

WEAVE AND MEMORY

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Weave of life, this is the most comprehensive and meaningful symbol that has been given, since the most remote antiquity, to the art of knitting. In following its steps and tracing the versatility of its techniques, the skill and ability that flows from its interweaving and the magic of the colors used by each culture, it is possible to notice how it has been, along the course of time and transcending local contexts, a feeding back factor among cultures.

Symbolically, the art of working with textiles is strongly bound to the creation, to the birth, and to the binding of acts and to the opening and closing of individual, cosmic and historical cycles. Mythology narrates that the 'Moiras', spinners and lunar divinities, controlled each person's life by means of a thread: the first one spinning, the second one winding and the third one cutting the thread at the end of existence. It is also said that in other cultures, the spinner, at the moment of cutting the final thread, pronounces the blessing formula that the midwife says when she cuts the umbilical cord of the new born. Remember that the moon knits destinies, the same way as the spider knits her web, is the image of the forces that knit our future. On the other hand, the relationship 'warp and weft', as vertical and horizontal, are identified with elements of feminine and masculine.

As time goes by, and as it happens when the artistic disciplines are being fortified, the textile work has suffered important transformations. The most important is the separation from the magic interpretation, as it had in the pre-Columbian cultures, to fill a space as an artistic object. Nonetheless, this route has not been an easy one because many simplistic and stereotyped criteria relate work with textiles only with handcrafting (mainly indigenous) and with the feminine role (in its pejorative meaning) and this myth has been hard to break.

In the frame of the Latin American context, any approach to the problem of cultural identity and to the development of art should consider the presence of textiles as one of the unavoidable referents.

Going back a little into history, it is valid to keep in mind that Inge Dusi, Italian-Chilean artist, brought this technique into Costa Rica when she was invited by the painter Cesar Valverde. Mrs Dusi worked mainly with batik trying to diversify the curriculum in the School of Fine Arts of the University of Costa Rica. This event took place at the same time when the Department ruled by Cecilia Fonseca was trying to introduce some other 'skills' as ceramics, near the end of the fifties.

Ma. Luisa Raby and Carlos Moya are mentioned among the disciples of Mrs Dusi. Mr Carlos Moya continued with the courses on textiles that she left. Similar techniques were taught by Ivette Guier and Elizabeth Thompson.

In 1984 Paulina Ortiz joined this process after having graduated from the California College of Arts and Crafts. Along with Mr Carlos Moya, she tried to create a career. As it always happens with any project that breaks up schemes and traditional options, the result of creating a new career was not the expected, even though around 1985 they had some courses and tutors.

By a coincidence of destiny, this was a time when some other new disciplines that had been imparted in the School of Fine Arts of the University, were also suppressed as the glass technician (Jean Cristophe Bourg) and goldsmith (Herbert Birkner) among others. Despite this, the textile work did not stop, but its development was curtailed and the so long awaited career could not be consolidated in the University of Costa Rica. It is important to note that despite the situation, Herbert Bolaños, from the National University, came back to Costa Rica with a Masters Degree in textile design that he obtained in Japan. At the present time he could not yet validate that Degree but it has given him the chance to impart some courses and it also explains the fact that the National University still has some looms.

Paulina Ortiz has not resigned in her passion for textile art. In the past, one of the most important pioneers in the struggle for the consolidation of this technique and now, one of the most prestigious representatives of the ancient technique.

As in a cyclic movement, she turns her view towards that ancestral daily work of our pre Columbian cultures. In her creative imagination and with the help of her hands as an instrument, knotting and entwining textiles, she goes back to our indigenous roots.

The material she most consistently uses is RAMIO and CABUYA, adding acrylic paint as well as golden dust; this last element is closely related to the pre Columbian cultures. The fibers of Paulina's artistic work are knotted and twisted. They do not look pleased but impatient and vibrating. Because of their constant movement, it seems that the artist has to knot them in a forced attempt to avoid them to be 'liberated' and may run into the space in which they should remain. The range of colors is very wide. Nevertheless, when she gets close to the remembrance of the indigenous past the colors are daring and strong. Among the most recent of these works, the figure of the circle is timidly appearing indicating a more calmed attitude, searching more harmony with the Universe.

The important thing of this significant artistic act of Paulina Ortiz is that, by remaking and giving impulse to the rebirth of all the symbols related to the weave of life, the ritual becomes source of inspiration. In this way, the actualization and the re elaboration of that past, from the perspective of today, is easily inserted into the vanguard techniques and inside the new alternatives of the visual arts.