

TO TOUCH A PLACE

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It is difficult to categorize Ana Esteve Llorens' work because, in it, she negotiates the artistic problems and history of three different fields: anthropometry, design, and textiles. Her canvases reveal their structure, reminding us of their status as movable objects anchored to the architecture, by body that transported and positioned them. These gestures reveal a reflective legacy of minimalism—very present, yet rearticulated in the artist's work—where the condition of "object" is defined by a scale affinity between inert bodies (sculptures) that intersect with the movements of other perceiving bodies. We can consider *Untitled (Modularis Naturae)*, a set of modules sharing a mathematical relationship based on the golden ratio, and derived from the artist's height, as the key to *To Touch a Place*.

The application of the golden ratio (1.618033988749894) as a compositional principle to generate a sense of harmony and gravity, combined with the selective use of primary colors, are strategies from the history of design and art that Ana employs to focus our attention on the nuances and infinite subtleties of the artisanal processes underpinning this body of work. Initially trained in engineering—a field that seeks to optimize processes, scale the range of human intervention, and perform precise calculations that anticipate the transformation of the material world—this artist seems to seek in textiles a medium through which to challenge the efficiency aspired to by her original discipline, using a process of sensitive integration. At the same time, she softens the rigidity of the relationships between materials and spaces established by the minimalist tradition mentioned earlier.

The eleven works that comprise *To Touch a Place* are the result of a residency the artist completed during June and July 2024 at the School of Crafts (in Mexico City), under the guidance of Maestra Beatriz Rodríguez. This public school is part of the National Institute of Fine Arts and, since 1980, has provided direct, expedited, and specialized training for technicians in various artisanal processes, such as ceramics, woodworking, jewelry, and, of course, textiles on looms. This experience as a visiting researcher is Ana's second, a decade after training for a semester at this same institution (2014)

To Touch a Place alludes to the haptic connection that enables Esteve Llorens to bring awareness to the process of being, inhabiting, and becoming part of a space through her practice—a space that is affective rather than merely physical.

The research that brings this exhibition to life is characterized by a meticulous selection of tools and materials, each of which has undergone phases of intense experimentation and learning, determining key artistic qualities in this body of work. The textile elements of the works were executed on a pedal loom, also known as colonial loom, because it was introduced in New Spain in the 16th century. To this day, a vast network of Mexican artisans continues to use it.

Starting with a cotton warp, Ana wove wefts using European hemp yarn dyed with local natural Mexican dyes. Hemp is a plant native to Asia, with systematic use dating back to the 1st century AD. It is more resistant to pests and requires less water for growth compared to cotton. Hemp is also iconic in the provinces of Valencia, Alicante, and the Andalusian region. However, in the 20th century, the cultivation of hemp faced challenges and even prohibitions due to the ban on medicinal and recreational cannabis. These fabrics are presented here in the orientation in which they were woven on the loom.

The ochre yellow, the dominant color in *To Touch a Place*, sets the tone for a palette of primary colors, as the first skeins were dyed with *Zacatlaxcalli*, a natural dye that is easy to gather in areas near Mexico City. This parasitic plant, with rudimentary and ephemeral roots, grows like a web of noodles over certain vegetables and shrubs. In evolutionary terms, this plant has ceased to photosynthesize, assimilating all the carbon and nutrients from its host, which is why its coloration has turned intensely yellow. Since its propagation is wild, it is impossible to predict the saturation of ochres it will offer, as this depends on the chemicals absorbed from the other species. Its fresh fibers must be pounded, boiled, and strained before being impregnated through another boiling process into the threads to be woven.

The availability of Brazilwood bark in city markets dictated the presence of magenta. To obtain the dye, these wood shavings must soak for thirty days before boiling. Depending on the pH of the water, the containers used, and exposure to sunlight during the drying of the threads, tones can range from orange and red to deep purple. The variety of pinks attests to the different temporalities of the materials in interaction.

Undoubtedly, the most complex tones to obtain are indigo. This procedure is disappearing (although some families continue to maintain it in states like Oaxaca in southern Mexico). The substitution of this raw material with highly industrialized and toxic alternatives is precisely where anilines derive their name. This color is extracted from the foliage of the indigo plant, subjected to a labor-intensive process in a series of open-air pools, specifically built for this purpose, through which water flows at each step: hydration, oxygenation, straining, and obtaining a paste that petrifies and rehydrates when the fibers are boiled for dyeing. To include this range of tones, the artist used this dye in rock form.

To Touch a Place is a meditation on the cenesthesia of an expanding body and the actions taking place in different workspaces (the workshops and the gallery), as well as the motor and perceptual finesse at play in the countless microspaces, perhaps perceptible, between the weft and the warp.

This text was published on the occasion of the exhibition "To Touch a Place".
Translated from the original Spanish version by Ana Esteve Llorens.