



The Wandering Flight
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Ruiz-Healy Art
San Antonio, TX

The Wandering Migration
by Sarah Fisch

It's no wonder that the title of this FOTOSEPTIEMBRE USA exhibition at Ruiz-Healy Art is *Cecilia Paredes: The Wandering Flight*. In the past three years alone, this artist has exhibited her work at the Havana Biennale in Cuba; in the Pingyao International Festival of Photography in Shanxi, China, where she won the award for artistic excellence; in the Samara Museum of Art in St. Petersburg, and the Moscow Museum of Modern Art; at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Madrid; in the Galeria Isabel Aninat in Santiago, Chile; the Peruvian Embassy in Washington, D.C.; and in Tanger, Morocco, as part of the Instituto Cervantes.

Paredes doesn't just span oceans and continents with her work. Peruvian-born and now living in Philadelphia, she has led a peripatetic life. After her time at the Catholic University Art School in Lima, she moved on to study at the Cambridge Arts and Crafts School in England and at the Scuola del Nudo in Rome, and has spent much of her adult life moving from place to place. "My former husband, he was a United Nations officer, and that's what you do," she says simply.

She did manage to stay and live in Costa Rica for 24 years, and represented the country in the Venice Biennale of 2005. But, as she wryly points out, "the national flower of Costa Rica, it is an orchid. So it has aerial roots."

What theme could be more liberating than flight? ...Or, in Paredes' case, more tinged with melancholy?

"This series has to do with relocation," she says, "Because I would arrive somewhere, and then I would have to leave. This was very much the story of my life. You would try to blend in to the landscape, and make of yourself this background."

Her attempts to blend into the background informed *Landscapes*, a celebrated series of photographs in which she used paint and fabric to camouflage her body against gorgeously-rendered, highly stylized wallpaper backdrops. Elegant, clever, and chic, images from this collection became a worldwide viral phenomenon. In 2012, her work was shared thousands of times across social media, and in web publications like *The Huffington Post*, *DeMilked*, *Business Insider* and even the British tabloid *The Daily Mail*, she was framed as an "artist who paints herself," the writers emphasizing her stunning

mastery of *trompe-l'oeil* self-portraiture techniques. (A recurring question: "how does she paint her back?")

Here a paradox arises. Paredes' work of this period is formally beautiful, immediate, accessible, and screen-friendly. And it came about in a ravenous mediasphere preoccupied with female beauty and its complications. The meteoric rise in views of YouTube makeup tutorials, many of which also use *trompe-l'oeil*, reflect a fascination with the process of bodily adornment as self-expression. Meanwhile fashion and style-based Tumblrs and blogs influenced, and were influenced by, corporate global branding in an unnerving visual symbiosis. Images from contemporary art became a kind of visual currency, posted on Pinterest boards alongside marketing images of handbags and wedding gowns. Amid this context, Paredes' images were enthusiastically admired and consumed across myriad platforms, while the exigency of digital communication left little space for analysis.

While those of us who followed Paredes' career hungered for more thoughtful exegesis, the widespread popularity of the *Landscapes* photos suits her purposes in an unexpected way. Because make no mistake; Cecilia Paredes is a photographer, painter, and sculptor, but performance is central to her work. And through some alchemical zeitgeist energy, her viral presence amounts to a highly subversive meta-performance.

Paredes calls the female subject of her photographs not "I" but "she," or even more baldly, "the character." Why is this an important distinction? Because performance temporarily dislocates personal identity from the physical body, and because in the art world, as elsewhere, woman as object remains, to borrow from useful current parlance, "a thing." Performance-informed photography wields the power to upend this dialectical "thing." Though Paredes' work tells a different story than that of fellow-performer/photographer Cindy Sherman, for example, both female artists employ their bodies as actors, rather than as objects. By embodying a different character from image to image, they reverse the standard parameters of self-portraiture; the viewer may not be able to determine what Sherman or Paredes look *like*, but we can't help but to take in what they look *at*. The physical being captured on film is not a thing you can consume, but a result of the consciousness behind the camera.

Paredes takes a significant departure in *The Wandering Flight*. She has made objects that derive much of their power from in-person experience. These winglike tapestries, like some of her earlier work involving feathers, coax the viewer into a psychic, ritual space. The feather tapestries stand in contrast to the digital realm of her photography; they are analog and hands-on, and their joyous color and seductive softness invite touch as well as vision. A longing to stroke and embrace has a different character than the melancholy longing to blend into the background. It's as though the artist is offering you an Andean ritual costume to take on, even to perform in. With these brilliant capes, you could disguise yourself, achieving flight among the birds of your dreams!

In his essay "Feathers in the Work of Cecilia Paredes," Simon Flores draws a connection between her feathered art, and indigenous symbology in the syncretic Catholicism of the Viceroy period in her native Peru. During the process of colonization, Peruvian artists depicted feathers as a means of communicating the Divine, even using them to adorn images of Christ. This worried colonial authorities. As Flores writes, "the Andean re-signification was promptly declared subversive and the use of feathers in any way shape or form was to be viewed as an icon intimately associated with rebellion."

Intimate rebellion, flight, escape, and performance. The photographs in *Cecilia Paredes: The Wandering Flight* draw upon these themes while pushing the photographed performances into brand-new territory. In two works in particular, "En tus alturas," and "La dorsal," the female figure suddenly stands out from the wallpaper.

In "La dorsal," the character is pictured levitating cloud-like against a black background, clad in a black and white striped kimono-like garment whose pattern extends from the fabric onto the skin at the nape of her neck. The blurred distinction between fabric and skin suggests that the costume may be a bodily phenomenon, something she exudes. She exerts an atmosphere. She has become larger in the frame, more voluminous. It is the opposite of camouflage.

The figure in "En tus alturas" casts a slight shadow onto her white background, and wears (or emits?) a gown-like wrap of plaid, either tartan or madras. Upon close inspection, you notice here a playful variation on Paredes' customary *trompe-l'oeil*. The lighting sheen on the fabric surface reveals the

pattern not to be woven into the cloth, but instead printed with a photograph of plaid fabric. Some of the buckles and folds of the garment come not from the textile, but from the representation of another textile. Here there is camouflage, but not of the woman. It's verisimilitude itself that is hidden, as the performer's costume is a costume of a costume.

Paredes created this body of work after adopting Philadelphia as her permanent hometown, and after separating from her husband, saying "when we were apart, I was able to find my own place, and constant relocation was no longer." She acknowledges that gaining her own space partly inspires "a blank background, or a black background." It marks a shift in performance, too, an additional act in the drama; all character, no set.

That the woman in these pictures flaunts an exuberant pattern, rather than escaping into one, conveys an empowered emotive depth: she owns it. The female figure's position in these images is telling, as well. She is seated in repose, with her head inclined slightly forward. It's a pose that suggests meditation, itself an effort to quiet wandering thoughts. This depicted woman feels like a calmer being, more powerful, at once self-contained and radiating.

"She is living," the artist reflects. "She is taking things into her own hands."

"Camouflaged into her surroundings, the character dwells on the landscape and the landscape dwells on the character in a perfect symbiotic realm."

- Cecilia Paredes



Calabria, 2015, photo performance, edition of 7, 40 x 48"

Forbidden Fruit

2015, photo performance, edition of 7, 43 x 42"



Le jardin

2015, photo performance, edition of 7, 36 x 44"



Corinthians

2014, photo performance, edition of 7, 49 x 49"



Silk

2015, photo performance, edition of 7, 43 x 40"



La dorsal

2014, photo performance, edition of 7, 43 x 45"



En tus alturas

2014, photo performance, edition of 7, 45 x 45"



Shawl I

2015, felt and dyed feathers, 43 x 41"



Shawl II

2015, felt and dyed feathers, 39 x 34"



Cecilia Paredes

EDUCATION

Catholic University Art School, Lima, Peru
Cambridge Arts and Crafts School, England
Scuola del Nudo, Rome, Italy

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Listening with Eyes*, Tabacalera, Ministry of Education and Culture, Madrid, Spain
- 2014 *Background Stories*, Samara Space Museum, Samara, Russia
Background Stories, Pingyao Photo Festival 2014, Shanxi, China; curator: Alasdair Foster
Policies of Perception, Pasaje 17, Buenos Aires, Argentina; curator: Andrea Giunta
- 2013 *Wounded by a Thousand Arrows*, Museo de Osmá, Lima, Peru (catalogue)
Cecilia Paredes, Vladimir Palace, Saint Petersburg, Russia
Under the Same Sun, Instituto Cervantes, Tangier, Morocco
International Guest Artist, Bogota Photo Biennial, Bogota, Columbia
- 2012 *Natural Archive: Object and Photography*, the Embassy of Peru, Washington D.C.
- 2010 *In the Eyes of a Woman*, About Change Program, World Bank, Washington, D.C.; curator: Edgar Endress (catalogue)
Private Garden, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow, Russia
Cecilia Paredes: El río que fluye dentro/The River Within, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norte Americano (ICPNA) Lima, Perú (catalogue); curator: Jan Garden Castro
- 2009 *Animal of My Time: Photographs and Sculpture by Cecilia Paredes*, Humboldt State University, Eureka, CA
Cecilia Paredes, Jennifer Johnson Foundation, Jacksonville, FL
- 2007 *Bajo el Límpido Azul*, Costa Rica Museum of Art, San Jose, Costa Rica
- 2003 *Daphne's Garden*, Calderón-Guardia Museum, San Jose, Costa Rica
Wrong Sided Beach, University of Salamanca Center of Fotografía, Spain

Cecilia Paredes, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain (catalogue)

2000 *Alternate Routes*, Museum of Art and Contemporary Design San Jose, Costa Rica

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015 Havana Biennale, Havana, Cuba

2012 *Nature's Toolbox: Art, Biodiversity, and Invention*, Natural World Museum, San Francisco, CA

2010 *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art*, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City, Mexico; curator: Randy Jayne Rosenberg

2009 *Off the Beaten Path*, traveling show: United Nations, Paris; Nobel Center for the Peace, Oslo, Norway Fondazione Prada, Milan; UCLA Fowler Museum, California; National Gallery, Cape Town, Africa; curator: Randy Jayne Rosenberg

MADC 94/09: Diálogos y Correspondencias, Contemporary Museum of Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica

2008 *Open Maps*, Royal Museum of Arts BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium

Unlearning Intolerance: Art, Attitudes & Environment, United Nations New York and Royal Museum of Monaco

The Possible Glance, Contemporary Art Museum, Santiago, Chile

Art for Change, Natural World Museum United Nations Environment Program, New York, NY

Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art, Natural World Museum, San Francisco, CA; curator: Randy Jayne Rosenberg

2007 *Identities*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Santiago, Chile

Animalistica, Central Bank Museum, San Jose, Costa Rica

Envisioning Change, Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway; curator: Randy Jayne Rosenberg

2006 *Beyond Lilith: the sacred feminine*, Scuderie Aldobrandini Museum, Frascati, Italy (catalogue)

2005 *La Costilla Maldita*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Canary Islands (catalogue)

Opened maps - Photography of the Americas, Madrid, Spain

2003 *Iberoamerican Photography of the Nineties*, Barcelona/Madrid, Spain; Curator: Alejandro Castellote

- Tech-No-Logic II: Double Edged Sword*, Teoretica, Cultural Center of Spain, San Jose, Costa Rica
- 2001 *The Floating Land: Noosa*, Queensland, Australia
- 1999 *Image and Poetry*, Costa Rica Art Museum, San Jose, Costa Rica
- Images of Women*, Central Bank Museum, San Jose, Costa Rica
- Inner Landscape*, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica
- 1998 *Installo-Mesotico*, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica
- 1996 *New Tendencias*, Costa Rica Museum of Art, San Jose, Costa Rica
- New Acquisitions*, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aizpuru, Margarita. "The Accursed Rib." *The Accursed Rib*, Exhibit Catalogue, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Canary Islands. 2005.
- Batet, Janet. "Nature, My Significant Other." Exhibit brochure, Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, TX. 2011.
- Bogdanovich, Luis Martin, and Giuliana Vidarte. "Cecilia Paredes: Wounded by a Thousand Arrows." Exhibit catalogue, Museo de Osma, Lima, Peru. 2013.
- Castro, Jan Garden. "Cecilia Paredes: El río que fluye dentro | The River Within." Exhibit catalogue, ICPNA, Lima, Perú. 2010.
- Castillo, Omar-Pascual and María Cristina Padura. "The Accursed Rib (The femininity of the Visual, or Policies to Shatter the Masculine Canon)." *The Accursed Rib*, Exhibit Catalogue, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Canary Islands. 2005.
- Cazali, Rosina, "Collecting to gather the fragments." *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

- Damian, Carol. "Cecilia Paredes: Fugitive Dreams | Sueños fugitives." *Arte al Día International*, Issue 114 May (2006). 50
- Flores, Simón. "Reviews: Cecilia Paredes, Costa Rican Art Museum," *Arte al Día International*, Issue 120 (2007): 118.
- Flores, Simón. "Domestic Cartography, 1,200 metal hangers and waxed threads An Installation." *Cecilia Paredes: El río que fluye dentro / The River Within*. Exhibit catalogue, ICPNA, Lima, Perú. 2010.
- Flores, Simón. "Reflective Symbiosis." *Cecilia Paredes: Wounded by a Thousand Arrows*. Exhibit catalogue, Museo de Osma, Lima, Peru. 2013.
- Garcelon, Christian. "Cecilia Paredes: La dentelle "LACE", un bondage naturel." Exhibit catalogue, Chemin D'Art Salle des Jacobins, St Flour, France. 2006.
- Gozzini, Rosetta. "Beyond Lilith: the sacred feminine." Exhibit catalogue, Scuderie Aldobrandini Museum, Frascati, Italy. 2006.
- Herzbert, Julia P. "Cecilia Paredes: Ancient Myths under the Feminine Lens." *Arte al Dia International*, Issue 114 (2006), 42-46.
- Natural World Museum. *Art in Action: Nature, Creativity and Our Collective Future*. San Rafael, Calif.: Earth Aware Editions, 2007.
- Panera, Javier. "Cecilia Paredes-Nature within Nature." Exhibit catalogue, Galeria Arthobler, Porto, Portugal. 2004.
- Panera, Javier, "Body, memory, nature, metamorphosis. Some reflections on the photographs of Cecilia

Paredes.” *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

Quirós, Luis Fernando. “Stories of my Domain.” *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

Quirós, Luis Fernando. “Re-using Nature.” *Cecilia Paredes: El río que fluye dentro / The River Within*. Exhibit catalogue, ICPNA, Lima, Perú. 2010.

Sadler, Stephanie. “Artist Interview: Cecilia Paredes” *Little Observationist*. Aug. 5, 2013.

Santana, Andrés Isaac. “Cecilia Paredes: Into Someone Else’s Skin.” *Art Nexus*, No. 60, Volume 5 (2006): 74-78.

Schreiber, Hortensia Moncloa Arias. “From the Wishing Well and Dreams, Nostalgia and Migration. A New Metamorphosis.” *Cecilia Paredes: El río que fluye dentro / The River Within*. Exhibit catalogue, ICPNA, Lima, Perú. 2010.

Weiss, Rachel. “Sacre Quotes.” *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

Zamora, Álvaro. “The House of Innocence.” *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

Zaya, Antonio. “Camouflages.” *Cecilia Paredes*, Recorridos Cruzados 8. Exhibit catalogue, Centro de Fotografía Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca, Spain. 2003.

HONORS AND AWARDS

2014 International Award for Artistic Excellence, Pingyao International Festival of Photography, Shanxi, China
Artist talk, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

- 2013 Artist of the Year, Santiago, Chile
2012 Lecture on Contemporary Art, National School of Fine Arts,
Lima, Peru
2006 Selected Artist, Chemin D Art, St Flour, France
2002 First Mention of Honor, Central American Biennial
Selected Artist, Woodford Project, Queensland, Australia
2001 Selected artist for The Floating Land project, Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland, Australia
2000 Banff Center for the Arts Thematic Residency: DISCOVERY, Canada
1999 Artist in Residence, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
1998 Rockefeller Foundation Residency for Visual Artist, Bellagio, Italy
1995 First Prize, Sculpture Biennial Cerveceria, Costa Rica
1986 First Prize, National Engraving Hall, Lima, Peru
1983 First Prize, Municipality of Lima Prize, Silkscreen, Lima, Peru

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

- Museo del Barrio, New York, NY
Natural World Museum, San Francisco, CA
Museum of Contemporary Art Panama, Panama City, Panama
Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica
Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow, Russia
San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Art Nexus, Miami, FL
Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, Havana, Cuba
Deutsche Bank, New York, NY
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA
National University of Engineering, Lima, Peru
The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX
The University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
The University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Arts, Philadelphia, PA

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