

**The Intimate Circles Of Our Twilight Years/** Barbara Kastelein

*“Truly, though our element is time. We are not suited to the long perspectives. Open at each instant of our lives. They link us to our losses...”* Philip Larkin

Just as there are qualities, memories, commitments, you banish from your life for a while because perhaps you don't have the emotional space to deal with them – so there comes a moment when you allow them back in and you are, for a while, in their grip. Like the name which keeps popping up, or the new word which suddenly peppers every other sentence, the topicality of certain universal themes can almost seem uncanny.

The work *Gastado el Tiempo*, explores such a theme. It is a contemporary piece which uses modern art forms, the installation and photography, to explore an age-old concern –the passing of time.

The title (loosely meaning “time spent”) would come as no surprise for anyone familiar with the perturbing oeuvre of photographer Vida Yovanovich who, at the mere age of 49 is rapidly acquiring something of the status of a Sybil.

Her book *Cárcel de los Sueños* (Prison of Dreams) assaults the viewer with tough images of an old-age asylum which is decaying, as are its inhabitants. Author Elena Poniatowska notes perceptively in the prologue that Yovanovich is seeking herself in the aged, wrinkled and incapacitated women who are left abandoned there.

Were Vida less the artist and more the performer, she would be insisting on this reverse metamorphosis (for our fantasies and imaginings are more commonly of returning to, or preserving, our youth) as opposed to allowing it – through her sensitive painstaking commitment to her theme- to permeate her work so that the receptive experience slowly seduces, rather than dictates the reactions of the viewer.

Not only is time incorporated into the installation in that it takes time to get used to the dim light she uses –forcing the viewer to pause so that s/he can begin to see and enter (also literally) the work – but light and its absence are also used to lead the viewer's eyes to what people often do not want to see. You have to bend down to enter to the cylinder, then you are suddenly surrounded by the image. You are forced to be where you are.

Let's not get too whimsical about a woman who has seen death and the terrors of the abyss that are reflected in her dark eyes. The book is, as Yovanovich says, quite heavy, but exploring her own fears hasn't left her perched on some dark crater of terror, rather it is a continuing impulse for her artistic creation.

A healthy irony twinkles from her smiling eyes, and a perky sense of fun in her unique geometrical haircut. And, if it were pure sympathy, or compassion, the portraits of the elderly might not have been shot. This is an artist working with her obsessions and daring the viewer to admit s/he shares them.

And, while Yovanovich, wasn't sure whether she wanted her current show to be compared to *Cárcel...*, she also pointed to the previous work as a way of sharing the history of the emotive art (in the installation, the piano music by Satie helps sustain an emotional tension) she creates.

*Gastado el Tiempo* bespeaks the same preoccupation in a more subtle manner, and it is a great achievement for an installation.

A powerful medium which can often fall on its obvious need to create an ambience –while classical art forms, even photography, can be admired intellectually for their composition- a walk-in tableau needs to do something to the viewer as its *raison d'être*.

And this one has.

*Gastado el Tiempo* carries a very strong female sensitivity, although Yovanovich is no more interested in the term “feminist” than she is in creating a “national” art (in fact the work has a very European feel).

Given the importance of time and personal presence in appreciating the installation, I am loathe to describe it, and instead will give advice on how to enter the work:

- 1) Do go in –it's well worth it (museum guards have noticed that some people dilly dally at the entrance and skulk off)
- 2) Wait until you are alone, so that self-consciousness does not curb your reaction.
- 3) Pause a good while to let your eyes accustom to the (lack of) light, there is a curtain (with all the symbolism that brings in theater) to your left which you will eventually see and go through.
- 4) Take your time in the first room and then enter the cylinder.

5) Don't panic.

Lusting for results, Yovanovich asked me what I felt. My over-hasty response was that it was “so sad”, but as her brows arched in query, out popped the word “fear”. For, while there is a pervasive air of melancholy in the powerful intimacy of this work, it also carries an apprehensiveness that can easily mount to dread.

The rediscovery of this ambivalence is a rich experience it would be a pity to miss.

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