

Text by Natalia Siewicz
Portrait by Georgianna Chiang

I was introduced to Frieda Toranzo Jaeger's ecstatic and exuberant vehicle paintings several years ago at her former studio. While discussing with the artist the various forms of entrapment enforced on our bodies and minds by contemporary capitalism, I found myself intimately nestled between two of her triptych structures, whose paneled wings opened to disclose the worlds within, just like devotional altars. Through the rhetoric of concealment and epiphany that played out in front of me, the painted works exposed the anatomy of the interiors of Toranzo Jaeger's futuristic machines, the erotic topography of chassis, engines, pipe-work. Hidden within these revelatory bodies were interwoven iconographies. The first one, a lavish cockpit of a spaceship, adorned with ornaments and miniatures of refashioned portraits by Old Masters, Georgia O'Keeffe plant paintings, and abstract compositions, stood in contrast to the womb-like interior of the sensual electric car. Suspended between past and future, these works pointed towards new concepts of space and time, perhaps what one might call, queer and decolonial temporalities. If "decoloniality always occurs too late," as Kara Keeling has argued after Frantz Fanon, then what would it mean to visualize the process of manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures?

Through her artistic practice, Toranzo Jaeger has consistently challenged the overtly masculinized, white and often misogynist tradition of painting, proposing instead autonomous scenarios of desire and visibility. In her figurative works, the artist boldly explores queer kinship and sensuality as a political category, suggesting ways of thinking about pleasure that can afford agency and disrupt the colonial constructs of humanism. The electric car that features so often as a central motif and an aesthetic form on her canvases, is more importantly a placeholder for a social alliance that has the potential to destabilize sexual, gender and racial norms. Unlike many sites where Black, queer and Indigenous bodies are subject to constant containment and surveillance through racialized and gendered practices, the cars in Toranzo Jaeger's imagery become safe spaces for the performance of autonomy. Simultaneously, these quiet, driverless enclaves offer the promise of ecstatic delight; at times they even plunge into an autoerotic exploration of their own carnality.

What does it mean to feel the ma-

chine and its movements, to sense its trembling and whistling? How do we approach machines' agency and their sentience? For Toranzo Jaeger a car is not "a machine as fetish" locked in a binary feedback loop with humans. Rather, one could think of it as a vibrant actant that deserves an empathic engagement. Jane Bennett, writing about the political ecology of things and assemblages, sees the potentiality of vibrant actants in their mode to never act alone. As she writes in *Vibrant Matter*, "an actant's efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces." Bodies grind together and *interfere* with one another in Toranzo Jaeger's intimate car escapades. They embrace vulnerability and are open to sexual adventure. They come undone and move beyond their own sense of self. Hot human flesh on a leather seat. Leaves, florals and grass often grow out of the cyborg body of the machine, blurring the dichotomy between the natural and the artificial. By saturating her large-format canvases with sensuality, Toranzo Jaeger distills the bodily nature of the composition and brings her paintings to boiling point. Towards this end she uses an intensive palette of colors, and creates dense compositions rife with surprising textures. Through her interrogation of the erotic, the artist argues for a liquid sexuality, a sexuality situated on the plane of a multitude of perspectives, one that is subject to constant changes and permutations, an experience that could be at once euphoric, community-forming and integrating. Such recognition of the power of the erotic brings the promise of reorganization and re-arranging oneself anew because, as Emma Pérez has argued in *The Decolonial Imaginary*, "desire rubs against colonial repressions to construct resistant, oppositional, transformative, diasporic subjectivities that erupt and move into decolonial desires."

It is important to note that, while Toranzo Jaeger points us towards reimagined scenarios of the future, she is equally preoccupied with the celebration of her ancestral indigeneity and its material representations. Because indigeneity can be perceived as a perpetual state of suspension between threat and survival, the act of embodying indigenous kinship is something that needs to be constantly anticipated, rehearsed and practiced in order to produce sustainable results. The artist resurrects her indigenous roots by implementing into her canvas the embroidery and textile-making traditions that her relatives practice till this day. This

act of intimate, feminized labor which she performs with her family members generates solidarity and mutual recognition, as well as new modes of togetherness.

Importantly, while interrogating the pictorial plane with embroidery and textile work, the artist resists the binary categorizations of Western art history such as handcraft or painting. Instead, she sometimes offers to call her objects negative bodies, which through the act of support become an affective scaffolding for visual and psychological operations that manifest themselves on canvas. Marlene Dumas famously wrote that "a painting needs a wall to object to." Toranzo Jaeger's paintings seem to destabilize such protocols of dependency in order to assert their own autonomy in the gallery space and art history itself. In the process of uprooting the painting from its material support, namely, the wall, her freestanding altars open themselves up to their own wants and desires and unabashedly invite spectatorship.

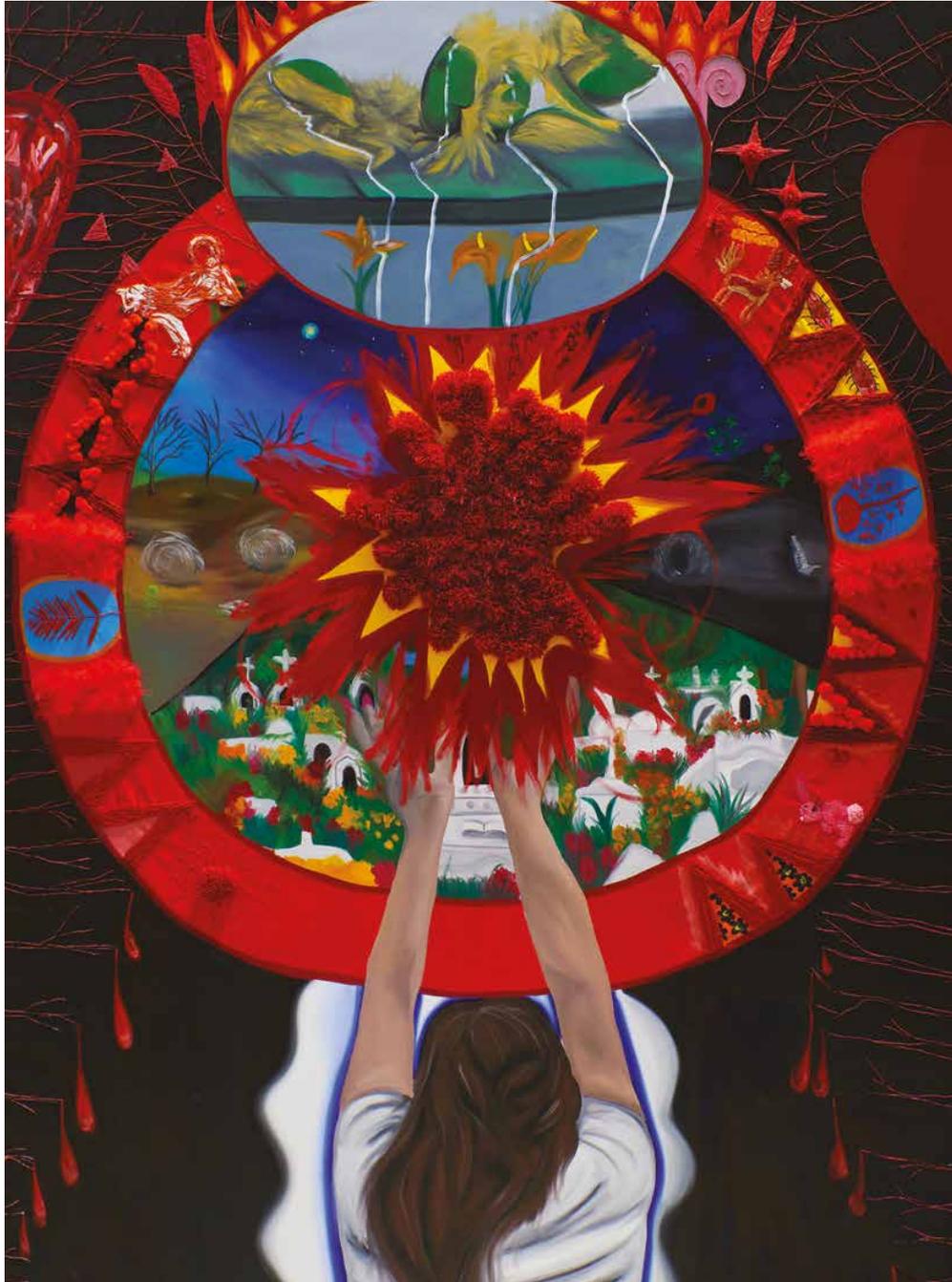
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Toranzo Jaeger



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WHAT DO YOU SEE, YOU PEOPLE, GAZING AT ME, installation view, Studio Coles HQ London, 2021 Photo: Robert Glowitzki Courtesy: Studio Coles HQ London (pp. 268-269) The Perpetual Sense of Redness, 2021, installation view, Baltimore, Museum of Art, Baltimore, 2021 Photo: Mitro Hood Courtesy: the artist and the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore (p. 270) autoflatto, 2018 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss (p. 271)

