat in bronze in the form of 4.22 m x 15 m doors, *The Forest Transformed*, flanking and resolving—in more ways than one—the façade of the Elena Garro Cultural Center (2012, La Concepción neighborhood, Coyoacán Borough, Mexico City; a project by Fernanda Canales, and an architectural whim that devours what was a magnificent nineteenth-century Porfirian country villa, including its loggia or *stoa*, *στοά*). The transition from nature to urban scene is ciphered in how trees, once cut down, become raw materials, lumber, arranged in boxes so concrete can be poured, fashioned into shoring, and recycled to act as fused walls, which are camouflaged accesses. Flayed foliage, beautiful notices of destruction and greed.

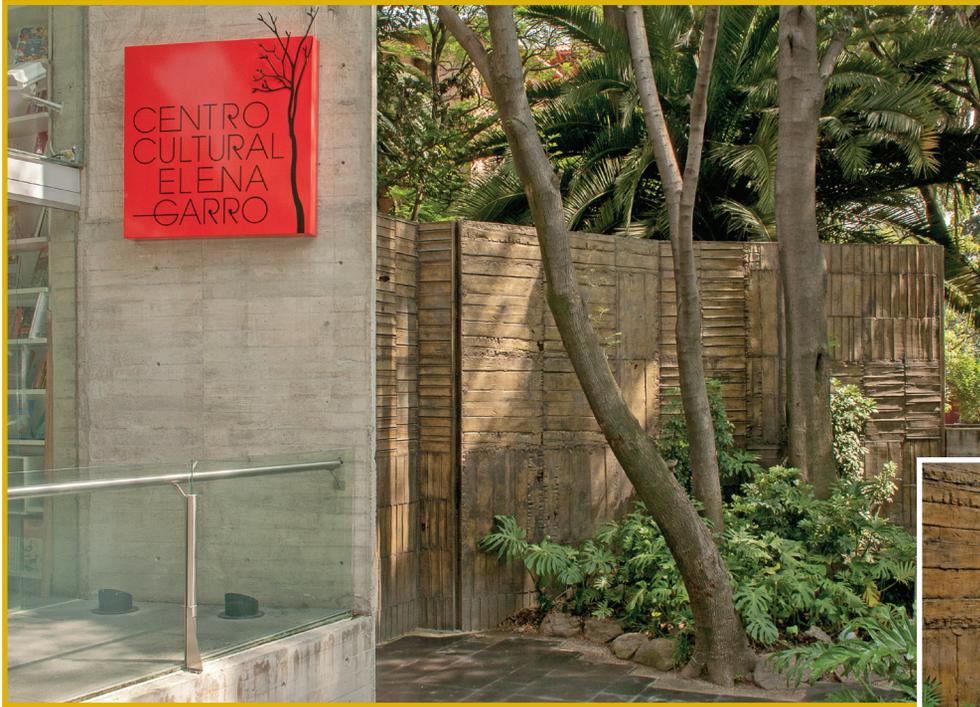
For the artist as demiurge (Δημιουργός: “he who works for the public”), the ordering principle of pre-existing elements, nature is not an object to be represented, but to be created from consciousness. It summarizes the sensual experience of perception, from a reflexive glance that gives it meaning, that turns the creative subject into someone able to order formless matter and chaos. In this sense, outstanding among her works is the monolith *The Stone* (1991; Cumbel, Switzerland), which won the contest celebrating the 700-year anniversary of the foundation of the Old Swiss Confederacy.<sup>4</sup> The piece is a huge chunk of marble (220 cm x 60 cm x 110 cm) marked with a route or map, in homage of those forerunners of calligraphy called runes, like those used in the Rök Runestone (Sweden). This luminous, temporally displaced menhir, lost outside its Megalithic era, anchored at the foot of the highway, is perfectly at home in these dense pine forests mottled with edelweiss (the snow flower), adjusting purely and smoothly to the mountainous scenery.

This kind of work is akin to columns or totem poles made of fired clay, which enjoy a structural soul and pay tribute to our Mesoamerican stelae, which act as markers and signs. With the passing decades, these dead living-being forms erect themselves into authentic legions of migrants, trapped in a happy Diaspora, entities disseminated in miscellanea of nations planted in various continents. From being *gardened*, like in the Tecorrales House in Valle de Bravo, to pieces in universities like Georgetown University’s Doha, Qatar campus; or San Francisco’s De Young Museum; the Gunpowder Park in

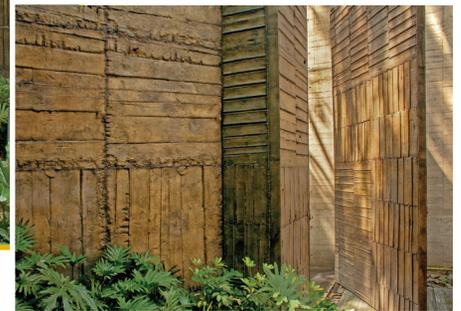
*Installation of Columns, 12 pieces of different dimensions, vestibule of Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Relations. ▶*



*Columns, 2012, Tecorrales House, Valle de Bravo.*



*Forest Transformed*, 422 x 150 cm, 2012 (bronze), doors of the Elena Garro Cultural Center.



**The transition from nature to urban scene is ciphered in how trees, once cut down, become raw materials, lumber, arranged in boxes so concrete that can be poured.**

Villahermosa, Tabasco; and temporarily on display in venues in Africa and the Middle East. Paloma Torres's visual art army is shining and advancing, fortunately for us. Those shorings for the soul... **NMM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Cioran, *Sylogismes de l'amertume* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> This work was part of the collective show "Contemporary Mexican Sculpture," erected in public spaces in Great Britain's capital, along with pieces by Yvonne Domenge, Rivelino, and Jorge Yázpik. An initiative organized by the Art4 association and made of stone, bronze, and resin, it will also be part of the 2016 Mexico-Germany Dual Year.

<sup>3</sup> Ramón Torres Martínez (1924-2008) represented the pinnacle of rationalism in Mexico. He partnered with Héctor Velázquez Moreno and was our country's most serious interpreter of Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, also creating his own brilliant, unmistakable style. He has also been connected with Mexico's best project developers: José Villagrán, Mario Pani, Enrique del Moral, and Augusto H. Álvarez. In 1950 as a very young man, Torres Martínez participated in developing University City as chief project developer for the School of Medicine, adorned with a mural by Francisco Eppens Helguera. He was a professor at the UNAM School of Architecture beginning in 1952 and its director from 1965 to 1973.

<sup>4</sup> In early August 1291, three forest cantons (Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden) forged a *Bundesbrief*, or Federal Pact, to safeguard peace along their mountain trade routes. Little by little, this initial alliance would include urban communities like Lucerne, Zurich, and Bern, in the sphere of the Holy Roman Empire. This was a political convention or founding myth.

<sup>5</sup> The title of this work refers to the UNAM cheer: "Goya!"