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Teresa Burga (1935-2021) **Shock Waves and Heartbeats**

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Teresa Burga is today, without a doubt, a key figure in Latin American and global art. However, this was not always the case. Until her late discovery in late 2000, her work had to face very complex situations: from the naturalized sexism in the cultural scene, the lack of Peruvian institutions and galleries to show her work, as well as the difficulties of a country going through turbulent social processes –from a nationalist military government to an internal armed conflict. But through it all, even when she could not exhibit, Burga never stopped creating.

Since the 1960s, her visionary work sought to transform not only the traditional languages of art but to critically intervene in her context. Her creative practice also has the double merit of having persisted despite a profoundly unequal scenario for women. When Burga began to paint in the early 1960s, it was only a few years after women achieved legal equality with the right to vote in 1955 –Peru was the penultimate country in Latin America to recognize women as citizens with full rights.

She was a co-founder of the Arte Nuevo group (1966-1967), a collective that investigated new artistic languages. Burga strategically used pop aesthetics to introduce a visual language that questioned the predominant male canon. In 1967, she presented one of the first and bravest installations in which she staged sexist models of representation and the female body as an object of consumption. However, the art critics of the time were unable to understand that artistic boldness, completely ignoring the sharp analysis that she placed on gender roles and the confinement of women to the private domain.

Shortly thereafter, Burga devoted herself to exploring with almost scientific rigor dematerialized art in dialogue with technology, communication, and the passage of time. She analyzed how the new information systems modeled people's behavior and subjectivity. Her work of the 1970s developed under a military regime was as experimental as it was equally undervalued, bequeathing two impressive multimedia installations that today form part of the most audacious art of the 20th century: *Autorretrato. Structure. Report. 8.6.72* (1972) based primarily on Burga's medical examinations, and *Cuatro mensajes* (1974), which translates into a sound, film, and visual poetry four phrases randomly selected from national television channels.

Since 1975 and for almost thirty years, Teresa Burga worked as a public employee in the tax administration service, where she was responsible for the organization and classification of laws, generating reports, diagrams, and charts. In those years, her art marking was devoted to explore labor conditions, pointing out her place in the accounting field in a time and place where women had few access to leadership positions. Burga also addressed her objective and subjective relationship with time, as well as how recording technologies were shaping everyday life.

In 1980-1981, together with Marie-France Cathelat and a wide range of professionals (doctors, anthropologists, lawyers, scientists, statisticians), she developed *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana* (1980-1981), one of the most important milestones in the intersections between art and social research. The large-scale project and installation sought to take the pulse of the social situation of middle-class women in the urban context at a time when democracy was returning to Peru. After that experience, Burga decided not to seek any further official artistic spaces as she found no support to exhibit her work.

A comprehensive selection of her work was brought together in the anthological exhibition that we curated, with Emilio Tarazona, at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA) in Lima in 2010. This project traveled shortly after to the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, under the title "Die Chronologie der Teresa Burga" (2011) with the additional curatorship of Dorota Biczal. That her work could only begin to gain national and international recognition in her 75th year speak volumes about the conditions of production and the gender inequalities that organize cultural and social structures. From that moment on, her work began an ascending path of new projects, retrospective exhibitions, participation in biennials and monographic books. Her work was presented at the Istanbul Biennial (2011) and the Venice Biennale (2013) –being the first participation of a Peruvian artist in the main section of this event–, and important surveys of her work have been recently presented, such as "Teresa Burga. Structures of Air" at MALBA, Argentina (2015); "Teresa Burga. An Artists or a Computer?" at SMAL Gent, Belgium (2018); and "Aleatory Structures" at the Migros Museum, Switzerland (2018). These projects allowed her to enter into a dialogue with her local and global contemporaries: from Cecilia Vicuña to Judy Chicago, from Greta Bratescu to Monica Mayer, from Ana Mendieta to Cindy Sherman.

Her return to the art scene allowed her to reconnect with drawing, sculpture, sound art, as well as with larger projects such as wall works and public sculptures. One of her latest projects was dedicated to explore the limits of her life. In 2014, Burga began to copy children's drawings, highlighting the value of these infantile forms whose complexity (affective, social, aesthetic, and political) is often dismissed. The project also seemed to seek to bring two extremes of life into emotional dialogue: the beginning and the end, childhood and old age.

Her work always offered a forceful and sincere response to the time in which she lived. In the last decade, she could feel the enthusiasm and admiration of many young artists who approached her, recognizing her as a pioneer of feminist research. Her attentive gaze and her loud laughter were actively present at art openings in recent years in Lima, where she always sought to approach the new generations with interest and generosity.

Much remains to be said about her prolific work: many exhibitions to be organized, many essays and books that deserve to be written. The unjust oblivion that her powerful work experienced has always been pointed out by Burga, demanding loudly that women artists achieve early and in life the recognition they deserve. Looking again at her neglected work has demanded not only a critical rewriting of the global art history, but also a full resetting of the categories with which the past has been read and how the future will be written.