

Exhibition text by Laura González Palacios

*To remember this brings painful joy.
'Tis a human thing, love,
a holy thing, to love
what death has touched.*

Judah Halevi (c.1075–1141)

No one is free from loss. To live is to die and, yet we endeavour to keep pain at a distance from our lives, only grudgingly acknowledging its presence when we are left with no other choice. Pain is the natural response to any kind of loss, and to live means to accept rituals of mourning. If we open ourselves up to reconciling with life and with death on their own terms, we will find a way to stop seeing loss as something meaningless, something that comes from beyond us, and we will start understanding it as a tendency inherent to the deepest level of human experience.

In this exhibition, Dominican artist Julia Aurora Guzmán, pinpoints the value of mourning and the importance of living through it in the present tense. A conscious tense that takes on the quality of space and unfolds within it. With symbolic zeal, her pieces present a meticulous composition and act as a key to open up a rift between times, between worlds and realities. Through imago-affective representation, Guzmán evokes that sense of nostalgia that lingers on once one has lost direct access to a source of love in an ordinary state of affairs: the pages from her late grandmother's empty photo album, coconut mesh from the island where she no longer lives, ceramics from a kiln in which she while no longer fire anymore pieces, burnt paper, bone, the parenthesis between them... This nostalgia occupies an emptiness full of content triggered by the memory of past presences and transpires between the "not-yet" and the "no-longer", which the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel assigns to "the spirit whose path [...] no longer ascends to its peak but, satiated by the peak's riches, descends to its home."

Guzmán's practice revolves around support centres and systems, both personal and collective, physical and emotional. Through her work, in which she combines forms and materials, she depicts the fleeting nature of life, honouring births and deaths in order to always circle back to the present moment. Now, in the centre of the room, a wink to the Japanese term 'nagori', which means 'the imprint of the waves', takes form in Wave Column. Recumbent here, the sculpture evokes streams etched into the sand, sea foam, shell fragments and other detritus that the waves leave behind as they ebb away from the beach. Created during an artistic residence at the European Ceramic Workcentre in the Netherlands in late-2020, the wave is made out of clay with a high concentration of firesand that manages to hold up the structure without any other additives. In this way, the artist expresses the need to move what we harbour inside us so as not to come to standstill, while also yielding to the stillness of the instant captured to appreciate all the detail. In still, Julia Aurora takes pause to honour, resume and complete creative processes from the last three years, a time in which she has also been creating pieces since she moved to Barcelona and has been a resident at the La Escocesa art factory. Those pieces form a new body of work and won't be on display in this exhibition. Another form of mourning that spreads out across the ancient sinuous forms of bone china, that now flows with hot wax until it sets on the paper, that breathes with the fire that burns it, that colours in the place in the album where there were once photos and now seems to etch out rashes. Sore territories that shift between the will and surrender to the present tense, to the space that can open up in its entirety, to everything that must transpire between the "not-yet" and the "no-longer".

They often say that time cures all things, but I beg to differ. If, among the gifts attributed to our routine time-line (cronos), we can locate the course of life, it is not clear that the mere passing of time is enough to work through the processes of mourning in dignity and hope. Or enough to set in motion the possibility of repairing the harm caused by loss. Mourning is a new territory each time round, past experience or shortcuts are of little use for passing through it. It is not linear; rather, it comes in waves and is bound up in the kairós aspect of time: that moment, set apart from the commonplace, in which something important happens. That's why it is easy for news of loss to embed itself deeply in the memory in the aftermath of how, when and where it is imparted. Our untold pains, the stories that pile up around us and that we disregard, block us off from accessing that form of the present that honours absence. It is our duty to feel and mourn loss. Because it is not time that cures, but rather what we do with it. And yet, whether it is for bearing the loss of a loved one or our ordinary everyday mourning that looms up as a response to a lack of trust in life, to the burden of frustrations and disappointments, we need to find meaningful ways of speaking about pain and understanding mourning as a profound form of activism. It is in the here and now that we have the chance to do so.