

# PATRICIA FERNÁNDEZ

In Patricia Fernández's sculptures and paintings, objects and images are often incomplete or partially hidden. Texts are obscured, and patterns are irregular or interrupted. Information is removed from its original context and fragmented. Although Fernández uses her personal family memories and archives as the foundation for her work, her family history is riddled with blind spots and conflicting narratives. She was raised in Spain in the 1980s, and her childhood was filled with characters that her parents and extended family had known under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (r. 1936–75). During the Franco era, her family and their friends were perpetually on guard against the government, whose protocols for dealing with dissidents, masterminded by the dictator himself, included imprisonment, torture, and death. Franco's violent rule prompted many to leave the country. Those who remained by necessity or choice were driven to secrecy and silence.

Thomas Lawson describes the stakes of Fernández's familial archaeological excavation as political and psychological: "For Fernandez the terrain is made more dangerous because her particular family history is subsumed within the larger narrative of the Francoist dictatorship, meaning the potential of any uncovered betrayals, cruelties, disappointments and losses is exponentially more explosive. An act of bad faith in a regular happy family can lead to unhappiness and estrangement; the same act under a dictatorship can lead to imprisonment or death. Equally, those living in a repressive regime develop, as a means of survival, a guarded consciousness in the present, and a carefully shaped and compartmentalized memory to deal with the past."<sup>1</sup>

Exploring the instability of memory and the reliance upon a murky family history for the construction of identity, Fernández transforms already dubious family stories by intentionally combining fact and fiction in a collection of letters, collectively titled *A Series of Antecedents* (2010). Written by the artist, letters from family members and friends describe, for instance, rooms and decorative elements in homes where she presumably spent parts of her childhood. Letters to Fernández encourage her to return to Spain or correct assertions made in earlier letters. Compiled in small books or incorporated into

her sculptures and paintings, the letters offer a story of mysterious truths and suspicious fictions, giving rise to more questions rather than providing resolution. Combining found objects with original sculptures and paintings, Fernández creates a visual language that is as esoteric and obscure as the stories that she is illustrating. For *Facsimiles* (2010), Fernández arranged washy paintings, paper, dyed and sewn fabric, and carved wood objects around a wall painting and a carved wood table. Based on instructions given to her by her grandfather, a traditional wood-carver, the objects are copies of items made by him. The process of copying and elaborating on objects from her grandfather's past—which is, by association, also her past—allows Fernández both to attempt to connect to her own uncertain history and to open a space for viewers to consider a Borgesian philosophical puzzle.

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## Notes

1. Thomas Lawson, untitled essay accompanying the exhibition *Patricia Fernández / Maha Saab*, Itd Los Angeles, 2010, [http://www.itdlosangeles.com/PFI0\\_Lawson\\_text.pdf](http://www.itdlosangeles.com/PFI0_Lawson_text.pdf).