

Vicuña, Cecilia. *New and Selected Poems of Cecilia Vicuña*. Edited and translated by Rosa Alcalá. Berkeley: Kelsey Street Press, 2018. 370 pp.

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The opening of Daniel Borzutzky's introduction to the *New and Selected Poems of Cecilia Vicuña*, titled "No, No, and No *The Art of Cecilia Vicuña*," makes no mention of Vicuña as a poet or of her poetry; rather, the reader encounters the following vignette: "I saw Cecilia Vicuña a few weeks ago. She tied us up. This was a site-specific performance at the Poetry Foundation in Chicago as part of *Dianna and Cecilia Vicuña: A Textile Exhibition*" (xv).

Following this description is a photograph of the scene in which a seated audience has their hands raised and bound by the same, long piece of string. In this opening, the reader is confronted with an understanding of Vicuña as a *performer* whose work performs a *binding* and is catered to be *site-specific*. It will be these three aspects, performance, binding and site-specificity, that this volume of Vicuña's poetry will use as guiding threads to weave in and out of the selected works it contains. Borzutzky's vignette highlights how this triptych of important themes in Vicuña's work hinges upon one another allowing for a complete picture of her work's sensibilities to emerge. Furthermore, it is through poetry and poetics that this guiding thread is able to find its path for, while there may be no mention of "poet" or "poetry" in the first lines of that introduction, the performance, the binding, and the specific site where it takes place are enacting a poetics. The *New and Selected Poems* highlights what Vicuña attempts to do *with* what is conventionally understood as the poetic form, and what she is *doing to* any notion or understanding of what poetry *is*, or is "supposed to be." Vicuña's poetry threads through her *oeuvre* and is present even when the work's form does not constitute what may be easily recognizable as a "poem"; as can be noted via the inclusion of photographs, sketches, and performance notes in this volume. It is noteworthy that the book's dimensions, 8x9.9 inches, allow for the layout to reflect Vicuña's interplay of blank space and text that makes up the poems and for the large reproduction of photographic and drawn images.

Borzutzky's introduction includes an anecdotal myth surrounding Vicuña as an artist: she was doing and discussing her art as though it were conceptual art before ever having encountered the term itself (xvii). By extension, Vicuña's poetry reads as though she had never encountered the term "poetry" or "poetics;" it exceeds every constraint that may be placed on what can be constituted as

poetry. Her poetry, as this selection makes evident, cannot be bound by any singular definition or approach as to how one should write and, in turn, read poetry. This is demonstrated in the selections that made it into the volume, such as *Stupid Diary/Sabor a Mi*, *Precarious/Precario*, and *QUIPOem/The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*. Each section entry in the selected poems showcases Vicuña's distinctive styles and approaches, but binding them all is a commitment to poetry itself, to poetics. In each distinct approach, one can be read the attempt, the desire for something *more*, something *other* to emerge that a unifying style cannot in itself achieve. This search can be read in *Stupid Diary/Sabor a Mi* in the poem "Clepsydra":

I embroidered on my head long ago  
the signs of abandonment and failure  
No one had the fortune of knowing  
To which galaxies I allude with my smile. (15)

By the time they arrive at the "Uncollected Poems," readers find in "Desert Book" the description of a body inextricably bound with the landscape, the failure to articulate has somewhat been relieved, but the pressure resides elsewhere, that is, in the reader:

I write with wind  
rusting the dust

I write with breeze  
dying the stone

I write with body  
dancing the mark

I write with gestures  
temporal crossroad

my skin  
a hide

inscribed  
Earth

who reads  
the signs? (274-75)

Besides serving as a guiding thread to Vicuña's work, the strength of this collection lies in weaving a narrative through a series of windows that provides a view of Vicuña's major poetic works. However, it would be a mistake to think that the volume can act as a stand-in for any of the works it presents. These, included in this text, are in formats different from their initial publications. While this breathes another life into them, it should entice new and returning readers to seek out the curation of each work collected here in their individual presentation. There is a self-awareness that each selection is incomplete, which can be read in the "Nota de Autora/Author's Note" that begins each section and provides extraneous information about the work not otherwise captured in the selection that proceeds. In the note preceding *QUIPOem/The Precarious*, for example, the reader learns that there are two parts to the original publication: the main text reproduced in this collection and a second part that Vicuña describes as an "autobiography in debris," which "became a second book printed upside down on the back of the first" (213). This "second book" is not reprinted in the selection that follows; however its explication provides a link between the formatting of the included selection and the text as the reader would encounter it upon turning to the original publication.

The author's notes and the poems are not the only attempts in the volume to capture Vicuña's presence. The collection culminates in the "Performance Notes," a section wherein Vicuña's own handwriting is reproduced. The relationship between the artist/poet's hand and the artistic production/written word is then given space in the collection. A further relationship is also given prevalence beyond the practicality of communication and of increasing readership, that between Vicuña and her translators, above all Rosa Alcalá, the primary translator and editor. Again, thanks to the dimensions of the book, the English translation is able to mirror the original text on the facing page, loyal to formatting and spacing. The two texts do appear bound as one, that is, not presented in hierarchical formatting.

Vicuña's work as bound to specific sites most clearly manifests in the section "Precarious/Precario," specifically the entries under "10 Metaphors in Space." Each entry has a photograph, title, poem, and the location and dates of the work. Each piece is produced in a specific landscape, whether a natural one or a space in a city. Each work is dependent on specific sites for meaning; this is especially poignant in the work *Vaso de Leche/Glass of Milk* that relies on knowledge of both a Colombian and Chilean socio-political context and is performed in Bogotá. However, it is

to Chile that Vicuña's work is most tightly bound and this can be traced throughout these selections. Despite not having been respected within the country for much of her artistic career, Vicuña has continued to make reference to its politics and dedicated her 2013 publication of *El Zen Surado* to Chilean post-dictatorship youths who participated in the 2012 student protests: "the (female) students who march naked or dressed for the sake of justice. Poetry and the future depends on them" (2018, xxi).

It is important to state that, as Vicuña's poetry is bound with the political, to push the boundaries of poetry is for her to also be pushing against an oppressive political order. The back cover of the *New and Selected Poems* is printed with an endorsement from Rodrigo Toscano, an extract from which reads: "[h]erself [Vicuña] a tempest (with all the destructive force of history directly behind), she keeps deep dread at bay." Toscano highlights that the personal and the historical are bound in Vicuña's work, this in turn offers a resistance in that the "only place left to reimagine liberation in our time is in the *outer out*, beyond the nation states, past 'inter' state affairs, in other words, close in, as close as we get to our fair planet's sources, and to each other." Vicuña's *New and Selected Poems* narrates, through a sample of works, this *close in* that is also an *outer out*, a poetry that is not only political, but performs politically (?) unto itself, as if by reading we become bound by her poetry.