

Ana María Hernando

As a multidisciplinary artist my work focuses on the feminine, using empathy to make the invisible visible, and to question our preconceptions of the other — including nature and the earth — their worth, and value. I paint and draw flowers, not only out of mesmerized wonder for their presence on earth, but also as a rebellion against the labels of “decorative”, “inconsequential” and “superficial” that have been equated historically to the art of women. I also make large-scale installations that often incorporate a variety of handmade, crocheted, or embroidered fabric objects. In my more recent work, I explore color and movement in tulle textural “paintings” that offer a feminine rejoinder to historical movements in abstractions. These framed textile works, and installations unapologetically contradict and embrace the inherent lavishness of the tulle, alongside shared vibratory color, and spatial concerns.

In my tulle pieces and installations, the fields of color, texture, and pattern develop through a single gesture — weaving tulle — repeated over and over. Tulle, seen as a prototypically feminine material, alludes to a fantasized message of happy fragility, where all is better when women delegate their own agency. Presenting tulle in a somatic and visual abstraction, I bring it forward in such abundance that softness becomes less a discreet quality and more a function of power, both formally and symbolically. Associated with a happiness that belongs to the fantasy realm, I take the tulle and while keeping its alluring quality, I transform it with the vocabulary of power. A wide palette of bold and subtle color choices meets a sense of the delicate, as the material becomes radiant with light upon its undulating and curvilinear surfaces.

My recent work is reminiscent of the series I produced during my year-long residency in France at La Napoule Art Foundation. There I amassed yard after yard of colorful tulle to cascade from the historic château’s second story windows, and all over, inside the buildings, and around the gardens, using the architecture as the relational subject for the fabric. Several of my tulle pieces engage with the spatial voice of architecture to disarm our automatic rendering of invisibility to these spaces, and to awaken what we have taken for granted: A ruffled rim softens a corner in brilliant orange and pink twists of tulle; a splurge of color occupies a small spot on a very large wall. I take doorways, edges, skylights, emptiness, and dress them with my tulle pieces. The work gives voice to a transitional space, the edge of emptiness, utilitarian and invisible but indispensable in our need for its existence. It is an invitation to seeing with the body.

My sculptural pieces are directly aligned with the notion of abundance, which I view as an unstoppable force of life that transforms and moves forward in living things, no matter how humankind might evolve or devolve. In love with the natural world and often informed by it, my works have always provoked within me a narrative that invites dialogue beyond the formal to also show a sense of wonder at the aliveness of being. In *Cloud: The Birds are Praying for Us*, a previous outdoor installation, the tulle fluttering in a wind-swept Rocky Mountain valley became a performance in celebration of the impractical; a tribute to ever fleeting temporal transitions in the natural world sited beneath a mercurial Colorado sky. Whether it be to fill a gallery in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, with a ceiling-high sculpture consisting of colorful starched petticoats crocheted out of necessity by the women I know in mountainous Peru, or an installation of tattered sandals at the Museo de las Americas to represent the diasporic journey of immigrants, I find inspiration in the beauty that surrounds myself and the determination and the buoyancy of others. The medium for this speaking is textiles. The communal hands and processes are the force that come together to make it alive. It is my deeply felt intention to illuminate the thirst of the heart, and what occurs behind the veil, the pattern, and the labor of our lives.

In the installations and sculptural pieces, I often include the handwork of others that reach back to traditions surviving through time. During my childhood in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Spanish women of my family would come together to sew, crochet, and embroider, sharing the everyday with one another. These spontaneous circles of women gathering with a common purpose always held something intriguing for me, a power that was difficult to define but impossible to ignore. The community they build has no use for the ego of an individual, making way for the well-being of the whole as the focus. The things my mother and grandmothers made from fabric and thread were expressions of the communal spirit. All the beauty — the hours of work, the washing and ironing — became invisible, a setting for the table that would inevitably be laid and stained with food. In my practice, I am interested in these unacknowledged feminine forces of work, and in the feminine uncontained. So full of love, perseverance, clarity, generosity, and joy, it wants for nothing. It is presence itself.