

The Permanent Ephemeral in the Art of María Eugenia de la Garza

Gina Bechelany Fajer*



◀ *Some Memories Are Left Up in the Air*, 90 cm, 2008 (digital print on encapsulated clear film, nylon thread, and box of light).

At first glance, it is no easy matter to draw a line connecting María Eugenia de la Garza's different artistic proposals. This Mexico-City-born visual artist is the creator of a body of work as extensive as it is original, including photography, interventions, performance, corporal, and even mental art. However, there is a —not always visible— thread running through it all, linking up her artistic production; that thread, or the fine weaving called “memory,” is her central axis.

Seeking the origins of María Eugenia de la Garza's art necessarily returns you to the self, an interior space peopled with experiences, yearnings, absences, and presences, celebrating what is no longer here; sometimes festive-

*Editor; gbechelany@gmail.com.

ly, sometimes in a disquieting way. Her art is an inseparable part of an internal process that is pushed out into the light by memory and finds expression in different supports, such as video, photography, installation, or a happening. The artist herself is a field for exploration; that is why it is irrelevant whether her work is ephemeral or permanent, instantaneous or an entire process, because this is not simply bringing into the present memories from the past, but rather re-signifying the experiences to transform them into new experiences.

WHAT OR WHOM IS THE ARTIST LOOKING AT?

María Eugenia de la Garza's subject matter ranges from a new encounter with her daily surroundings to daydreams of remote places: from different times and facets of her own person to unknown, anonymous characters; from pleasant memories to distressing absences; from incontrovertible facts to philosophical musings. In this process of exploration and transformation of the object, we have to say that De la Garza turns everything she "touches" into art. The following are good examples:

Raúl and I (2003-2004) is a prolonged performance piece. For a year, the artist played, developed as, was at one with, and merged with Raúl, reviving him, based on the intervention into several objects, including her own body. De la Garza managed to give life to the absent father, non-existent not only in reality but also in her memory:

Facing the fact that I didn't know what had happened to Raúl, my father, upset me again when I became a mother. When I looked at a photograph in my album again, I decided to do something with that loss. . . . As a little girl, I used to imagine that I ran across Raúl casually, in the street, in a car, or in a crowd. One day I discovered that I could find him. I used my own body as subject and object of my photographs, through mimesis. That's how I was able to take him to the cemetery, to church, to the countryside, to the garden, to the stadium, to have a cup of coffee, and to get to know his tastes, his moods. That meant I could have him close to me.

This experience gave rise to a series of photographs that the artist later used to make a book, in which the ephemeral was recorded on paper.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zove7offltw>



▲ *The Skin of Memory*, 2007 (video installation and performance).

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▲ *Fragmentation 01*, 38 x 32 cm, 2011 (print on self-adhesive vinyl).

Female Episode (2006) is the record of an action the artist took after seeing her mother come out of the operating room. In this sequence of videos, De la Garza plays the leading role in the symbolic mutilation and reconstruction of a breast, which concludes with a rain of milk over her body. The artistic action is not a mere reaction to a painful experience; it is a reason to use art to delve into issues like feminine identity, illness, and the primordial maternal link: the milk that comes

from breasts, the milk that nourishes, but also the milk that protects and comforts.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8KQQyo_nlg

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The Skin of Memory (2007) is made up of several forms of art: sculpture, video-installation, acrylics, and performance. The origin of this piece is a self-referenced experience, an episode forgotten by the artist. It was only the memory of others that made it possible to reconstruct this experience, not merely by recounting the facts, but as a way of submerging herself in her own identity. She says of her artistic experience:

My body open to other names and other secrets. With this video-performance-installation I want to talk about the relationship



▲ *Feminine Episode*, 2006 (videograms).

between the public and the private, the representation of art as therapy, and the representation of an identity that is configured as plurality, as reconstruction of the self in the experience of the other. My memory is resolved in my flesh through an aesthetic experience, to which I add the pleasure of discovering myself as myself, using photographs of the hands of 20 women who told me their experiences when they were caring for me in the hospital.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi1awqzhDcw>

Stringing Things Together (2008). But the object of María Eugenia’s work is not always the same self. Her art sometimes also extends to the re-signification of the experiences of others. In this case, it is the experience of 17 senior citizens who shared their memories; an intervention project that took place in Mexico City’s Nonoalco-Tlatelolco Housing Project. According to De la Garza, it is “an analysis that reflects on the day-to-day experiences and loneliness of seniors living in a common space, such as the housing project. It is an intervention delving into the individual situation of older people in the emotional sense, as social individuals.” This project throws into relief the play between individual and collective memory, between public space and the individuality of each of the inhabitants. After filming the seniors’ accounts, the artist produced a monumental video-projection on the façade of the housing project’s buildings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxYpWbqmwv>

Fragmentation (2011). The protagonists in *Stringing Things Together* not only shared their memories through words, but they also opened their photo albums to the artist, who intervened into them, deconstructing and reconstructing them, “with the intention of reconfiguring a memory, a moment,” to give movement to an encapsulated instant, to make the ephemeral permanent in the memory.

Despite being self-referenced art, María Eugenia de la Garza’s pieces abandon their epicenter to spread out to other territories, to the territory of anyone who is seeking to re-signify what has been experienced or not experienced, what has been lost or what has been recovered. Is the work of this artist perhaps a re-signification of forgetfulness or a resurgence of memory? **MM**



▲ *Stringing Things Together*, 2008 (intervention in a specific site: Tlatelolco).

The object of María Eugenia’s work is not always the same self. Her art sometimes also extends to the re-signification of the experiences of others.



▲ *Fragmentation 2*, 38 x 32 cm, 2011 (print on self-adhesive vinyl).