

## I

### *Jacaranda Mimosis* instead of Sakuras

Tatsugoro Matsumoto arrived in Mexico in 1896 during the first wave of Japanese immigration to Mexico, after a stint in Peru. During the regime of Porfirio Díaz<sup>1</sup>, he became the favorite gardener of the elite in the emerging Roma neighborhood of Mexico City. In the early thirties he began planting jacaranda trees in his gardens, in both the capital and the rest of the Republic, following the orders of president Pascual Ortíz Rubio.<sup>2</sup> Jacaranda trees grow up to 20 meters in height and yield an abundance of lilac blossoms from March to April. The blooming happens after all the green leaves have vanished. The blossoms are later replaced by bright green leaves.

In Japan, when cherry blossoms, or "Sakura", bloom, they become the center of the "Hanami" ritual celebrating Spring, Hanami meaning "looking at a flower".<sup>3</sup> Cherry blossoms also grow in Washington D.C., as the trees there were a diplomatic gift from Japan to the U.S. in 1912. Matsumoto, facing the impossibility of planting Sakuras in Mexico, given that their blooming requires a drastic temperature change that doesn't occur in Mesoamerican climates, selected the tree species *Jacaranda Mimosis*. The species is typical in Brasil, Peru and other areas of South America, and shares with cherry blossoms an explosive simultaneous blossoming, coloring public urban spaces. In jacarandas, the color is lilac.

Lilac color dots Mexico City in the Spring, and is the color which Sarah Crowner (Philadelphia, U.S., 1974, based in Brooklyn, New York) takes as a seed to develop a body of work consisting of eight paintings and eleven collages. The works are accompanied by constellations of small jacaranda plants inside the gallery. This installation and the present publication mark her first exhibition in Nordenhake Mexico. The eight paintings define groups of curved geometries and follow the artist's thread of investigation over the last decade. The specific methodology of her practice consists in first painting rectilinear or oval fragments of canvas with one single color of diluted acrylic paint, leaving visible brushstrokes which evoke body movement. Then, the painting is structured by sewing together the fragments with a machine in squared forms, to finally be mounted on a wooden frame. The sutures reveal the composition of the work, where the joints both divide and unite the color-shapes, signaling again the body by recalling the stitches of wounds. The unions (or divisions) compound the relationships already laden in the sections of color, generating an affective agency, as if the lively color forms wanted to at once strike each other out and converge.

Beyond working with canvases, Crowner expands her production to works in ceramics of different scales, either produced in her studio in Brooklyn or in collaboration with the Suro workshop in Guadalajara, Mexico. The works and large-scale ceramic installations are sometimes ephemeral in exhibition spaces, on other occasions permanent –as, for example, a swimming pool in Veracruz<sup>4</sup> or several recent works that are integrated in architectonic collaborations with Mexican architect Tatiana Bilbao.<sup>5</sup> The fluid mechanisms of Crowner's artistic thinking also bleed into the fields of dance and clothing. Crowner's way of working not only connects with the first Avant-gardes' cross pollination of disciplines, but also with the notion of the post-media artist of the 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

## II

### Collage

Collage is an immediate technique. It allows for radical spontaneity, despite holding the possibility of being refined, should such a result be desired. Crowner's meditative process of cutting and sewing canvases reflects this paradox of medium. In these particular canvases, the seams make the work whole –a network referring directly back to the jacaranda's veins.

The potential radicality of collage, no doubt, caused it to emerge as a genre in early Avant-garde disruptions, during the second decade of the twentieth century. Henri Matisse is a key figure for Crowner, who is particularly drawn to the cut-out works he produced when he could no longer paint due to arthritis, late in life in the 1940s. Collage continues to be a relevant strategy in contemporary art, having a strong presence in the practices of Guatemala-based Elisabeth Wild<sup>7</sup>, the German Rosemarie Trockel<sup>8</sup> or Crowner herself. Cut-out photographs in the compositions of Crowner's collages illuminate iconographies and concepts fundamental to, but otherwise invisible in, her final works on canvas: plants, fashion or architecture.

The scope of this publication reaches beyond the series of collages to a flow of images carefully compiled by the artist, signaling the workings of a contemporary mind. Crowner's atlas develops around the idea and the imaginary of the jacaranda and concretizes in a sequence that at first sight could seem thematically distinct, but it is not. She creates a constellation of entities that follow a complex, precise system of affects conceived by pure intuition.

<sup>1</sup> Porfirio Díaz was veteran of the War of the Reform (1858–60) and the French intervention in Mexico (1862–67), Díaz rose to the rank of General, leading republican troops against the French-imposed rule of Emperor Maximilian. Seizing power in a coup in 1876, Díaz and his allies, a group of technocrats known as "científicos", ruled Mexico for the next thirty-five years, a period known as the Porfiriato.

<sup>2</sup> President Pascual Ortíz Rubio governed from 1930 to 1932 and connects with Matsumoto, who was Porfirio Díaz's gardener. Matsumoto's descendants in Mexico City still own a flower shop in the Roma neighborhood. Sergio Hernández Galindo, *Los que vinieron de Nagano: una migración japonesa a México*, Artes Gráficas Panorama, Ciudad de México, 2015

<sup>3</sup> The contemplation of the cherry blossoms has an existential philosophical meaning linked to brevity, to life and the enjoyment of it, because its flowers fall from the branches before withering. The Sakura are the symbol of the samurai, for whom dying in battle before aging is the ultimate honor. In the legend of the ritual suicide of a samurai in front of a white cherry tree, the blood dyes the flowers, mythically explaining the color of its flowers. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherry\\_blossom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherry_blossom)

<sup>4</sup> See the pool and its construction in several pages of the present publication. Sarah Crowner, pool for artists' residency Casa Proal, San Rafael, Veracruz, México, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> The renowned architect Tatiana Bilbao (Mexico City, 1972) has developed important projects among which are the Botanical Garden of Culiacán, Sinaloa (2012), outstanding sustainable housing buildings, or the exhibition hall of the architectural park Jinhua, Zhejiang, China (2004-06), among many others. The architect and Sarah Crowner currently collaborate in a building by the Mexican coast where the artist integrates ceramic tiles in several ceilings of the space.

<sup>6</sup> A post-media artistic practice isn't defined by any specific media and is open to embrace different ones. Several art historians such as Rosalind Krauss have discussed the term post-media or post-medium since it was first used by Felix Guattari around 1990.

Rosalind Krauss: *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Félix Guattari: "Towards a Post-Media Era." (1990) In: *Chimères*, No. 28, Spring-Summer 1996, Engl. transl. at <http://www.postmedialab.org/towards-post-media-era/>; 30.6.2013. Repr. in: Clemens Apprich, Josephine Berry Slater, Anthony Iles and Oliver Lerone Schultz eds.: *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*. Lüneburg: PML Books, Mute, 2013, p. 26-27

<sup>7</sup> As a relevant example of contemporary collage, outsider artist Elisabeth Wild (Vienna, 1922) shows in exhibitions thanks to the integration of her work in her daughter's Vivian Sutter exhibitions, such as the Documenta 14 in both Kassel and Athens (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Rosemarie Trockel (Schwerte, Germany, 1952) works with different media including sculpture, textile or ceramics as well as collage, that has recently been acknowledged as playing an crucial role in her artistic thinking.