

Silent Waves

Patricia Olazo

The year 2020 brought different things to different people. For Patricia Olazo, it brought the thudding realisation that despite living in the twenty-first century we are not always free to come and go as we please, and that bad things happen to good people.

Olazo was close to her sister, Melissa, despite living in a different continent on the other side of the world. Therefore, the shock of learning that at the age of 41 Melissa had been diagnosed with end stage gastric cancer – and that due to COVID-related international border closures a personal goodbye would not be possible – was catastrophic. Instead, *Silent Waves* is Olazo's goodbye.

How do we grieve? Some of us withdraw, others want to scream. In Olazo's case, grief drives her to produce work. She works on this rolling project every day, which she sees as both a way to communicate with her sister, and as an act of love.

For this project, Olazo has chosen the cameraless processes of the chemigram and the cyanotype. Olazo reflects: "There is an intense personal engagement that arises from creating a piece of art without the intervention of a camera or lens. There is just you and the paper; there is just you and the chemicals and the ocean waves." Olazo is aware of her strong physical relationship to both her chosen photographic materials and the natural environment. Whether she is in the darkroom producing evocative chemigrams or standing in the ocean being struck by waves while making cyanotypes, Olazo is feeling her way physically through the work.

Olazo also shows a sincere respect for the physicality of the materials themselves – the liquidity of developer, stop and fixer; the tactility of the surface of the glossy photographic paper; and the undulations and imperfections in the watercolour paper as it dries after being battered and drenched by the ocean. Printed photographic media works, as with all analogue works, are best viewed in the real. Travelling through Olazo's exhibition, the material properties of the works impress upon the viewer – the sheen of the photographic paper and its subtle warp around the edges; the depth of tonal range in the cyanotypes and the matte qualities of the dense watercolour paper; and the irregularly tall, glossy sculptural forms of the forest installation.

Working within the language of abstraction allows for a non-pictorial representation of feelings that are difficult to express such as fragility and impermanence, joy and sorrow. Olazo's ephemeral images are there and yet not there, almost coming into focus and then dissipating, full of movement, yet – empty. Silent. The powerful indexical trace present in every work speaks to that which is absent; that which is lost.

Olazo views the natural environment, particularly the ocean, as the 'other side' of the silence. For Olazo, the ocean is ever-present and alive. Olazo has now learnt, through her pain and loss, to cherish every moment. She has become more disciplined and driven, and takes nothing for granted. She now understands it can be gone in a second.

Olazo speaks loudly through the silence.

Genevieve Memory

Genevieve Memory is a visual artist, composer, curator, writer, and egalitarian living and working on First Nation's land in Meanjin/Brisbane, Australia. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) with Distinction from Griffith University, and a Bachelor of Music (Music Education) from the University of Queensland. Genevieve is represented by the Australian Music Centre.