

PROFILE

By Alejo Ponce de León

Although not as romantic as the members of the volcano School (an improbable group of painters who settled in Hawaii during the XIXth Century with the purpose of portraying some exciting volcanic eruptions), Mariana Sissia's drawings ascribe to certain tradition that extracts dramatic potential out of mineral. Outstanding technical skills applied to excavations, cracks and faults, equals her output to studio graphics produced by certain scientific disciplines as stratigraphy or topography. And though the artist has stubbornly decided to set tramps and detours within her landscapes, the possibility of containing graphic information make her drawings as fiable as any satellite image.

After taking a university course on painting at Rosario, a traumatic period in Sissia's life overcame when she had to adapt to Buenos Aires way of living. This gave as result a series of works entitled *Self-Defense Systems*, with which she burst into Buenos Aires art scene in 2009. This group of graphite drawings plenty of details showed isolated plots of land, incalculable deep holes, cordoned off excavations sites; islets of ground transversally cut that revealed subterranean tubes. It was, in sum, a collection of incisions on the landscape's surface, done with the purpose of avoiding any threatening element against emotional comfort. Works seemed to be distant and unexpressive, in tune with the harshness of her technique and its laconic, slightly sarcastic, slang used to name the different positions of her defense systems.

However, a zone of intimacy and weakness becomes evident after the appearance of certain symbolic load elements, which cannot find their appropriateness within apparently desolated spots. Slides traveling across scarps and flowing into holes; a useless seesaw that is not able to work naturally because of an obstructing mound of soil; Sissia processes earth extension so as to turn them into a playroom for a passive-aggressive spirit. They are sterile views, but altered in such way that a sort of resentment and distrust tings them. The effectiveness of these traps is yet to be proved, regarding the fact that neither human being, nor animal appears prowling around them. Maybe they fall out of use during peaceful times and were not needed anymore. The central piece of the series, *Trench*, is more than 4 meters long and depicts, almost as a facsimiled copy, a rocky spot in the face of which is impossible not to

dwell upon for a couple of minutes. *Trench* condenses the long reach of Sissia's work and at the same time it magnifies it to a vertiginous limit. For the artist it ended up being a kind of revelation: finding herself in front of such a detail worked piece, she started to pay attention to those small features that were part of her drawings and decided to test them in order to capitalize their aesthetic value. Thus, she focused in those fragments and there she carved abstraction. Turning landscape upside down or zooming up on some small elements, she shapes a world of almost fractal geometric geology. This tendency consolidated during 2011, when she was elected to be a part of the Artists Program at Di Tella University and her work grew as it was exposed to debate and discussion in critic sessions at the University. Drawings were slowly separated from their illustrative aspect and acquired a more expressive nerve. During this time, she frequently heard Nick Cave's album *Five leaves left*, to its rudimentary made tracks, faintly arranged and with displaced sound, that became an interesting counterpoint to the precision and density of her drawings. During this dead time in between goals, she ventured into video art and produced a piece entitled *Excavation 1: introspective monument*. There, two diggers in a small field under a grey sky, working the ground inside a space carefully demarcated with a tape measure that outlines the word "Yo" ("I"). Although the video is over before the process is finished, the work is projected alongside a picture of the excavation once it came to an end. By this, Sissia lines up in a direct manner both to the Land Art movement –maybe with Michael Heizer as its main referent– and process and performative art that bring her work close to Francis Alys.

More recently, committed to the physical act of drawing, she undertakes formal experiments where she tries a range of procedures, recurring to a radical twist regarding the way the graphite is pressed on the paper, changing the speed of traces and the angle of her graphic tools. The method prevails over the concepts and previously stipulated plans. The results of this twist are abstractions and games that the artist somehow links to surrealism. By expelling a sharp mobility within the most chromatic areas, what was solid ground starts to dematerialize; it turns so vague that it is sublimated. Variations of a weird version of technical expressionism.

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In the brief text that came along with *River of three routes*, the show that Sissia shared with Nicolás Sarmiento in 2010, Eduardo Stupía stands that her work is liberated “from all business or anecdote beyond those implied in the gaps of her action in praxis”. It is reasonable to think that this self-sufficient mark will be able to still provide material to ambitious plastic projects in the future. At the same time, it would be desirable that the artist can take her skillfully range of procedures to superiorly articulated forms of expression, transparent and forever comfortable, or so complex so as to fuel the substance of bewilderment.

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