Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams. Edited by Norma E. Cantú. Texas A&M University Press, 2015. 182 pages. Hardcover $60.00.

Ofrenda: Liliana Wilson's Art of Dissidence and Dreams combines some of the major pieces of acclaimed visual artist Liliana Wilson, offering for the first time a superb insight into significant phases of her artistic trajectory. Intense colors, clear lines, diverse techniques, and Chicana/o and Latina/o faces, bodies, lives, souls, symbols, fears, desires: this fine arts collection by the Chilean-born artist is a gentle testimony to subjectively experienced violence, but it affirms our ability to cope with it, and thus becomes a visual signpost to inner and outer peace.

The book has two major sections: the first presents cultural essays, while the second offers selected high-quality reprints of Wilson's artworks. The theoretical and poetic articles remain faithful to the spirit of Chicana theory and establish conversations with the artist and her paintings. Taken alone, each of the two sections is most relevant for contemporary aesthetic production and positioning. Together, they present a surprising, elaborate, magical blending of Chicana cultural thought and Latina art. This versatile dialogue between genres, disciplines, artists, and scholars reveals their different but common awareness of the subtle nuances of life and art. With its polyphone character, its decentered and recentered understanding, the book is a secret hymn to solidarity and hope.

Quite naturally, the reader's interest, my gaze, is drawn first to the images, to the forms and feelings they transport. Each one offers a different narration on Chicana/o and Latina/o histories/herstories. *El inmigrante* (112), for instance, dates to 1982, a time when Wilson herself was still quite new to the United States. Against dark skies, a person sits in despair next to a turned-off television on a platform of bricks, an awkward construction on a fissured outcropping of rock. In the back there is a huge helping hand, proffering a possibility of change. My eyes turn to the next page, to *El color de la esperanza*, from 1987 (113). Someone is sleeping on dry earth in front of a barbed wire fence; behind the fence are turquoise skies, a watching sun, and la Virgen praying, comforting. I leaf through the art section of the book.

Each page shows a new piece, indicating its title and dimensions, the year it was produced, and the materials used. The images meditate on political and cultural conditions, encouraging us to withstand brutal inhumanity. I skip various pages until the half-length figure of a young woman standing in shimmering waters, underneath a bright night sky, captures my attention (154). Tiny stars around her head subtly indicate a halo. Her chest appears like an open window through which the sky becomes visible, and a lily is growing out of it, symbolizing purity and innocence. This acrylic on panel from 2004 is called *Transformación*, and this, precisely, seems to be one of the main themes of this extraordinary book: the artwork takes the reader on a multilayered journey, passing through the notions of suffering, confidence, and transformation. The chronological arrangement of the artwork suggests a historical trajectory without prescribing it as the only possible reading. The ideas of torment, hope, and change appear, disappear, and reappear rhizomatically, fading and growing in their intensity; yet the focus on transformative power becomes stronger, more graspable through the book and through the years.

The essay section puts the art pieces into their discursive and biographical context, and in the process fills a gap in the history of Latina and Chicana artistic networks. Liliana Wilson came to Tejas as a young woman, shortly after the 1973 coup d'état in Chile, and was raised in a Chicana setting in which she was soon participating as an equal actor. Such information suggests one valid approach to Wilson's art, for her paintings create a unique Chicana-Chilena sphere of cultural openness and geographic and political interconnectedness. This way, the book becomes another proof of how Chicana feminist theory, pathbreaking in its healing vision, promotes in-between spaces, difference, and inclusion on all levels. The essays accompanying the artwork vary in focus, methodology, and style; however, they agree on the painter's and her paintings' constant "crossing between Latin America and the United States" (37). The book's main title alludes to this bridging. The Mexican and Chicana/o concept of *ofrenda* relates closely to death and its celebration, and Wilson explains: "What I do is an *ofrenda*, an offering, of beauty. . . . Through the beauty of these images, I am trying to give hope" (29). The artist maintains the concept's circular understanding of life and makes it one of the leading motifs of her creations.

The book mirrors this circularity, never giving up complexity, allowing multiple meanings and fragmented interpretations. In light of this, the reader appreciates the book's clear and comprehensible structure. The essay section contains three parts, combining ten pieces that debate

the significance of Wilson's art. The first part, with three essays, may be the most poetic one; it begins with the personal testimonio "Ofrenda" by Wilson (13–30), co-authored with Chicana historian Antonia Castañeda. The second part provides six scholarly articles. The third part presents the musical lyrics of "Tango Al Que Sopla La Hoja," by Lourdes Pérez, a tribute to Liliana Wilson and her work (106–7). To place a song at this point, as a gateway to Wilson's artwork that starts on the next page, shifts attention to the subtle yet ever-present soundscape composed through the images of *Ofrenda*, reminding us to listen to the paintings' multicolored whispers, breaths, sighs, screams, laughter, and melodies.

One of the essays included in the book was written by the late Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (31–33). The essay's title is "Bearing Witness," matching the title of one of Wilson's paintings (140), which Anzaldúa describes. The essay emphasizes the transformative potential of Wilson's work, sustaining Anzaldúa's own notions. A few chapters later, Guisela Latorre's article "Exiled Creativity and Immigrant Aesthetics" (69–81) argues that Anzaldúa "influenced" Wilson (70). *Ofrenda*, though, is evidence of the nonhierarchical dynamics between the Chicana theorist and the Chilena artist, revealing an intermedial relation between two colleagues who nurtured each other with images, words, and true friendship. Another essay needs to be mentioned here: "Ella Tiene Su Tono" (53–68), by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. This essay contemplates and complicates Anzaldúa's best-known epistemological text, "now let us shift . . . ," through the lens of Wilson's paintings and vice versa. By doing so, Gaspar de Alba unfolds, and then intertwines again, the intimate connection between Anzaldúa's Chicana theory and Wilson's artwork, leading us to unknown territory in both.

Healing and transformation as proposed by both Wilson and Anzaldúa are reflected in the opening and closing of the book's artwork section. The first drawing, *Los desparecidos en el cielo* (1977, 108), alludes to Chileans tortured, assassinated, and disappeared by the dictatorship, providing them with a peaceful sandy beach as a resting place in heaven. The last painting, the marvelous *El anuncio* (2011, 168), shows four fairy-like girls holding huge leaves, a flower, and a shell, under a full moon. They announce their serene truth, securely manifesting their ability to speak without needing to use the master's voice, the voices of dominant cultures, or violence. Some of Wilson's protagonists are living in hostile borderlands, but the self-aware, self-expressed being always returns in her work, proposing an alternative to hegemonic subject positions. The paintings' characters are female or

androgynous, indigenous or mestiza children, reflecting humble upbringings and representing intersectional social identities validated as role models.

In Wilson's paintings, regional and global aspects collide and harmonize. Rooted in Chilean and Chicana experiences and innovatively continuing these artistic traditions, Wilson's art makes these specifically located knowledge systems accessible beyond specific cultural contexts. In her poetic essay "Las Imágenes de Liliana Wilson" (35–38), written in Spanish and partly translated to English by Mónica Galmozzi, Marjorie Agosín underlines the emotional impact of Wilson's painted imaginaries, which are so capable of disconcerting, saddening, or delighting us (36). Considering this, it dawns on me that while mere intellectual approaches recognizably divide or unify us, these paintings can link viewers from varied backgrounds and beliefs, through time and space. Wilson's art is highly conceptual, and so is the book. The images deal with philosophic universals such as life, death, love, hate, justice, injustice. They ponder transculturally understandable questions of migration, belonging, pain, and recovery. Yet these ideas never seem distant or abstract. They have brown faces and black hair, they are girls and boys, they wear greens, blues, or yellows, they spread their angel's wings, they hold a big red fish or Mexican *mazorcas*. They look at us with big brown eyes and ask us to engage with their stories. They don't know the answer. They soothe us, for we don't know the answer. They show us how to laugh, how to heal our pain.

It is the affective quality of Wilson's colorful kaleidoscope that touches us throughout the book. Chicana and Chilena ways of knowing are Wilson's point of departure, travel route, and goal, yet through the paintings these Chicana-Chilena interstices also become general expressions of human existence. The book's artwork indicates the different work phases that Liliana Wilson ventured through, as well as recurrent themes and symbols that maintain or, in most cases, shift their semantics. Water and fire, angels and devils, youth and old age, imprisonment and freedom; ornaments, flowers, nature; fish heads, lemon heads, bird heads—these are some of the elements Wilson works with. She introduces visual doublings (a man who becomes two, 116) and divisions (a person split into two parts, 138, 155). Wilson's images are calm and strong; like dream visions, they stay with us as imprints of our mind and soul, long after we have closed the book.

One last word on the collection of essays. They, too, are an offering, written by seasoned Chicana scholars and promising academics who will shape future discussions. Kay Turner connects Derrida's notions of ghosts with reflections on embodiment (41–52). It is a beautiful, meaningful

operation of thought, for embodied souls are omnipresent in Wilson's work: in the drawing *Rodrigo Rojas* (1988), dedicated to a young Chilean who was burned alive (114); in *Homenaje a Ana Mendieta* (1994), honoring an artist whose causes of death were never revealed (119). Laura Pérez's essay sounds out the artwork's "inviolate Eros" (83–86). There are other historic and art historic pieces situating Wilson's work, as is appropriate for an artist of her stature. It would be hardly surprising if, within a few years, the already well-known name Liliana Wilson were to appear even more prominently, dominantly, ubiquitously. This book is, as the enchanting girl-spirits remind us, an announcement: it is *el anuncio* of Liliana Wilson's visual and visionary wisdom.

The editorial work that produced such a fine book cannot be praised enough. It requires the ability to pull the right strings at the right time, to make thoughtful arrangements behind the scenes; above all, it requires vast knowledge of the field. Editor Norma Cantú, herself a brilliant Chicana theorist and writer, created the synergies that bring this project to life. Cantú has been a leading figure in Chicana feminism and literatures, establishing Chicana spaces in dominant cultures, constructing sustainable Chicana-Latina alliances. Her careful work over decades ensured the participation of the outstanding personalities in the book. While Cantú's expertise and sensitive eye are crucial to the book's existence, she never strives to be seen. On the contrary: her role as an editor gives the remarkable example of how stepping back with elegance and grace elevates others. The result is an unprecedented conversation of theoretical and poetic voices with the colorful cosmos of resistance, balance, and harmony Wilson envisions as her *ofrenda* to the world.

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