

Director's Statement

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ZONE:Chelsea Center for the Arts, New York.

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BEATRIZ EZBAN / Unified Field: The Border

ZONE:Chelsea Center for the Art is proud to present Mexican artist Beatriz Ezban's New York solo exhibition, in collaboration with the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York. The nine new paintings and ten drawings in "Unified Field: The Border" grew out of a residency at the Yaddo artist colony in upstate New York.

Ezban confronts a politically charged contemporary issue; however, her emphasis is not on divisions but rather on the liminal nature of thresholds, what she describes as the magnetic fields where cultures meet and interact. She translates these concerns into universal and aesthetic terms, in richly textured paintings made with oil and wax on linen, the surfaces scraped with a palette knife.

Ezban explores the transitional range between figuration and abstraction. Her simplified human forms--essentially silhouettes--are choreographed into configurations that allude obliquely to current events while retaining a timeless humanity. Her more abstract works use line expressionistically to suggest demarcation and intersection as part of the compositional and, by implication, social dynamic. What makes her work seem robustly painterly rather than merely programmatic is her vivid sense of color. Dark passages are placed alongside vibrant yellows and fleshy rose reminiscent of Phillip Guston--another artist who combined a social conscience with a sensuous appreciation of color and the viscosity of pigment.

Ezban hopes to negotiate between conflicting imperatives at what she calls the "asymmetrical meeting points." Art itself can turn the "edges of chaos" into "unified fields" of harmonious interaction. Throughout the twentieth century an antagonistic atmosphere often prevailed in the art world between representation and abstraction, between pure painting and narrative subject matter. Those borders are becoming more porous among contemporary artists. Beatriz Ezban, whose work been has shown internationally as well as in major exhibitions in Mexico, is contributing to the ongoing dialogue.

CAMPO UNIFICADO:LA FRONTERA.

Por Jennifer Bahng

Curadora y Directora

Zone:Chelsea Center for the Arts, New York

ZONE: Chelsea Center for the Arts, en colaboración con el Instituto Cultural de México, se enorgullece en presentar la primera exposición individual de la artista mexicana Beatriz Ezban en la ciudad de Nueva York. Las nueve pinturas y 10 dibujos que componen la muestra *Campo Unificado:La Frontera* fueron realizados durante su residencia en Yaddo, colonia artística ubicada en el norte del estado de Nueva York.

Ezban aborda un tema de actualidad con fuerte carga política; sin embargo, el énfasis no está en las divisiones, sino más bien en la naturaleza liminal de las fronteras, en lo que describe como campos unificados, donde las culturas se encuentran e interactúan. Beatriz traduce estos puntos de contacto en términos estéticos y universales, creando pinturas ricamente texturadas, trabajadas con espátula en óleo y cera sobre lino.

Ezban explora la transición entre figuración y abstracción. Sus figuras humanas - básicamente siluetas- forman coreografías, configuraciones que se refieren, de manera oblicua, a los acontecimientos recientes mientras mantienen su humanidad intemporal. Sus trabajos más abstractos se valen de líneas expresionistas para sugerir demarcaciones e intersecciones como parte de la composición, que llevan implícita la dinámica social. Lo que hace que su trabajo tenga solidez pictórica, más que simplemente programática, es su vívido sentido del color. Formas oscuras se yuxtaponen a vibrantes amarillos y rosas encarnados, reminiscentes de Philip Guston, otro artista que combina conciencia social con una apreciación sensual del color y textura del pigmento.

Ezban tiene la esperanza de negociar entre los imperativos en conflicto, a los que denomina "asimétricos puntos de encuentro". El arte por sí mismo puede tornar las fronteras del caos en campos unificados que se relacionan armónicamente. A lo largo del siglo XX con frecuencia prevaleció en el mundo del arte una atmósfera antagónica entre representación y abstracción, entre pintura pura y narrativa. Estos límites se tornan más difusos en el trabajo de artistas contemporáneos. Beatriz Ezban, cuya obra se ha presentado en importantes espacios tanto en México como en otros países, contribuye a llevar adelante este diálogo.

Beatriz Ezban, Unified Field: The Border Project

by Graciela Kartofel

Beatriz Ezban creates painterly works –pictures that are the essence of a painter’s work. She is a color field artist who was devoted to abstraction. Born in Mexico and having developed an ample CV, she reveals the impact of living in upstate New York for a brief period while doing a residency at the Yaddo artist colony. The nine paintings and the ten drawings under the title "Unified Field: The Border" show the emotion of someone who has felt the contemporary human condition and is expressing it as unavoidable. The paintings are an elaborated synthesis of the dense topic of the time when she was in the United States -border problems-, giving title to her serial work and to the exhibition now presented at the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington DC.

Having painted for years stroke after stroke and without a figurative approach, Ezban surprises the viewer with those simplified silhouettes emerging from her fields, "Crossing the River" or in a "Border Talk". The art world still maintains a line -although thinner and thinner-, between representation and abstraction. Ezban crosses it without even thinking of the change. She drew from one field to the other, from one country into the other one and the scenes became inhabited in a natural way. The artist doesn’t theorize about it but a narrative emerges in each picture becoming the most real narrative one could ever think of.

In this exhibition, the artist deals with the diverse frontiers, the geographical ones, the ones in the visual arts. Following the opposite path to the Mexican artist Federico Silva, who worked figuratively in reference to social situations and then turned into the geometry and abstraction, Beatriz Ezban continues with her abstract aesthetics while allowing the political situation to germinate in the paintings. Her oils on linen and watercolors on amate paper have the thick texture characteristic of her work. Subtle, growing from the material itself, those “bodies” are confronted at the "Edge of Chaos", a chaos that the artist paints as if revealed in the skin of anonymous people.

Graciela Kartofel
New York – México, 2006

IR

SANTIAGO ESPINOSA DE LOS MONTEROS

Los trayectos han sido desde siempre más interesantes que los arribos, incluso que las partidas. Importa lo que sucede en el camino; ir a alguna parte, por los caminos que sean. En ese trasladarse está el encanto de, quizá, llegar.

Beatriz Ezbán ha iniciado un trayecto importante en su última etapa de producción pictórica. Y en ese transcurrir en el que ella misma no sabe a dónde llegará está la obra que ahora se expone en el Instituto Cultural Mexicano de Washington.

Como si fuese una exploradora visual va recogiendo imágenes que se encuentra en el camino, y en esa extraña manera de cosechar lo visto pone en juego su modo de ver la pintura, de conocer lo que pueden pasarle a los colores cuando la luz de la tarde los rapta, cuando juegan a ser espejos o una linterna los descubre.

Importa que esta reunión de referencias, acopio invaluable de una pintora cuya mirada es especialmente aguda, haya derivado en un comentario de contemporaneidad visual y temática. Parecería que desea borrar las divisiones geográfico políticas entre los pueblos con la misma determinación con la que ha desaparecido los límites existentes entre la pintura abstracta y la figurativa.

Para quienes hemos seguido desde hace muchos años el trabajo pictórico de Beatriz Ezbán, esta nueva serie de obras nos sorprende. Al ser una autora internacionalmente conocida por sus trabajos abstractos, su nueva pintura nos llama a viajar hacia una figuración cargada de narratividad.

Es fundamental saber que ella misma se ha preguntado las razones de este golpe de timón: *"Como pintora es tan reciente este cambio que aún me sigo preguntando qué seguirá en mi trabajo, si esta figuración será un paréntesis para luego volver a la abstracción, si estoy borrando las fronteras entre lo abstracto y lo figurativo, o si puedo ir de uno a otro..."*^m El cuadro de un hombre a gatas al que otros de pie miran y uno de ellos lo alumbra con su linterna, crea tensiones evidentes entre fuerza y debilidad. Quizá aquí se encuentran algunas de las claves de otras piezas. La composición en apariencia sencilla, casi elemental, deja claro y sin adornos una decidida puesta en escena, sin fecha pero con tiempo, que nos habla de una relación ambivalente entre Estados Unidos y México.

Entre las referencias más directas a su obra anterior se encuentran las piezas *They Come Crossing The River I* y *Magnetic Field*. En ellas están las reminiscencias de la pintura que ha caracterizado a Beatriz Ezbán en los últimos dos años, pero habitadas ya por personajes y contando una historia, lo que no sucedía en sus telas

anteriores. Este par de piezas, podría decirse, son un importante eslabón en su trayectoria.

En la primera, una especie de letra X hace las veces de zona ceñida por la cintura en la que los personajes, en realidad delicadas líneas verticales, parecerían avanzar, desplazarse en grupo hacia algún lado. *Magnetic Field* en cambio nos deja ver a dos personajes que parecen mezclarse con formas abstractas, como si intentasen con su llegada desplazarlas para dar cuerpo a las nuevas piezas de corte figurativo.

Quizá una de las pinturas de más difícil solución es *Border Crossing*. Realizada en rojo intenso, los tres personajes parecerían desarrollar una organizada coreografía dancística. Da igual si se están agachando para esquivar un alambre de púas o si solamente festejan el trayecto. El rojo es definitorio de esta escena y hace que la pieza tenga una gran fuerza expresiva pero, sobre todo, esté atada a las significaciones cromáticas referidas a este color.

No podríamos enfrentarnos a esta serie de trabajos sin considerar que fueron hechos durante una residencia artística en Yaddo, al norte de Nueva York, entre mayo y julio de 2006. Se trata de una obra que marca un importante cambio en la trayectoria de Ezbán, y hecha con evidente sentido crítico, en el seno de una de las comunidades culturales más relevantes de la Unión Americana.

De un tiempo a la fecha, Ezbán ha estado especialmente interesada en la relación arte/ ciencia. En esta serie de obras ella tiene claro que *"algunos países actúan como campos magnéticos, ya sea atrayendo o ahuyentando a la gente, porque siempre hay diversas razones y responsabilidades de ambos lados para que esto suceda. Pero lo importante es percatarse de que ningún ser humano puede ser ilegal"*ⁱⁱⁱ

En todo caso esta serie de pinturas de Beatriz Ezbán trata sobre la idea de ir a otro lado, desde acá, desde donde estamos, ver a la distancia e imaginarnos en otra parte... Cruzar no es fácil. El trayecto inicia cuando pensamos en que lo haremos. Y así, pensando, un día descubrimos que detrás hay un largo camino recorrido.

ⁱ **"La tentación de cada día"**, Wilbert Torre, El Universal, Martes 05 de septiembre de 2006, México

ⁱⁱ **"Beatriz Ezbán usa la teoría física contra la política migratoria de EU"**, Fabiola Palapa Quijas, La Jornada, Viernes 25 de agosto de 2006

The Border / Campo Unificado: La Frontera

Beatriz Ezban

by Stephen Vollmer

The Mexican artist Beatriz Ezban has clearly focused upon and established an unmistakable tone within her thesis as represented this current exhibition, *The Border / Campo Unificado: La Frontera*. It is a body of work in which she integrates abstract and figurative imagery to represent the physical reality and confrontations awaiting those who look to cross over geographic, social, and economic barriers: Natural and manmade boundaries separating people in search of hope and dreams.

Her works bordering on the abstract, display the artist's interests in the exploration of space, texture, and luminous, chromatic contrasts to further reveal an underlying aesthetic based in formal studies surrounding existential philosophy. Yet, in this series of works, Ezban introduces distinct figurative elements into her atmospheric fields of abstract planes to evoke an internal dialogue within the consciousness of the gallery visitor.

Beatriz Ezban speaks on behalf of those who have been silenced, pushed aside all too often at home and abroad. They are the 'They', the 'Other' who have made hard choices to cross into the unknown. Exodus is rendered anew and, Ezban's subjects are not unlike those found in Aztec Codex Boturini, which recalls a people in search of a new home, who arrive only after having endured the trials and tribulations of a long journey.

To most, *The Border* remains unfamiliar, seen as either a foreboding or romanticized territory experienced through gentrified tourism and armchair literature. As much, a variety of visual and oral mediums have created stereotypical imaginary more akin to Lewis Carroll's *looking glass*: coffee table photo-essays in which the land serves as a cinema-graphic backdrop of nature's majesty or, the nostalgic reconstruction of *how the West was won*. In regards to northern Mexico, it remains virtually unknown to outsiders of both nations. And, *La Frontera* is generally assumed to be a set and absolute line separating Mexico and the United States as delineated on maps. The region is however, a vast area that ranges from Texas to California, or from the Mexican perspective, stretching from Tamaulipas to Baja California. Two nations, ten states, two oceans, and three time zones!

Citizens of the United States generally call it the Southwest. In Mexico and Central America, it is, *El Norte*. Its physical environment is a combination of arid brush country and vast, high deserts forested with sage, mesquite, prickly pear, and saguaro cactus, bounded by great river canyons and mountain ranges covered in conifers and aspens. Its climate is no less extreme, varying in extreme degrees, not only by season but as much, by altitude. It is a land whose environment challenges all who walk through it.

If one goes back, back before historically recorded time in North America, some of the oldest sites of human presence can be found in the cave shelters of native peoples who lived in the once high canyons of the Trans-Pecos region, at the convergence of the Rio Concho, the Pecos, and the Devil's along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. The *Frontera* has always been that place on the cusp of tomorrow where one faces the unknown of what lay beyond. But, its definition and location has continually shifted like the sands of the great deserts of Sonora and Chihuahua. Eternally, the region's environment has been recognized as a natural barrier to any who have been tempted to enter into or cross it out of desperation or faith. And now, those who explore its paths are destined to confront a hyper-reality that lies far beyond the urban grid of *civilization*, beyond the linear demarcations of national boundaries: one of iron curtains and moats.

It is a region once littered with broken wagon wheels discarded along the ruts of the Camino Real. Today, Interstates are littered in the obscured dreams of adventure and shared hopes: revealed in the shattered ruins of abandoned artifacts of clothing, plastic grocery sacks, and water bottles strewn across desert floors. Regardless of origin or from which direction one has come, *The Border/La Frontera* has often been portrayed in myths as a gate to Eden, when in fact it has all too often proven to be closer to Hades. Yet, select generations have often willingly sacrificed of themselves for the next to pursue the long term dream and opportunity of future.

In this series, Ezban melds the angst of an internal journey and her empathy with that of those who have crossed the Border and caught between two worlds. Thematically, *Unified Field: the Border / Campo Unificado: La Frontera* explores the issues and traumas of all émigrés. Who, whether crossing a sea, traversing a river or a fence in the expanse of great deserts, have embarked upon epic journeys that resulted in encounters of survival, in which one's identity is challenged, reconstructed, and traditionally abandoned if not, erased.

The greatest challenge thereafter may reside in the fight to romance and recover the memory and respect of origin.

Ezban's works represent a distinct perspective of geo-political and social-economic currents, the subjects of parlor conversation in remote capitals, but, an all too true reality of those caught in between. She has provided a visual backdrop to fuel the heated debate surrounding, compassion, hope, identity, border integrity, security and *holding a line*. The *ambiente* of her imagery stirs and provokes an expanded dialogue on disturbing and unresolved issues. Throughout these works, Beatriz Ezban depicts anonymous subjects braving extreme hardship and degradation, in which she recalls the tales of crossing barriers, the stories of endurance not unlike popular *corridos* that continue to inform a greater part of the *gente* in Mexico and Central America. In these works, she reconstructs perspectives of collective memories and experiences; extracting images from out of oral histories, reportage, and contemporary visual media.

On behalf of those at home and abroad who have been rendered silent, Beatriz Ezban calls out for a more just tomorrow. Her exploration of *The Border/La Frontera* supports the belief that all mankind is inherently created as equals and hold an inalienable right to seek a better life. Such qualities define the essence of the American experience, the desires of Mexico and, most peoples of the world. Ultimately, Ezban's *The Border / Campo Unificado: La Frontera* provides an opportunity for all to enter into a civil discourse and exploration of the myths and ideas surrounding *borders* and *fronteras*. She has provided a venue to reflect upon personal histories and the risks associated with migration: risks taken if not by ourselves, then by nearly all who walked before.

"*El camino no está bien pintado, pero está allá como la vida ...*" Unas palabras de un pastor muy sabio, un hombre, mayor, desconocido de Cuauhtinchan.

Stephen Vollmer

Dallas, Texas

September, 2008

Beatriz Ezban at the Las Cruces Museum of Art

The Las Cruces Bulletin. December 2007

Art Talk

by **QUIDA TOUCHON**

"Nothing can hurt me. I just open up. And that's exactly what we're supposed to do. When I am going to create I open up and in opening up to this force that I'm not afraid of, I let myself fall into it and be inspired and let it all flow into these pieces I am creating..." These are the words of **Nora NaranjoMorse**, a contemporary sculptor who is a native of Santa Clara in New Mexico. I was thinking about Nora when I first looked at the work of **Beatriz Ezban** last weekend at the **Las Cruces Museum of Art**.

The sensation of fearlessness glowed through the work as well as the title of her new paintings "Unified Field: The Border". To carry it further, the "Unified Field," another scientific term, relates to the optimistic state of creation that can occur like magnetic fields between cultures that find conjunction at a determined border or meeting place albeit with uncertain results.

Her canvases and drawings find themselves abstracting the human form just enough to make the force and the emotion come through in a universal voice of body language and gestures, some supplicating and yielding, some dominating and imposing, some communicating equally in understanding. She works with oils and wax, richly textured and often wielded with palette knife. The simplified figurative content is enriched with a palette of rich color fields. It's heady stuff, not just retinal pleasure, but more accurately, a challenging, idea-based art.

This is an artist who has a large folio of credentials and art training, who speaks from her own authentic voice, and who is a Mexican living in her native land.

It's a group of paintings that may strike you as puzzling, or worst case ... disturbing. Alternately, it seems terribly dangerous for an artist to fulfill other people's expectations, which is sometimes when they do their least interesting work. Ezban's work expresses something about herself and thus how she co-exists with the rest of society. Think of the "Unified Fields" as a challenging contemplation and visit the museum while the show is up.