

AIR(E), Firestorms

by Catalina Mena Larraín

Denise Lira-Ratinoff's work is related to Installation Art as a language that enables sensory experiences without being subjected to rational logic. The artist conceives the audience as participating subjects whose perception comes into dialogue and completes the artwork. Her production seeks to challenge emotion and thought, using direct and intense stimuli that capture sight, touch and hearing. Her work says: If you want to know something, you have to experience it.

Her conceptual line (her *move* would be a more precise term) has found a radicalness and strength in the last 15 years, when she herself began to undergo experiences of deep contact with nature, carrying out highly physically demanding explorations of glaciers, deserts, forests and seas, entering the landscape to extract images and sounds that were processed by her own body. At that point she adopted, as a matter of urgency, the commitment to create art aimed at making visible the environmental crisis and the self-destructive violence of economic rationality.

From an existential stance, the artist deems the work of art as the creation of a language that questions critical consciousness, devoting herself to a rigorous and committed craft, researching and creating new aesthetic and technological forms to experience the danger in which the planet finds itself.

The idea of immersion runs through all of her works. They seek to immerse the audience in a visual and conceptual landscape which moves them. And she pulls this off.

It is no longer a matter of authorship or presenting the exacerbated subjectivity of the artist, but rather art as a place from which to create a utopian horizon, despite conveying an apocalyptic message. Intellectual pessimism, but at the same time pragmatic optimism. Denise recovers the belief – lost from time to time – that art is capable to transform psychic, social and political structures, to the extent that it appeals to deeper and more encompassing levels of perception. The problem is that we are bursting with information about the climate crisis, global warming, deforestation, pollution, extinction, and yet, we continue to live as if this didn't happen: we do not want to see it. It seems that we defend ourselves from the deafening noise of the media. It is there, at that point of disconnection, that she conducts her creative gesture, proposing poetic languages that restore the ties between body, space, time and consciousness.

The political commitment of the artwork materializes in a production system where art and life are inextricably connected. She, together with her husband Patricio Aguilar – with a background in stage and cinema – have set up a true factory of experiences, to which they devote all their time and resources. There is no need to ask them how they do it in order to see that they are involved in a radical move: it is a matter of life and death.

AIR(E) Firestorms speaks of a terrifying phenomenon: right now, as you read this text, large areas of the Earth's surface are being consumed by flames. These are not localized fires or the burning of a forest, a building or a neighborhood, but rather hurricanes of fire that expand uncontrollably, beyond objects, feeding on the winds and high temperatures, and reaching heights over 600 feet tall.

Her work wants to be an alarm call that pierces our defenses. The main piece is made of fire as visual material. For several days, using different technical resources, the couple produced fire actions that were filmed with top-of-the-line cameras. These images are complemented by various soundscapes, compositions created with sounds captured in lands and oceans, manifesting the sounds of nature.

In this film, where the visual material is fire, Denise's body can be seen catching fire, in a performative action that takes on the character of a sacrifice. Putting the body on the line, offering the body, perhaps it's the only meaningful way to speak.

Distancing itself from a documentary record and a linear narrative, this work is presented as an ongoing situation. It is an abstract image, in continuous movement and transformation, which places us at the crossroads between what is sublime and terrible. Heraclitus conceptualized fire as an element that must destroy in order to renew. Alchemy and other mystical traditions have also understood the value of fire as an agent of metamorphosis and purification. ***AIR(E) Firestorms***, is a work that is introduced into the body, affirming the desire for an art that takes the bond with others to the extreme.

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