



STRENGTH & FRAGILITY: Silvia Turbinder's Paper Sculptures

BY GENEVIEVE NORDMARK

NESTLED IN THE SUBURB OF MARTINEZ, AN HOUR AND A HALF BUS RIDE OUTSIDE OF BUENOS AIRES, is the home and studio of paper artist, Silvia Turbinder. In an earthy and intimate room with classical music playing softly on the radio, a message hangs on the wall. It reads "If you think you can, you might. If you think you can't, you're right." It is an apt philosophy to inspire a woman

who left a successful career in architecture to pursue her creative interests in fibers.

"At that time I felt like Wonder Woman: raising kids, teaching, and building my professional career. Till I said, 'That's it. I've had enough of commitments. I'm going to work only in my things, teaching and creating.' It was perfect. Oh! My father! He said, 'You're crazy, how are



OPPOSITE PAGE
LEFT: **Que no nos atrape el morir (May not be caught by death)**; 2008; kozo fibers; handmade paper: 1.70 x 0.35 m. (67 x 14 in.)

TOP RIGHT AND BACKGROUND:
Deconstrucción (Deconstruction); 2012; kozo fibers; woven randomly; 2.50 x 1.00 m. (98 x 39 in.)

THIS PAGE
RIGHT: **Morada que un soplo desvanece (Blown with a breath)**; 2013; kozo fibers; weaving of kozo fibers; 2.30 x 0.30 m. (90 x 12 in.)

you going to live?' But it was the best thing I could have done." Almost twenty years later she has built an equally successful career as an internationally exhibited visual artist and teacher to students who come to her from multiple disciplines.

Traditional paper-making methods and materials are a starting point for her work although her process quickly diverges when the fibers inspire her. Traditionally, Eastern paper-making fibers, such as kozo, are cooked in a caustic solution to ready the fibers for sheet formation, but Turbinder's pieces rarely take the form of sheets. "I separate the fibers by hand. For my first piece I was like, 'What did I find?! Wow!' Because it was a mistake. I was cooking and it wasn't a very good [batch]... I started pulling and playing with the fiber." The results are often like *Deconstrucción*, large, three-dimensional pieces that are woven in the air, seemingly fragile, but inherently strong.

Recently *Deconstrucción* was exhibited in Palais de Glace, a museum in the Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires. "I hung a white fabric behind it because the shadows from the piece are amazing." The fabric fell down onto the piece, but even though the threads are "very, very, very thin," it was not damaged. This is the recurrent theme in Turbinder's work, the contradictions involved in being human, primarily the ongoing dance between strength and fragility.

Her work is also about identity and the quality of existence, memories appearing through different layers of cracking skins, and the presence of the void. In *Que no nos atrape el morir*, a kozo paper sheet tapestry is held together with laid fibers, the light illuminating every vulnerable path. The sheets were wetted then tinted with watercolors that were drawn on after drying. "I wet the paper because it's the only way that the color flows. What I like is that you don't have any control over that.



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That's good, for once, to not have any control."

It is common for artists working in paper fibers and book structures to make editions or multiple copies of pieces, but even though the undercurrent of her thematic interest directs Turbiner's body of work, the pieces are unique in composition and approach. "I like the challenge of doing something new. But I won't repeat a work. Doing a work for the second time, exactly the same? Never."

Her recent work, *Fossil*, an altered book, is an example of this. It is reminiscent of a previous series of three altered books but stands alone as its own

composition. "There's always an idea behind the work before I start, always an idea. I have to draw and write it down. There is something inside, there's meaning and substance... If not, I don't want to do it just because it's nice... I need to express myself."

To see more of Silvia Turbiner's work visit her website at www.silviaturbiner.com.ar/

LEFT: *Fossil (Fossil)* (front); 2014; paper book and handmade paper of cotton fibers; altered book; 0.20 x 0.20 m. (8 x 8 in.)

Genevieve Nordmark is a recent graduate of SUNY-ESF's MPS program in paper and bioprocess engineering and author of the blog *The Fiber Wire* www.thefiberwire.com

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