

Isabel Cauas

"And now I had reached a lonely spot, where no race of man could be seen, and whence I seemed to have no communication with any living thing"

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Magnificent Wilderness: Maria Graham's Interior and Exterior Landscapes

ISABEL CAUAS Artist Statement

Landscape has been the inspiration for my career from the beginning, and trees have been the protagonist, appearing at times and disappearing at others. There is a play between the abstract and the figurative, which intertwine in the landscape, and likewise, days of blue skies coexisting with dark nights.

I think my work is inspired on an emotional response to the natural world. I observe the landscape itself, and then I paint or engrave intuitively in the solitude of my studio, so that the work will have a sense of place and can at the same time evoke the viewer's own



▲
Juan Fernández, detail
monotype

memories and personal interpretations. There is a feeling of intimacy and intensity, and the idea of a fleeting glimpse into a remembered reality.

I build my images from small domains, showing fragmented microworlds. These fragments may take the forms of windows through which it becomes possible to view into and out from my inner being.

My desolate landscapes often remain unfinished, inviting the viewer to complete them and roam over them.

I like to approach engraving pictorially first, with graphic strokes followed by the application of values and hues, usually monochromatic, on a copper plate with or without cutting, and surprise myself with the resulting inverted image built by the planes and transparencies creating infinite monotypes. At the same time, my approach to painting is graphic, very close to engraving, by playing at causing deep, permanent cuts in the piece.

My hope is that, once completed, my work may become its own thing with its own existence, which begins a dialogue and states its own demands on the viewer. This is my invitation.

I also should like to describe what my unusual process was and how I arrived at the resulting monotypes in the works I have developed for the *Lands, Real and Imagined: Women Artist Respond to the Art and Travel Writings of Maria Graham (1785-1842)* exhibition.

As an initial step, and in order to internalize, I began by reading Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in Chile during the Year 1822*. Maria Graham's way of writing about and describing our landscape has had an enormous impact on me. Finding someone who, 200 years earlier, felt and was moved like I was, by roaming over the exact same spots—so familiar and well-known to me—of the Chilean landscape, has been very gratifying.

There is a part in her journal that so aptly describes what I feel and has touched my soul. It was written on the Island of Juan Fernández on El Yunque, a hill where I have stood, that was very hard to climb and reach. There she was, 200 years ago, feeling moved by my very own landscape, painting the same horizon, from my very vantage point.

“...And now I had reached a lonely spot, where no trace of man could
be seen, and whence I seemed to have no communication with any
living thing. I had been some hours alone in this magnificent wilderness ;
and though at first I might begin with exultation to cry—
“I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,”
yet I very soon felt that utter loneliness is as disagreeable as unnatural;
and Cowper's exquisite lines again served me —
“Oh, solitude ! where are thy charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place.”
And I repeated over and over the whole of the poem, till I saw
two of my companions of the morning coming down the hill,
when I hurried to meet them,
as if I had been really "out of humanity's reach...”

JANUARY 26TH
P. 352

In working, I really did not take the illustrations as a source of inspiration to create my monotypes—I preferred to connect with those places where we had both been and where the descriptions she gave of them in her Journal were somehow my own. I also decided to include objects that honor Maria Graham in various situations: a volcanic rock, which represents the seismic woman and her contributions to this important science in Chile; a sprig of chamomile recalling her love of, and research on, the native plants of our country as the naturalist woman she was; a gourd for drinking *matte* together with its straw, telling about her enormous interest in attaining an intimate knowledge of our society and what the barrier meant to her that she was able to cross in order to socialize with our culture; and finally, a Quinchamalí ceramic piece to recall her visits to the hills, to the workshops where she also worked with clay to create and steep herself in the local artisan craftwork.

Each monotype or object has a specific quote relating to a text in her journal, and these are included and exhibited in chronological order in the show. I feel that I'm connected for life to this artist traveler, with her constant search for new landscapes. I am excited to be in places in nature where very few people have ever been. I enjoy a solitary walk, in silence. I am a collector—as she was—of objects, stones, leaves, and sticks that somehow help me appropriate the places where I have roamed—to study in the case of Maria Graham, and in my case to recall and be inspired for future works.

Beyond a doubt, I no longer view the landscape the way I did before. Now I have her with me, describing and whispering in my ear to pay attention farther beyond.

Isabel Cauas

► **Cuesta Zapata**, detail
monotype

**ESTA MAGNÍFICA
TIERRA SILVESTRE:
LOS PAISAJES
INTERIORES Y
EXTERIORES DE
MARIA GRAHAM**

ISABEL CAUAS
Declaración del Artista

Desde el comienzo de mi carrera mi obra ha estado inspirada en el paisaje, siendo el árbol el protagonista que aparece y desaparece por algunos períodos. Hay un juego entre abstracción-figuración del paisaje que se entrelazan entre sí, así mismo los días de cielos azules coexisten con oscuras noches.

Creo que mi obra se inspira en una respuesta emocional al mundo natural. Observo en el paisaje mismo y luego pinto o grabo intuitivamente en la soledad de mi taller, para que la obra tenga un sentido del lugar y, al mismo tiempo, pueda evocar recuerdos e interpretaciones personales en el espectador. Hay una sensación de intimidad e intensidad, y la idea de un vistazo fugaz a una realidad recordada.

Construyo mis imágenes desde pequeños dominios, mostrando micro mundos fragmentados, algunas veces estos recortes tienen formas de ventanas donde mirar hacia y desde mi interior es posible.

Muchas veces mis desolados paisajes quedan inconclusos para invitar al espectador a completar y recorrerlos.

Me gusta abordar el grabado de manera pictórica primero con trazos gráficos para luego directamente aplicar valores y tonos, normalmente monocromáticos, sobre una matriz de cobre con o sin insición y sorprenderme con el resultado de una imagen invertida construida por los planos y transparencias creando monotipias infinitas. Por otro lado, mi acercamiento a la pintura es gráfico, muy de la mano del grabado, jugando a provocar insiciones permanentes y profundas en la obra.





Espero que al finalizar mi obra se convierta en una entidad con su existencia propia, que empiece a dialogar y a plantear sus propias exigencias al espectador. Esta es mi invitación.

Me gustaría describir cual fue mi inusual proceso y de como llegué a las monotipias resultantes de la obra que he desarrollado para la exposición “Lands, Real and Imagined” Women Artist Respond to the Art and Travel Writings of Maria Graham (1785-1842).

Como primer paso y para interiorizarme, partí leyendo “Diario de Residencia en Chile Durante el año 1822”, la manera de escribir y describir de Maria Graham acerca de nuestro paisaje me ha impactado enormemente. Encontrar a alguien que 200 años atrás haya sentido y conmovido igual que a mi, recorriendo exactamente los mismos rincones, para mi muy familiares y cotidianos, del paisaje chileno ha sido muy gratificante. Hay una parte del diario que describe muy bien lo que siento y que me ha llegado al alma, escrito en la Isla de Juan Fernández, desde un cerro en el que he estado, El Yunque, muy difícil de llegar y subir y ahí estaba ella, 200 años atrás, emocionándose con mi mismo paisaje, dibujando el mismo horizonte, desde mi mismo punto de vista.

▲
Nature, detail
monotype

▼
Solitude, detail
monotype



“...And now I had reached a lonely spot, where no trace of man could
be seen, and whence I seemed to have no communication with any
living thing. I had been some hours alone in this magnificent wilderness ;
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“I am monarch of all I survey,
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JANUARY 26TH
P. 352

Al trabajar realmente no tomé las ilustraciones como inspiración para crear mis monotipias, preferí conectarme con los lugares en los que ambas hemos estado y en los que en las descripciones que ella hizo en su diario de alguna manera hubieran sido las mías. También decidí poner objetos que homenajean a Maria Graham en variados otros aspectos; una piedra volcánica que representa la mujer sismóloga y sus aportes a esta ciencia tan importante en Chile, una rama de manzanilla, para tener en consideración su amor e investigación sobre la flora nativa de nuestro país como la mujer naturalista que fue, un recipiente para tomar mate y su bombilla para narrar su inmenso interés por conocer intimamente nuestra sociedad y lo que significó la barrera que cruzó por socializar con nuestra cultura y finalmente, una cerámica de Quinchamalí para recordar sus visitas a los cerros a los talleres donde ella misma trabajó con el barro para crear y empaparse de la artesanía local.

Cada monotipia u objeto tiene una cita en particular en la cual relaciono un texto de su diario y en el montaje estos están Incluidos y ordenados de manera cronológica en la exposición.



► **Quintero Bay,**
detail, pottery

Creo que he quedado conectada de por vida con esta artista viajera, con su búsqueda constante de nuevos paisajes. Me emociona estar en lugares de la naturaleza a los que pocas personas han llegado, disfruto de una caminata en soledad y en silencio, soy recolectora, igual como ella lo fue, de objetos, piedras, hojas, palos que me sirven para, de alguna manera, apropiarme del lugar por donde he caminado, en el caso de Maria Graham para estudiar, en el mío para el recuerdo y la inspiración de futuras obras.

No hay duda, ya no veré el paisaje de la misma manera que antes, ahora la tengo a ella conmigo, describiendo y susurrando en mi oreja, para que me fije un poco más allá.

Isabel Cauas



◀ **Hands on
Clay,** detail
pottery



“...I can conceive nothing more glorious than the sight of the Andes this morning on approaching the land at day-break; starting, as it were, from the ocean itself, their summits of eternal snow shone in all the majesty of light long before the lower earth was illuminated, when suddenly the sun appeared from behind them and they were lost; and we sailed on for hours before we descried the land...” p. 113

Arrival, 2021
Isabel Cauas
monotype
40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



“...But my mind has bowed before him in whose hand are the issues of life and death. And I know that I cannot stay long behind, though my life were lengthened to the utmost bounds of human being. And I trust, that when I am called to another state of existence, I may be able to say,

Oh Death, where is thy sting ?

Oh Grave, where is thy victory ? ...” p. 115

Solitude, 2021
Isabel Cauas
monotype
40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



“...They are ornamented with streaks, and various patterns, in white and red clay, where the ground is black; and where it is red or brown, with black and white. Some of the red jars have these ornaments of a shining substance that looks like gold dust, which is, I believe, clay having pyrites of iron ; and many have grotesque heads, with imitations of human arms for handles, and ornaments indented on them; but, excepting in the forming of the heads and arms, I do not recollect any Chileno vase with raised decorations...” p. 142

***Hands on Clay*, 2021**

Isabel Cauas

pottery

10.2 cm x 22.9 cm



“...8th. — I went to pay a visit to the wife of my landlord, who had often entreated me to go and take matee with her; but my dread of using the bombilla, or tube which passes round to every body for the purpose of sucking it up, had hitherto deterred me. However, I resolved to get over my prejudice, and accordingly walked to her house this evening...” p. 152

Social, 2021
Isabel Cauas
mate
22.9 cm x 7.6 cm



“...Manzanilla, so called from its smelling of apples, is a strong bitter, like camomile, and is used in the same manner. It looks like camomile with the outer florets stripped off: the true camomile is called Manzanilla de Castilla...”
p. 155

Graham also sent back dried specimens and seeds from her own herbarium. From a specimen that Graham had collected in Quintero, Chile, “just as she was on the point of quitting the country,” Hooker grew a flower in his garden, thereby fulfilling Graham’s wish to see plants that were indigenous to Latin America growing in England. While Graham acknowledged that Chileans referred to the flower in Spanish as “manzanilla [sic]”, or chamomile, given its sweet aroma, it was considered a new genus by the European botanical community. Hooker renamed it *Graemia aromatica* “to commemorate the Lady to whom we are indebted for the introduction and knowledge of the individual”, and also to honor his friend and her brother-in-law Robert Graham, Professor of Botany at the University of Edinburgh. He collaborated with Graham to publish additional findings in, for instance, *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* (thirteen volumes of which Hooker edited from 1827).

***Graemia Aromatica*, (Chamomile bouquet), 2021**

Isabel Cauas
40.6 cm (length)



“...The bay of Quintero, or rather the Heradura, is very beautiful; better sheltered from the fierce north winds than that of Valparaiso, better furnished with wood and water in itself, and nearer to the supplies from Quil-lota and the valley of Santa Rosa for provisioning ships. Some rocks, very well known, lie off the mouth of the bay ; but within, excepting in a very few places, the anchoring ground is good...” p. 187

***Quintero Bay*, 2021**

Isabel Cauas

monotype

40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



“...23d.— Capt. Spencer went with us to the Cuesta de Zapata, a very steep mountain, up which the road winds in such a manner as to form sixteen terraces, one above the other, making a most

singular appearance, seen in perspective from the long straight road which leads directly to it from Casablanca...” p. 194

***Cuesta Zapata*, 2021**

Isabel Cauas

monotype

40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



“...Nothing can be more desolate than their appearance now, and perhaps the dulness of the day contributed to that effect. Midwinter still reigns ; no grass enlivens the red mountain side; but here and there an evergreen shrub, with its spiry buds still closely folded, overhangs the valley below. A bright beautiful stream breaks its way down the whole vale, and the sources of this are the celebrated baths. From under the living rock, several copious springs gush out at a temperature not below 100° of Fahrenheit. The water is perfectly limpid, and without peculiar taste or smell, but is said to acquire both if bottled up a few hours...” p. 226

***Baños de Colina*, 2021**

Isabel Cauas

monotype

40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



“...It was now twelve o'clock : the earth was still at unrest; and shocks, accompanied by noises like the explosion of gunpowder, or rather like those accompanying the jets of fire from a volcano, returned every two minutes. I lay with my watch in my hand counting them for forty-five minutes ; and then, wearied out, I fell asleep : but a little before two o'clock a loud explosion and tremendous shock roused everyone; and a horse and a pig broke loose, and came to take refuge among us...” p. 307

Earthquake #1, 2021

Isabel Cauas

stone

7.6 cm x 11.4 cm



“...24th. — Yesterday and to-day in sight of Juan Fernandez, and working for it, but could not reach it till near sunset. It is the most picturesque I ever saw, being composed of high perpendicular rocks wooded nearly to the top, with beautiful valleys ; and the ruins of the little town in the largest of these heighten the effect...” p. 347

Juan Fernández, 2021

Isabel Cauas

monotype

40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



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Nature, 2021
Isabel Cauas
monotype
40.6 cm x 40.6 cm



"...Tuesday, February 11th. — This day, we came early in sight pf the land about Cape Horn, which we doubled about sunset. There were mists and clouds overhanging the land; now and then we had fine sunshine, but oftener cold misty breezes. The coast is high and remarkable, especially about False Cape Horn, where there are several large conical hills ; but we were not near enough to distinguish them very clearly..." p. 354

***Cabo de Hornos*, 2021**

Isabel Cauas

monotype

40.6 cm x 40.6 cm