



Codigo roto



Diptico patrones de moda



# EDURNE ESPONDA: CÓDIGO PROPIO (PERSONAL CODE)

**THERE** was the feel of ceremony in the room where the large abstract paintings of Mexican painter Edurne Esponda hung before me. I had seen Esponda's work before at Ernden Fine Art Gallery in Provincetown, a splendid, small contemporary gallery where she was introduced in the 2006 season, but not on such a scale. I had come a long way to see them again, navigating across Mexico City, from the metro stop at Constitution Square, the grand plaza at the heart of the city, to the lovely, treed, urban neighborhood of Pelanco. Each wall of the viewing room held an enormous, dynamic painting. Mexico is an extroverted country and Esponda's paintings embody that spirit.

Esponda spent her early days in Oaxaca in the bright southern light, the spectacular, rugged mountains, and perhaps most importantly, among the large indigenous population who carry a history of color and craft and courage unrivaled among pre-Hispanic people. There were 27 tribes established in the valley long before the Aztec empire. Oaxaca has nurtured many of Mexico's modern artists, including Rufino Tamayo, Rudolpho Morelos and Francisco Toledo.

This legacy lies at the heart of Esponda's work - the dramatic landscape, the visual language of color and texture, and underneath, like the layers of paint on old stucco walls, a pentimento in all her paintings, a repeating code, brings time into the work. This code, image reduced to sign, seems to be Esponda's resolution of the debate between image and abstraction.

One of these tribes is the Mixteco, their land, La Mixteca, the "place of the cloud-people." Esponda often begins a painting with the glyphs of Mixtec código, a minimalistic "writing" that is an amalgam of signs and pictures. She traces it onto the raw linen, repeating and repeating until she discovers her own translation of color, form, atmosphere and rhythm. Or she may see the code repeated in the external

world, in bar codes at the market, in a distant city skyline. "Código Roto (Broken Code)," a collective work of 22 narrow paintings of varying heights, more than 7 feet long shown together, is a deceptively simple bar code of extraordinary scale and color. It is, perhaps, a redemptive act, inspired by Esponda's desire to re-gather indigenous culture - compromised, broken by succeeding empires, the Conquistadors and our arrival at existential fragmentation. "Everything is already done," she tells me. "Now it is in the way we interpret things."

In a recent body of work, she has appropriated the nomenclature and iconography of the fashion industry, where for many years, before turning full-time to painting, she devoted herself to design and all things couture. She is influenced by the woven patterns in textiles, the hand of the fabric, color attuned to the seasons. She paints on antique tapestries, or jacquard; old roses bloom through transparent white. She embeds modern codices of cutting patterns beneath the surface of her deeply pigmented pure oil paint. Esponda uses no medium and often exhibits a prodigious tactile authority in her gesture. She paints only with the knife.

Esponda's palette reveals an empathic relationship with color.



Esponda E, Ocre

She trusts only natural light to give her the truth, so she must make use of the daytime, sometimes painting from sunup to sundown. She uses paint from many manufacturers, but her red is always Mexican. One five foot square red painting fairly hypnotized me as I entered the viewing room. I know why the bull can't look away. Relief from the tension of the dense, passionate, dominance of red was in a lower corner, asymmetrically pierced with deep cobalt.

Edurne Esponda's most recent exhibition was titled "Código propio - Personal Code." Her paintings, reduced to color, sign, and gesture powerfully communicate our shared desire to define place, self and meaning, wherever we are. Esponda offers us her own personal dialogue with modern culture and the human history of Oaxaca, Mexico, and the world.

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