Magdalena Jitrik
Patria o Muerte

By CARLOS GODOY
From Historical Materialism to Spiritual Utopia

Magdalena Jitrik's (Buenos Aires, 1966) exhibitions are interventions in public discourse. A cursory look at the titles of some of them is enough to make this clear: *Revueltas* (1997), *Desobediencia* (1999), *Ensayo de un museo libertario* (2000), *Socialista* (2001), *Fondo de huelga* (2007), *Templo* (2010), *El fin, el principio* (2013), *Vida revolucionaria* (2014), *Soviet* (2017), *Venceremos* (2017), *La superación de la guerra* (2019), *Pintura moderna* (2020), *Extremo sur* (2022), *Pueblo fantasma* (2023), and the one that brings us together today: *Patria o muerte* (2026). These sound more like titles of historiographical essays than exhibitions of paintings and objects. Indeed, they point to the intersection of two currents: the artist's investigations into Marxism, the left, and communism, and the recent history of Argentina.

The dispositif Jitrik devises in her works brings together figuration and geometry, artistic representations of Indigenous peoples, the modern tradition of avant-garde painting, the reconstruction of social bonds through assembly-based practices, workers' readymades, Mexican muralism, and Argentine metaphysical surrealism. A cocktail sustained by the force of color and the composition of magnetic, existential landscapes. From her first appearances in the 1990s, Magdalena Jitrik's work, consistently organized around the discursive framework of the exhibition, has made clear her concern with articulating a point of view while also engaging in a critical dialogue with the present. Perhaps a legacy of her family, combining the systematic rigor of materialism with the discursive order afforded by working with words, her exhibitions are books as much as they are essays.

This is why a new intervention by Magdalena Jitrik is so necessary in this present moment of chaos and political upheaval, when the battle over the sacred—understood as that which a people decides must endure—is being waged in the realm of subjectivity.

"Patria o muerte" is the emblematic slogan of the Cuban Revolution, pronounced by Fidel Castro in 1960 during the funeral of the victims of an attack. It is a call to insurgency, to the instinct for self-preservation. Through this readily legible quotation, Jitrik brings revolutionary practice back into view at a moment when it seems distant, blurred. Who are the revolutionary subjects today? Is revolutionary practice possible as community recedes? Does revolution remain a concept that operates in the realm of social classes, or does it now belong to the world of technology?

At the same time, to speak of homeland and death is, as throughout Magdalena Jitrik's work, to pose a question about the sacred.
Patria o muerte could be the exhibition that completes a trilogy of the Patagonian steppe, alongside Extremo sur and Pueblo fantasma. In these three exhibitions, the artist initiates a process that brings together the historical materialist's sense of responsibility and biographical history as an object of study. A history in which the approach to the sacred lies in revolutionary practice, in the search for truth, and in the recognition of a life lived alongside others. In Patria o muerte, we encounter once again a Jitrikian paradox, in which traditions that might appear irreconcilable collaborate in sustaining a shared coexistence. In the reception room, we find a space of Baroque paganism, where objects bearing working-class, telluric, and popular inflections accumulate around a painting, as if forming an altar. The painting is, in a sense, an imposition of hands, albeit a suicidal one. Once inside the main gallery, a minimalist configuration unfolds: enormous suspended paintings form an oval within the room's white square. This installation strategy was previously employed in Vida revolucionaria, presented in Genk, Belgium, as part of Manifesta 9 in 2012, and has been adapted and reconfigured for W's gallery space by Gastón Arismendi. The installation proposes the suspension of the walls' function, allowing the synesthetic impulse of the paintings to construct a dreamlike, sensory, spiraling atmosphere.
The predominant color palette is also a hybrid, bringing together the ochres and yellows of the Río de la Plata with the slightly warmer tones of a Central American palette. In both cases, these colors evoke the desert and the plains. The Patagonian horizon, the perspective of routes leading toward the sea, the pale blue of the sky: this is the visual register.

In this invocation of the sacred, the paintings—which typically depict figures oscillating between the circle and the square—are disrupted by an irruption into the pictorial plane, just as Magdalena intervenes in the field of

history through her work. This irruption takes the form of whirlwinds, spirals emerging at the very front of the painting, between the viewer and the work. Centrifugal forms that, like a black hole at its event horizon, entangle space and time, much like the angel of history.

Ignacio Lewkowicz, a historian devoted to theorizing the assembly-based processes that emerged from Argentina's 2001 crisis, spoke of three open wounds of modernity that operate in the production of aesthetic meaning. These wounds, in turn, are grounded in the work of three thinkers: Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud. In Marx, the historical/economic wound marks the moment when human beings cease to occupy the center of providence and become products of relations of production and social history. In Darwin, the biological wound opens when humanity loses its sacred place as "king of creation" and is repositioned as just another animal species within the food chain. In Freud, the psychological wound emerges when reason loses its absolute sovereignty, as the ego is shown to be governed by the unconscious.

These three wounds of modernity form the central thread of the modernist novel Magdalena Jitrik writes, chapter by chapter, in each of her exhibitions. In this particular instance, *Patria o muerte*, we might also suggest a fourth wound, one that Lewkowicz raised as a possibility: Einstein's quantum wound, which undoes the spatiotemporal certainties of classical physics and invites us to traverse meanings and interpretations within those spirals, whose centrifugal force draws us in even as it propels us outward.

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