



Elena Climent

In Search of the Present
En busca del presente

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Elena Climent in her studio, New York City, 1992

Cover illustration: **Altar of the Dead with Relatives**, 1991

Elena Climent: Recent Paintings

Edward J. Sullivan

FOR ANYONE FAMILIAR with daily life as it is lived in Mexico City, the paintings of Elena Climent produce an instant shock of recognition. This is not to say that she depicts any of the famous “monuments” of the city. Nor does she present us with anything that could be called (touristically speaking) “typical.” There are no market vendors or watermelons in her paintings. What she describes (in a true but never photo-realistic way) is the interior structure of the life of middle class Mexicans. We virtually never see their faces; we only perceive them through the things they leave behind—on kitchen tables, on pantry shelves, in the niches where Christmas creches are set up or in the intimacy of the bed and dressing room. Climent’s paintings palpitate with life or, rather, are redolent with the warmth of the existence of people who never consciously do anything “artistic” but whose everyday behavior (the way they set a table, arrange a store window or decorate a home altar) evidences an innate reverence for the appearance, shape and color of things. Climent paints simple objects but she does not glorify or dignify them. There is an intensely personal alliance between the artist and the things she records on her canvases. She is happy and at ease with what she paints and the act of registering these objects gives her intense pleasure. Indeed, one can almost sense that if the viewer is pleased with them their creator

would be happy but it would not necessarily pain her if the things she paints were to be dismissed as “unimportant” by someone.

Elena Climent’s work might almost be called “anti-nostalgic.” The kitchen pots and pans she paints are more likely to be made out of plastic than earthenware. The children’s toys that clutter her vitrines are not the fanciful animals or traditional dolls that we might see in paintings by Rivera or Maria Izquierdo. They are cheaply made recreations of television wrestling heroes or knock-off varieties of American Barbie dolls. A shelf painted by Climent might contain a chromo-lithograph of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Santo Niño de Atocha alongside a can of hairspray or a shocking pink lipstick. It is what these objects say about life today in a specific place—as well as the natural affinities of their shapes and colors that fascinates this gifted artist.

Elena Climent’s art developed in a climate of insecurity, in an age of *con-undra*. Mexican artists of the 1970’s were attempting to come to grips with the changes that the late 60’s had brought to society. Their artistic expressions, maturing in the 1980’s, sought originality without conformity to imported values or prototypes. While they did not want to revive the past they could not wholly reject it as had the generation of painters and sculptors before them. Yet the models of an earlier time seemed insufficient to express the anxiety of the present.

Things were no longer pretty. Space was no longer limitless—public squares appeared smaller and smaller and the places people lived and gathered together seemed to be ever more reduced in scale. Past reflections of daily life in Mexico could not possibly be recreated—the times and places represented in the art of the painters of the 30's and 40's had become the substance of myth and legend. Contemporary life left little room for legend—even if their vocabulary were based on the language of the tele-novella. What Elena Climent has been able to do so well is to create alternatives for herself. Just as she is a basically self-taught artist she has fashioned her own private

strategies for dealing with the past and present. Her visual language is unique. It does not contain the ironies, sarcasm or despair of many painters of her generation. She accepts the reality she finds, internalizes it and makes it into a realm of her own. For the past several years Climent has lived in New York. The distance between her physical surroundings and the places in Mexico that she paints has added an even deeper dimension of thoughtfulness and sobriety to her work. Places and moments are crystallized into frozen drops of time. They are

looked at and analyzed by the artist in order to extract from them their essential qualities. Far away from Mexico City Climent is able to objectify the artifacts of middle-class life which she recreates. This distance helps to divorce any hints of sentimentality from her pictorial scrutiny. Her subjects are never depicted as fetishes of modern life but simply as its signifiers.

Elena Climent's paintings are also, in a curious way, about power. When speaking of "power" I do not mean the

power of domination and control but the power of self assurance and personal strength. There is a particular potency to these representations of what is specifically, in many



Altar in a Taxi Stand, 1991

cases, a woman's domestic reality. The kitchen, dressing room or child's bedroom are some of the principal settings for her paintings. Her art depicts the locus of female presence. While there is often a nonchalance to the places and things in her work there is, at the same time, a sobering gravity to the inner life of these objects and what they tell us about the persons with whom they are associated. In Elena Climent's work there is a rare honesty and openness infrequently encountered in art today. □

Interview with Elena Climent

Edward J. Sullivan

EJS Since when have you been concentrating in your art on scenes of domestic middle class reality in Mexico?

EC I must have begun to paint in this way in about 1986. Before that I had painted things that had to do in a certain sense with what I paint now. I've always done interior views but the earlier ones were more imaginary. They were loaded with nostalgia. When I was growing up, nostalgia was a very strong force in our lives. Anyway, I began to realize that my "imaginary" paintings were becoming too repetitious and so I began to look outside my own reality.

EJS I know that much of your earlier work was in a somewhat surrealist vein.

EC Well, in a way I'd always been involved in both the real and what you might call the surreal. It's like an artistic schizophrenia. The world in which I was raised was very divorced from real life. Our father, an exile from the Spanish Civil War had created a scale of aesthetic values for us that was really ferocious. The separation of our lives inside the family circle from the outside was really dramatic. The aesthetic ideas with which I grew up were more European, more classical. Symmetry and harmony were important. But the rules we followed weren't those that existed in Mexico. For example, as children we always had to dress within a certain range of colors.

We couldn't wear anything too bright because that would be considered vulgar. Lack of order was also something not to be tolerated. Good taste was everything for my family. Everything had to be exquisite and refined.

EJS Would you say that this type of attitude toward life was "anti-Mexican" in a sense?

EC No, not anti-Mexican but just unrealistic. In fact, there were many people in my father's circle who were very concerned about traditional Mexican things—objects, old woods, natural fibers and so on—plastic was considered horrible. They were concerned about so many things that were part of a Mexican reality that no longer existed. They tried to reject the banal things of life. And those everyday things were the ones I ultimately realized I had to depict in my work.

However, I think it's important to explain that this aesthetically rigid upbringing was actually a very positive aspect of my development. It was so overwhelming and people were so secure in their ideas about how things should be that it made it all the more important for me to fight it and rebel against it. It actually gave me the strength to generate my own vision, my own path for my art. I also have to recognize that the influence of my father



Kitchen Cupboard, 1991

on my art was in so many ways of enormous importance for me. He taught me a great deal and I am very grateful for his influence.

EJS How have people tended to react to your fairly objective representations of the mundane aspects of everyday life in the Mexican capital?

EC At the beginning people thought that what I was doing was horrible but there's a greater acceptance of it now. When I began I doubted that I would ever be appreciated. People considered what I was doing to be vulgar—I was looked on almost as a traitor to the way I'd been brought up. However, when I had an exhibition at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City in 1988 I was sure that there would be a very negative reaction but I was surprised that so many people identified with what I painted. People of my own group generally liked it—much to my amazement. They looked at my work and said, "Yes, things really are like that." They discovered beauty in things that they had been trained to dismiss as ugly or vulgar. I was also gratified to see the great number of visitors to my show from different social classes. Very rich people as well as people like the guards or the maintenance staff of the museum came and looked with real sympathy at what I'd done.

EJS Do you consider yourself as part of a specific "generation" or group of Mexican painters?

EC I don't know. I've always been a loner. I am self-trained and it never

seemed to me that I did things the normal way. Yes, I do feel, in general, a part of a "generation" of artists insofar as I'm confronting the same problems as everyone else, not only in Mexico but in the world. I feel that everyone is looking for some urgent reason to preserve a certain amount of optimism about life in a moment when there's a real pessimism around. Insofar as contemporary Mexican artists are concerned, I've been able to see a lot more of their work since I've been living in New York and I realize that there are tendencies and preoccupations in their art that we have in common. I am surprised to see that there are so many parallels with my own work so there must be things "in the air" that we're all concerned with. For example, there's a definite trend to return to realism and a specific way of treating objects and color that's similar in many of us. There's a rejection among us of the canons of the preceding generation. We reject Europeanism in art. We were told in school that we should imitate European art but we don't want to. Abstraction is also something we reject, although there are marvelous abstract artists. I feel something of a tension between us and the previous generation. We're often attacked by the older artists as "folkloric" painters. For example, if any of us paints a Virgin of Guadalupe, that's it...we're immediately marked by these older artists as simple folklorists. My principal idea has been to search out things in Mexican life—traditions and customs that aren't moribund but are very much alive—things that are regenerating themselves. I want to show that there really is a Mexican reality today,

one that's not coming to an end but rather is very much alive and constantly regenerating itself. I go to Mexico twice each year and I'm always seeing a continuation of what I'd observed before. This really has nothing to do with nationalism because I believe that what I'm painting has universal value.

EJS How has your work changed living in New York?

EC Well, it's been evolving but I guess it would have evolved had I stayed



Candy with Superman, 1991

in Mexico. However, being in New York has made me more conscious of certain things that don't exist here. At first I tried to find equivalents in New York to life in Mexico City but I soon realized that there are very few such equivalents and I began to wonder why. One of the things that was most striking was the difference between being poor in Mexico and being poor in New York. Here, being poor is a shameful thing, perhaps that comes from the Protestant ethic. But in Mexico people consider that it's simply a ques-

tion of bad luck. In the end God will even things out. In Mexico the poor have a great sense of pride and this is reflected very much in their aesthetic sense. In Mexico poor people must fight to not let themselves become overwhelmed and swallowed up. This comes out in the fact that anything becomes an excuse for beauty. There's a great decorative sense in Mexico. I've become much aware of that being away and it's affected my work. Another great difference is color. For example, the sorts of industrial colors available in Mexico can't be bought here. My own paintings have become brighter since I've been in New York. My earlier work was more austere.

EJS I know that when you go to Mexico you take a lot of photographs. Do you consider these photographs as works of art in themselves?

EC Well, not really. I don't have a great technique. Some turn out very well but others don't. I don't consider myself a photographer. I really use my photographs as a dictionary. I have many notebooks with photos in them and when I want to paint a door or a pot I look through my notebooks at all the details I've gathered in my photos.

EJS Could you talk about your methods of composition and technique?

EC The first thing is that my ideas for a painting—for its composition—come to me in an instant. Sometimes I actually compose the objects in my studio if I can—although I often can't. I don't do preparatory drawings for my paintings. I



Cookie Package on Newspaper, 1991

think that this would actually be counter-productive. It would kill the spontaneity. The first thing I do on the canvas is sketch the composition—quickly put the elements in the place that they eventually will be. When painting the picture I try to reproduce the process that the object itself underwent in its own creation. For example, if I'm going to paint things in a bag I paint the objects first and then paint the bag around them. Or I paint a window frame and then after that the windows themselves. Insofar as is possible, I try to recreate the real life process. This is essential for me. I often try to find out exactly how things were made so that I can paint them truthfully. I'm very sensitive to the way things look and interact with each other—reflections, distortions, etc. I am very concerned about placement—how the back of a surface interacts with the front and the visual effects they produce.

EJS Your paintings have various sizes. Can you explain any differences in concept between one size and another?

EC The size of a painting makes a big difference in its mood or atmosphere. A small painting is very focused; it has its own world within it whereas a big painting is more explosive. It's done to have a greater impact from afar—so there are big differences that relate to the size. Sometimes I work on a small and a large painting at the same time to maintain a certain equilibrium. Each size painting is very exhausting to do—but each in a different way. A large picture is filled with emotion. I'm in a more agitated state when I paint them. In a certain sense the large works are more conceptual. You're always concerned about how it will look from a distance and you have to paint more indistinctly so that it will make sense from far away. Brush strokes are much freer and the images have to be more synthesized. A small painting is more like the work of an artisan. What will be seen is exactly what you're painting. You are at the same distance as the viewer will be.

EJS What about the middle sized paintings?



Altar with Christmas Ornaments, 1992



Altar with Blue Tiles, 1992

EC They're more or less like the small pictures in terms of the way I do them and their effects.

EJS Could you say anything about specific influences in your art—in either subject or style—or of artists you've admired?

EC Well, there are lots of artists I'm very interested in. There's something to learn from virtually everyone. When I think about questions of light, I always think about Matisse or the light of the Impressionists. In terms of paintings with greater detail, Flemish Renaissance art comes to mind. Insofar as subject matter

is concerned, I'm very impressed by Maria Izquierdo, Olga Costa and other women painters of that period. Although they're of a different time, they dealt with things that were as relevant and meaningful to them as the things I paint are for me. There is a freshness in their work that I don't often find in paintings by many artists of today. In general though, no matter what I look at I learn something from it.

EJS Are you very conscious of any specific female-ness in your art?

EC Not necessarily. I hardly have any consciousness of my own identity



Yellow Kitchen, 1991

when I'm painting. However, I'm certainly conscious of being a woman artist—and it's caused me a number of problems, especially in Mexico given the position of women there. And I certainly have empathy for other women artists. I feel as if I'm going beyond those unspoken rules of what it is to be a woman and an artist. Perhaps I've been a bit too aggressive for a Mexican taste.

EJS As a Mexican artist living in the United States what do you see as the present and future role of Mexican art—and Latin American art in general—in the consciousness of a North American public?

EC There's certainly more of a willingness now to take it seriously. I've seen a change in this even since I arrived in this country and it gives me a certain optimism. It seems as if there's a tremendous desire to search for new sources of vitality in art. So much art being done now in Europe and the United States is very conceptual—so cerebral, driven purely by ideas. And it's getting somewhat tired. I think that Mexico has an extremely powerful visual tradition—its visual heritage is stronger than any other cultural element. When people outside of Mexico realize this I think that it will be something that they will actually need as a source of artistic energy for them. □

In Search of the Present

Elena Climent

ONE OF THE MOST difficult challenges in my life has been trying to bring together with some common denominator my different backgrounds and the contradictions they produced in my up-bringing.

My father was a Spanish artist and an exile from the Spanish Civil War. In 1939 he sailed to Mexico with many others who, like him, were fleeing the new fascist government in Spain. He never saw his parents again, and he saw his siblings only after some 30 years. In Mexico he had to begin a whole new life for himself. He was then 42 years old.

I think that after his first years in Mexico, once the fascination and surprise of this new vast and marvelous country had calmed down, his nostalgia for the world he left behind settled in him forever.

All throughout the rest of his life—his second life one may call it—he surrounded himself with a universe of his creation, impregnated with fantasies and painful recollections of that lost world which became more and more legendary: the Mediterranean world which he evoked in his surroundings, in his home and in his art. He painted, over and over, his dreams of his Spanish memories, the even-more-remote dreams of other dreams, Spanish dreams, memories from the times of the Arabs, of the times of Mediterranean splendors, a fascination for whichever trace was left of all those long-gone people who travelled from one coast to another selling, buying, trading. Who exactly they

were didn't matter, what mattered was the feeling, the flavor, the atmosphere that all that long-time-ago memory was wrapped in and, above all, his love for it and the great pain for its loss.

He painted mostly objects, and when they weren't objects, when they were people or landscapes, he treated them as if they too were objects: ancestral, timeless, immortal, silent and full of secrets never to be known. His objects made you think of those you could find in a burial or in some distant market, at a stand where they sold antiques that have travelled through places and times, no one knows how long or how much, until they arrived at that very place and into your own hands by pure chance.

Mystery and fantasy can help you soothe some of the pain for a loss, and I can imagine how for someone whose life had been cut in two an object can acquire that magic quality of triggering those comforting dreams. Maybe this is why my father surrounded himself with so many of them, why he painted them, and why he could produce that wonderful atmosphere around him, perhaps it is what gave him a feeling of continuity between his two lives. It was a world created from his dreams, from his oldest memories which seemed to be not decades, but centuries old. And it was inside this world of his that I was born.

My mother's past was not a presence like my father's, and she transmitted to us no sweet or magic recollections from her own youth. Her background was completely different. She came from a working



Bricks and Clothesline, 1991

class Jewish family of Brooklyn, and her childhood seems to have been very grim. Her mother died early, leaving four young children, and her father had to work very hard and had little time for them. The little my mother would tell us about her childhood I recreated in my mind in a cold and cloudy atmosphere, a sad image produced by my mother's sadness.

She was much younger than my father, and was probably overwhelmed by him. She had abandoned her origins, married

out of her faith against her father's will and, as did my own father (for this they did have in common), she wanted to choose her own identity.

The idea of marrying a Spanish artist whom she found distinguished and handsome and whose life-style probably evoked in her that of the European artists that we see photographed in their studios during the first decades of the centuries; black and white photographs of spaces with high ceilings, full of books, paintings



Yellow Wall with Birdcage, 1990

on the walls, perhaps an African mask, some ceramics, the artist himself sitting on a couch with pillows made from some ethnic fabric, half of him in the shadow, half in the light that came in through a tall window (at an angle). The artist probably smoking a pipe and looking at a book. How seducing this must have been!

But trying to raise three daughters in a foreign country, in a new language, married to a man of overpowering personality who didn't seem to understand that the world had changed since his childhood, 60 years before, must have been exasperating.

Just getting us to go to school was a struggle because my father didn't see the need; he even questioned the value of learning to read and write. "They can sign their names with an 'X'," he'd say, half joking and half serious.

My mother was also worried about the fact that we were growing up without an identity. She couldn't raise us Jewish or Catholic with my father, who despised any institutionalized belief. He was of Catholic origins, but after his father's efforts to turn him into a priest, he turned out an atheist and would have been a declared anarchist if he weren't so much against being called anything. When asked about his nationality or religion he would declare himself to be a mammal, and refuse to specify any further.

So here we were, the three daughters of two people who came from completely different backgrounds, trying to decide what we were supposed to be. The only thing that was clear was that we were Mexican, because we had been born in Mexico and were being raised there, and to this both of our parents agreed.

Being Mexican became very important to us, and we took to this with the determination of a convert. Sometimes when you aren't quite in the middle of things you have a better perception of your environment and a greater capacity to appreciate it, and this was certainly our case.

But we weren't Mexican like our Mexican neighbors, we were Mexicans who could see things from the outside. Because our home was different from the other homes, and our parents didn't think like the others. They were constantly transgressing social rules and we, as children, were very sensitive to the tensions this caused. I think that this is part of the reason why we became so aware of the codes of behavior around people who surrounded us and learned to deal with them with great ability.

We didn't belong to a social class, and at the same time had access to all of them, from the very rich, to the very poor. We could feel quite comfortable in any home and knew just how we were supposed to behave in each one of them. But what we were and where we belonged was not clear. As a matter of fact, we were many things at once: the poor people who lived on the north side of our neighborhood accused us of being rich, white and foreign. To our neighbors from the other side (Mexican conservative upper-middle class Catholics) we were bohemians and Jewish. In the American School, where my mother sent us in spite of my father's complaints, we were poor and Mexican, and had to deal with conflicts that would even lead to violent fights. It was only in the circles of my parents' friends that we were just normal and could feel comfortable. But it was a world that had little

future for us, the younger ones. It was based on shared nostalgias, dreams, a taste for wonderful environments that were representations of these dreams of old times, real or not real. It was wonderful. All these homes we visited, where we would all gather for parties, or 'happenings,' as I later called them, were recreations of a perfect world that everyone believed to have existed at some point in their memories. Beauty as seen from a classic point of view; objects carefully organized, matching colors, harmony, composition, symmetry, the light coming in through a certain window at a particular time of day, hitting right on a specific corner of the room in such a way

that would remind you of a painting, perhaps a Rembrandt. The background music, the lit fireplace as the heart of everything, someone sitting next to a lamp, drawing. Maybe someone would read a poem, perhaps a musician would entertain us with his music, a friend who could cook would prepare a very special meal for the occasion.

As I grew out of childhood I appreciated this more and more. I loved it, and as a teenager my life was enriched immensely by these countless gatherings of artists, musicians, writers. Those years were full of

meaning and artistic inspiration. I decided to become a painter at age 16, and took to this enterprise passionately. When I look back now, I can't help smiling, remembering myself walking in the streets, sighing before every artistic ornament, sighing before paintings, sighing before an old facade, a carved door, and even though now I realize how, in a sense, my artistic boundaries were constrained, I think it was wonderful and I'm grateful for having lived through such an experience.

In these times, when one of our biggest enemies is the feeling of senselessness, of void, of a general categorical disbelief for anything that we can't explain, of the overvaluation of the intellec-

tual over the sensitive, I consider myself to be very lucky to have grown up in an environment where things were flooded with meaning and feeling.

Even though it was a world that could nurture me only until a certain point, it was crucial during my first and most vulnerable years as an artist.

Later on, it became too constrained, because it fed on the past and therefore could not offer me a place in my own future, as a full grown person. Like a baby inside a mother's womb, there had to come a point where I could fit inside no longer



Still Life with Flies, 1990

and would have to be born into my own self. And this was one of the most painful and frightening experiences I've ever had.

Leaving this safe, appealing, warm, beautiful existence, where things made perfect sense and where I could understand the rules of the game to go out into the vast, ugly, confusing world that had always surrounded our fortresses, our oasis, and to look there for some new reason to create, to develop an identity of my own seemed like an almost impossible quest.

Besides, from the point of view of the people from within, this was a completely senseless and ridiculous need, and even perhaps a bit of a betrayal. How could I, who had been brought up in this wonderful environment, with the best aesthetic values, with good taste, fall into this attraction for vulgar things?

But I did not find them vulgar. After a long process of looking, searching, of roaming around the city without knowing what to look for, I suddenly learned to see in a new way. It took me a long time to understand that I couldn't expect to find an answer within the aesthetic rules that I had originally been taught. Until then everything that I drew (for at the time I was more of a draftsman than a painter) had a very strong influence of this mixture of classic, renaissance, timeless flavor. Whenever I looked for inspiration I had to withdraw from reality and go into an inward spiral, searching within my feelings, my dreams, my fantasies, and those of my parents and my friends' friends.

I do not regret having been like this. I feel that nowadays I can still benefit from that capacity which can at some points be very enriching. But at that time I definitely needed new motivations to create outside

myself and outside the artistic world I had been brought up in.

In those years, when I was in this stage, I retired temporarily from the art world to change techniques, from drawing to painting. I did some travelling in Mexico, inside and outside the city, and I looked everywhere in all directions, trying to absorb as much as I could. I wanted to store images in my memory and do something with them.

I must have been very well disposed and ready to perceive things in a certain way, when one night, while driving through a poor neighborhood, I saw a grey brick house in the darkness with a window that had a curtain of brilliant colors: pink with blue flowers. With the light shining from inside the house it looked like a movie screen. This vision hit me so hard that, once back home, I tried to make a painting of it.

This was my first painting in a series that I later called "Flor de Asfalto" (Asphalt Flower). This new style turned out to be an answer for what I had been searching. I had finally found a new way to see that gave a new sense to my surroundings, and with this new way of seeing, I discovered more and more sources of inspiration. Slowly, I learned to understand better what it all meant, in a way how it worked, both in the landscapes and in the interior scenes.

If you judge a place like Mexico City with classic values of order, symmetry, control of proportions, then you won't like the results. You will only see disorder, chaos, and ugliness everywhere.

In order to understand such an environment you have to change your visual and aesthetic codes. First of all, you can't

see it as something static. The urban Mexican landscape is in constant change and it is in this process where you can find its interest and beauty.

When we look at, let's say, Venice (or even more so the Venice of Canaletto), you will see a landscape that was created to last and to stay the way it was. It is there, before you, easy to understand, logical, orderly, symmetrical. The city was created—like the painting of the city was created—to be appreciated from certain angles. As a spectator, you don't need it and you don't want it to change. In a way, this wonderful landscape was planned to its completion.

Mexico City is a very different story. To understand how it looks you need to see it in its process of eternal change. Like crystals growing on each other, every new element in Mexico City will appear already transformed by other former elements and it will have a decisive influence in the next ones to come.

A home is built in a newly colonized neighborhood. Then, perhaps a few years later, will come the pavement and the sidewalk. The sidewalk happens to be higher than the house entrance, and it will cover a good part of it. The owners of the house will then add inside steps improvised with big rocks to be able to enter the house comfortably. A few houses further down, the sidewalk is too low for the entrance doors, and so the steps will be added on the outside. The awkward spaces left by the new sidewalk and its capricious layout will be filled in perhaps by plants inside cans, even by an altar, if a generous enough space is created. Anything is possible, as new spaces are constantly being created by the random-

ness of urban growth. A window pane is broken; it will be replaced by some piece of glass—perhaps a different type of glass—a bathroom glass, a colored glass, and eventually, after more replacements have been done, the window will acquire the appearance of a collage. The door: while waiting to buy a brand-new iron door, a provisional one will be built out of pieces of boards, of a tin sheet, of an old propaganda poster printed on some resistant material. Plant pots: anything can be a plant pot. A row of identical supermarket bags filled with soil with geraniums growing inside can decorate the top of a wall that is waiting to be further amplified when more bricks become available. The waiting can be long, and when its time is due, another waiting period will have begun for some other improvement.

And so goes the story of Mexico City, a big story made from millions of individual stories, of endless alterations of space, amplifications, divisions, ingenious solutions for problems that no one else will solve. It is a very dramatic and moving story and, as such, it must be understood in its own way.

So this was my breaking out from the closed aesthetic world I had been brought up in. I knew I would never be able to get rid of all of the traits it left in me, and I didn't want to, either. As I said in the beginning of this article, one of my challenges has been to bring it all together, my inside and outside world. Maybe the common denominator I have been looking for is art itself, where we are all elevated into the same search from transcendence, and where we are all equal. □

Checklist of the Exhibition

Altar of the Dead with Relatives, 1991
(Altar de muertos con familiares)

oil on canvas
46 x 54 inches

Bricks and Clothesline, 1991
(Muro de tabicón con tendedero)

oil on canvas
46 x 54 inches

Yellow Wall with Birdcage, 1990
(Pared amarilla con jaula)

oil on canvas
53 x 42 inches

Geraniums with Squirt Sign, 1991
(Geranios con letrero de Squirt)

oil on canvas
28 x 36 inches

Kitchen Cupboard, 1991
(Alacena)

oil on linen mounted on panel
32 x 24 inches

Yellow Kitchen, 1991
(Cocina amarilla)

oil on linen mounted on panel
18 x 24 inches

Still Life with Flies, 1990
(Naturaleza muerta con moscas)

oil on linen mounted on panel
18 x 24 inches

Altar with Blue Tiles, 1992
(Altar con azulejos)

oil on linen mounted on panel
18 x 24 inches

Altar in a Taxi Stand, 1991
(Altar en parada de taxis)

oil on linen mounted on panel
18 x 24 inches

Medicine Table, 1991
(Mesa con medicinas)

oil on linen mounted on panel
18 x 24 inches

Cactus with Window and Pink Rabbit, 1991
(Cactus con ventana y conejo rosa)

oil on canvas
14 x 16 inches

Toy Indian with Cactus, 1991
(Indio de juguete con cactus)

oil on canvas
7 x 5½ inches

Cookie Package on Newspaper, 1991
(Galletitas con periódico)

oil on canvas
7 x 5½ inches

Plastic Salt Cellar with Carnations, 1990
(Salero de plástico con claveles)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Tecate Can with Electric Plugs, 1992
(Lata de Tecate con enchufes)

oil on linen mounted on panel
7 x 5¼ inches

Oranges with Chile Powder, 1992
(Naranjas con chile piquín)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Candy with Superman, 1991
(Dulces con Superman)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Altar with Broken Glass, 1991
(Altar con vidrio roto)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Altar with Christmas Ornaments, 1992
(Altar con adornos de Navidad)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Toy Stand, 1992
(Jugueteritos)

oil on linen mounted on panel
5¼ x 7 inches

Elena Climent was born in Mexico City in 1955, the daughter of the Spanish artist Enrique Climent. She has taken art classes in Mexico City, Valencia and Barcelona, but is fundamentally self-taught. In 1972 she had her first exhibition in Mexico City and in 1988 she had a solo show at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Her work was featured in the exhibition *La Mujer en Mexico* which opened in 1990 at the National Academy of Design in New York and then traveled in 1991 to the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City and the Museo de Monterrey. More recently, her work has been exhibited at the Parallel Project Gallery in Los Angeles and in a special exhibition of contemporary Mexican paintings at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

This is her first solo exhibition in the United States. A second one-woman show will be held at the Galería de Arte Mexicano in Mexico City in October, 1992.

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