

## No Linear Narrative: Ana Esteve Llorens

Mary K Cantrell | Austin 2020

On a recent Sunday afternoon in Austin, I was on my way to meet Ana Esteve Llorens at Grayduck Gallery on East Cesar Chavez Street to discuss her current exhibition “Space is Reality.” I was groggy after pulling a 13-hour work day the day before, and was prepared a standard gallery visit — one in which the artist walks me through their exhibition, describing their work, their processes and their inspirations.

What I was not prepared for was for Llorens to immediately ask me how I felt about her art and for her to encourage me to bring *my own* story to the multimedia, sculptural work. Llorens hopes that gallery visitors will approach her work as she does, with a less absolutist and more democratic approach to meaning.

“Maybe there’s not even a narrative meaning as we expect,” Llorens told me. “Like, ‘what does this mean?’ Maybe it means that you have to go around (a sculpture) 10 times, or you start jumping in front of each piece, or maybe you dance in front of the green one.”

She’s hesitant to tell the personal stories behind any of her art works, fearing this will disqualify the piece from further individual interpretation by others. This makes Llorens a particularly difficult artist to interview, and only when I start to open up about my interpretations, was she ready to engage with me.

The ‘green one’ she refers to is “Untitled (A Long Horizontal Green I & II),” two horizontal framed panels of intricately handwoven fabric hand dyed by Llorens using natural pigments — indigo and zacatlaxcali, a flowering plant found in Mexico. The particular shade of green is inspired by the garden at her childhood home in Valencia, Spain.

Llorens jokes that the piece acts as a functional non-organic garden for your house, a piece of nature you don’t have to take care of.

Elements of the exhibition have been specifically constructed with the gallery’s space in mind — a grouping of assorted cabinets in the middle of the floor space challenge us to consider the body’s relationship to stationary objects. A column upholstered in naturally

dyed gray handwoven fabric — inspired by minimalist master Robert Rauschenberg's "Column" performance (1962) — punctuates the gallery space just inside the entrance.

Playing with the concept of zooming in and out, Llorens' domestic-scaled objects give way to a large, architectural installation in the gallery's high-ceilinged back room. Titled "Space is a Reality," the enormous bright white monolith and the Donald Judd-esque cube make you feel almost ant-like, dwarfed.

Her smaller objects, "Untitled (Units for Space)," are akin to furniture but are less practical and more fantastical. Her cluster of open cabinets — some made of plywood, others of sapele wood — feature stainless steel mirrors and are crafted using whimsical measurements [Llorens uses the example of measuring the distance from her elbow to her pinky]. And yet everything appears to have perfect, measured proportions, and to follow the mathematical golden rule. The mirrors, in which reflections change depending on the angle and light, act as alternative realities.

Llorens's exhibition is full of juxtapositions — of nature existing beside the machine, of the inside blending with the outside, and of objects that are both strange and yet familiar.

Llorens was born in and raised in Spain where she trained as an engineer. She holds a master's in Sculpture and Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University, and since 2005 she has lived between Spain and the United States.

Contrast is a hallmark of her artwork: "I think that has to do with my experience of living between two countries. There's an intermittency of presence and absence."

Llorens practices a kind of artistic restraint, always questioning whether new elements add value to the work. The objects in "Space is a Reality" and their appearances shift depending on one's vantage point, making the exhibition ripe for surprises and different perspectives.

"There's not only one point of view. The piece changes life with the movement of the room which for me is very important," says Llorens.

“I think that always relates to meaning and how there’s no linear narrative, maybe it’s more of an open-ended narrative.”

This text was published on the occasion of the exhibition “Space is a Reality”.