

## Ximena Garrido-Lecca Estados nativos [Native States]

by Lucrecia Palacios

A sort of modern counter-narrative, *Estados nativos* [Native States] describes the return of industrialized copper to its origin as raw copper. Ximena Garrido-Lecca placed a large spool of electric cable in the exhibition space, and from that spool extracted the copper threads it contained. These threads were in turn melted down, yielding copper in a liquid state which, through the lost wax technique, forms the crystals which can be seen in the showcases of the third exhibition room. The exhibition constitutes the record of a process, providing us with the elements that allow us to reconstruct it. It is not the first time the artist has conceived of an exhibition of hers as a working mechanism. In 2015, in Lima, *Arquitectura del humo* [Architecture of Smoke] set in operation an oven which produced bricks inside an 80-square-meter gallery<sup>2</sup>. The bricks, as they built up, created barriers, walls or bulwarks, an architecture of blockage and control of the sort we encounter in airports, marches or recitals (wherever a lot of people gather whose movements must be supervised). The use of construction materials both identical and geometric was a wink at the poetics of North American minimalism; the material and the production processes referred to native artisanal processes.

*Estados Nativos* hews, in this plan, to simple narrative linearity and concrete references to preindustrial processes in work with minerals, the ancient methods of ovens, blowtorches and precarious bricks that Garrido-Lecca observed in the workshops of jewelers in Lima, and which she reproduces in the exhibition space. This broadens, furthermore, the artist's previous experience using copper, a material she has in fact handled since 2013 in sculpture work in which the metal takes on the form of a fabric. Garrido-Lecca thereby reckons with the strong relation between mining, industry, the rationalization processes of nature and the progressive disappearance of the artisanal traditions they imply.

Called "the true veins of progress" in the pamphlets promoting mining, copper has marked the growth of the auto and electric industries since the start of the 20th century. Today, Chile and Peru are the great exporters of this metal, which is extracted through huge opencast pits. The social conflict the development of mining brings with it is well-known. There is no mining venture that does not unleash claims and clashes concerning the environmental impact extraction and purification of metals produce, in addition to the effects on local economies and populations.

It is also well-known that, since the '90s, a mining boom is on in Latin America. For the last two decades, the big mining works, beyond carrying out overwhelming processes of concentration, have persisted in the project of transnationalizing or exporting environmental risks. That is to say that they have moved their extracting centers to Latin American and African countries. Thus, under the guise of development and increased labor, they have essentially updated economic networks of the viceroyalty and reactivated the colonial imaginary with respect to mining – reviving images such as that of the Cerro Rico in Potosí, to name only the best-known and most symbolic–, but they have also shed light on the nearly synonymous relation between neocolonialism and liberal economics.

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Mining as a topic of concern –and, it can be said, as the economic activity that best epitomizes the ideology of progress– appears in various works by Garrido-Lecca. In 2013, for instance, in *Los suelos* [Soils], her first solo exhibition in Lima, she presented *Yacimientos* [Deposits], a video showing the changes in architecture and life-style of the population living on the outskirts of Cerro de Pasco, since the tunneling out of the deposits, as it proceeds, forces the local population either to mobilize or to go live in other spaces.

Jean Genet wrote that one of Giacometti's dreams was to make one of his sculptures in order to bury it later. Giacometti wanted it to be found after his death, long after his name will have been forgotten. This might be also considered the evolution of *Estados nativos*: the final manifesto of the work in progress would seem to be that, once the artist has finished the copper spool, and filled the showcases with stones, she –or any observant viewer– can take one of those stones and bury it again, returning it, as they say, when speaking of mining, "to the bowels of the earth."

Thus, it can be claimed that this project echoes with the original relation that sculpture maintains with the funeral monument –for we mustn't forget that sculpture, after all, is the basis for Garrido-Lecca's work–, together with the tragic element in the artist's work; a work of Garrido-Lecca's from 2010 consists, in fact, of the reconstruction of a large wall of funeral niches. This would, moreover, complete the cycle of re-naturalization of the metal, which, fortunately, and after centuries, would dissolve into dust, perhaps once again forming more rock.

Be that as it may, *Estados nativos* preserves in museum showcases re-covered copper, and in this way it leaves in suspense –and in a delicate balance– what we can construe as a metaphor in each of the rooms. Culture and nature? Industry and Art? Industry/production and Museum/culture? Progress and history? Internationalization and localisms? It is on these tensions that Garrido-Lecca's work is focused.

Although *Estados nativos* insists on the artist's concern in the face of the destructiveness of the ideology of progress, in reversing the extracting processes and industrialization of copper, the exhibition seems to question the possibilities for thinking anew about the relation we establish with nature and, ultimately, the possibility of ceasing to take as second nature the history of modernity: how to take apart the narrative postulating the manifest destiny of nature as resource and the geopolitical division of nations in relation to the resources each of them has.

Without being a regressive utopia –the exhibition contains neither a proposal for "overcoming" anything nor an elegy for what Hobbes calls the "state of nature" –, *Estados nativos* is an invitation to ask oneself what is lost in the passage from natural copper to industrialized copper –the same material is a stone that gleams like a jewel or that is hidden behind the prophylactic sheath of a cable–; what other possible forms and values (social, cultural, economic) the unexploited mineral contains. Like other works by Ximena Garrido-Lecca, *Estados nativos* is also a sample collection of artisanal traditions which are destined to come to an end but which are still, however, preserved.