



Romina Chuls

parir los pétalos
APRIL 20 – JULY 16, 2023

About the Exhibit

Researcher and multidisciplinary artist Romina Chuls explores feminist issues surrounding Peruvian and Latin American women in their daily lives. Through drawing, sculpture, indigenous embroidery and knitting techniques, Chuls scrutinizes territorial demarcation, nationalism, and sexual and reproductive rights.

In the exhibition *parir los pétalos* (translating to 'give birth to the petals'), Chuls imagines a ceremony of physical, emotional and spiritual abortions defined by interdependencies and pleasure. A recent sculptural series of ceramics and textiles represents vestiges of past and future abortion practices, augmented by cross-knit looping relating to a Nasca mantle dated 100 – 300 CE (currently in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum). The graphite drawings of *Embriones Huaco* similarly reference the forms from Nasca and Mochica *huacos*, with cross-knit looping puncturing the paper surface. Informed by her study of pre-Hispanic textiles and ceramics archives, Chuls articulates an understanding of abortion as part of a collective and more-than-human fertility cycle.

About the Artist

Romina Chuls (b. 1991, Lima) holds an M.A. in Arts Politics from NYU Tisch School of the Arts and a Bachelor in Fine Arts, with a major in painting, from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Later, Romina continued her training with several Peruvian pre-Hispanic textile courses, such as brocade weaving, Paracas ringed knitting and backstrap weaving. She completed a residency focus on Mexican embroidery at Arquetopia (2017), in Oaxaca, Mexico. She participated in the Artists in Residence program at Textile Arts Center (2018-2019) and she was granted a residency at Gasworks ceramic studio (2019), both in New York City.

About the Real Art Awards

Chuls is a recipient of a 2022 Real Art Award. The Real Art Awards are a juried competition open at no cost to emerging artists from the six New England states, New York and New Jersey. The 2022 Real Art Awards were juried by multidisciplinary artist Carlos Motta, curator and creative strategist Yona Backer, and Real Art Ways Executive Director Will K. Wilkins. In addition to a cash prize and a solo exhibition, each artist receives logistical and curatorial support throughout the exhibition process. This project is supported in part by awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Edward C. and Ann T. Roberts Foundation.



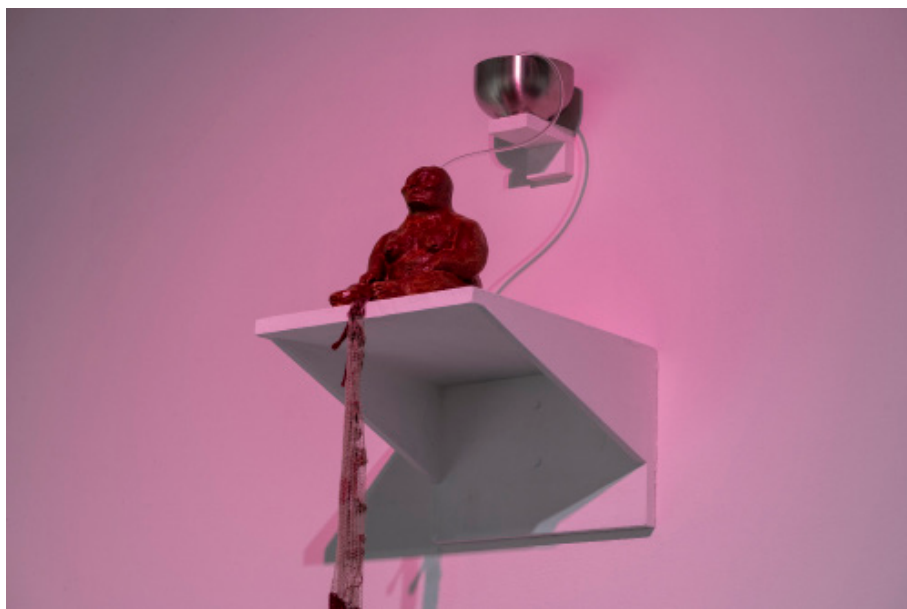
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parir los pétalos: weaving a speculative approach to abortion through fully felt interdependencies of care

Elisa Gutiérrez Eriksen

August 2023

Romina Chuls (b.1991, Lima) comes from and nurtures a legacy of women artists who, throughout the years, have fought misconceptions and biases around ideas of motherhood, womanhood, and the feminine. For her exhibition at Real Art Ways, *parir los pétalos* (2023) (*to give birth to petals*, 2023), Chuls has created a body of work that proposes an alternative perspective that imagines abortion as part of a larger reproductive cycle that extends to other human and non-human beings across space and time. Inspired by an expanded understanding of society rooted in Andean cosmologies and how we can create a sense of community beyond Western ideas, Chuls approaches the concept of abortion as a physical, emotional, and spiritual ceremony defined by interdependencies and pleasure.





Chuls' artistic practice is nourished by her activism –the experience of standing in collectivity as a potent healing tool–, by her interest in decolonial practices rooted in ancestral knowledge –in her case, manifested through the use of the cross-looping weaving techniques and ceramics explorations–, by her own life experiences and those of her familiar circle, and most recently, by a speculative exercise that originated in the Paracas Textile¹—a 2000-year-old mantle piece from Perú, which Chuls has studied for over four years².

Andean textiles are utilitarian items and ritual instruments that embody worldviews and cultural values.³ Although primarily focused on agricultural life, in the Paracas Textile, we can observe representations

1 See d'Harcourt, Raoul. *Textiles of Ancient Peru and Their Techniques*. Edited by Grace G. Denny and Carolyn M. Osborne. Translated by Sadie Brown. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1962. 169-183, Plates 88-104. Also see Brooklyn Museum, *Mantle ("The Paracas Textile")*, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/48296> (August, 2023)

2 See Chuls, Romina. *Needles hold the stories of past and future abortions*, 2022. <https://www.larevista.nyc/needlesholdabortions> (August, 2023)

3 McHugh, Julia. *Andean Textiles*. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/antx/hd_antx.htm (June 2020)



of how, in the Andean Cosmology, all earthly beings, animal spirits, and ancestors form part and parcel of all the aspects of a community.⁴ For example, as the Brooklyn Museum describes, in the Paracas Textile, “severed human trophy heads are shown as germinating seeds, suggesting the practice of ritual sacrifice and the interconnected cycles of birth and death.”⁵ Gómez-Barris explains, “Andean cosmologies find their expression in the transitions between worlds and levels of experience that are not perceivable to the extractive view.”⁶ Chuls considers these interconnected cycles as a possible path of research and proposes to bring Andean views to the present and future, locating ourselves in multi-relational terms.⁷

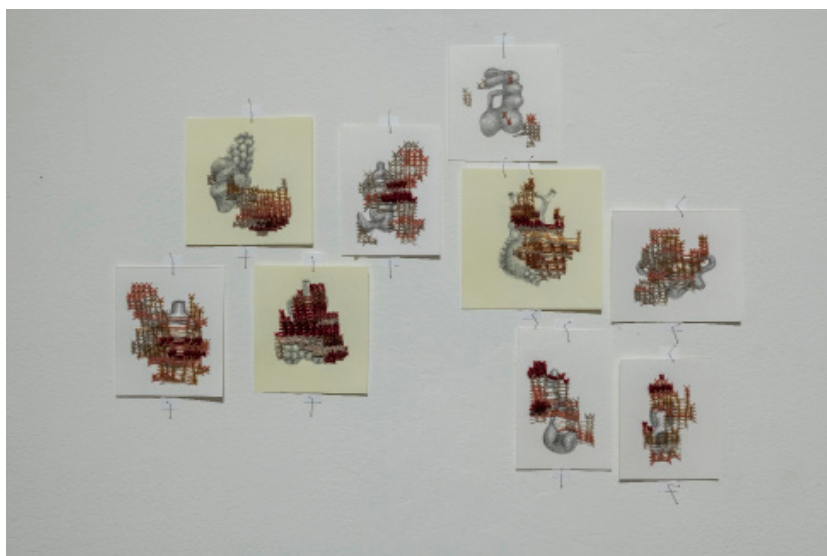
Thinking and developing porous relationships between the mantle and her own experience with abortion has led Chuls to a speculative line of exploration that integrates academic studies with intuitive knowledge

4 Gómez-Barris, Macarena, *The Extractive Zone, Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, Duke University Press, 2017. 47

5 Brooklyn Museum, *Mantle* (“The Paracas Textile”), <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/48296> (August 2023)

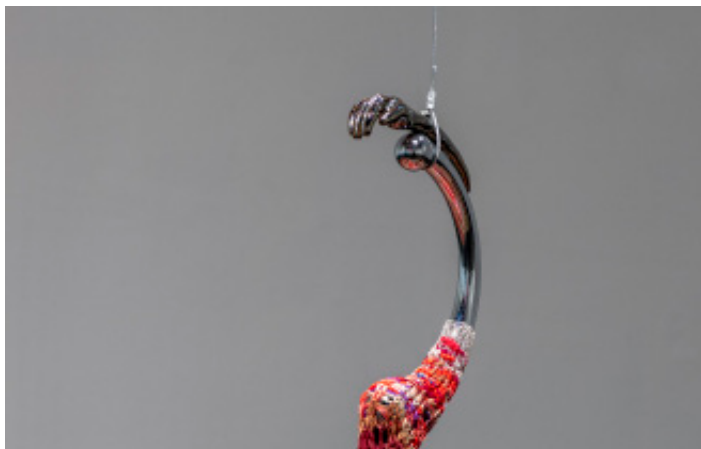
6 Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zones*, 47

7 Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zones*, 40



and to a series of pieces in which textiles, ceramics, and drawings intertwine a universe of fully felt encounters. In *Embriones Huaco I* (2022), *Embriones Huaco II* (2022), and *Embriones Huaco Series* (2020-2021), Chuls weaves connections between the scholarly, speculative, earthly, and spiritual dimensions and between the intuitive and the scientific. The drawings underneath the embroidered sections are imaginary *huacos*, fictional Moche vessels drawn on white cardboard and embroidered with hand-dyed threads that hide remnants of these vestiges, preventing the traces from being fully seen. In these studies, the textile becomes just as important as the imaginary prehispanic figures underneath them, allowing viewers to differentiate the thicknesses of the fibers and other details that might go unnoticed in her larger works. The hidden drawings combine human body parts, embryos, seeds, animals, and corn, as well as the characteristic handle in stirrup-spout bottles used in Moche ceramic vessels, which in Moche Society illustrated the spiritual complementarity between life and death.⁸

8 Bernier, H  l  ne. *Dualism in Andean Art*. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000  . http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dual/hd_dual.htm (June 2009)



In the center of the exhibition space, *Ofrenda's* (2023) over-pouring strength asks how we could think of abortion from the perspective of pleasure and orgasm, not pain. The floor installation comprises woven patches of cross-knit looping sections emerging from a silver dildo with a hand, expanding in space and displaying various red, purple, ochre, and brown tones. The pouring mantle features what could be interpreted as the aerial view of a territory featuring a diversity of soils.⁹ In “The Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde speaks of the erotic as *an assertion of the life force of women*¹⁰ and as *a female and self-affirming act in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society*.¹¹ In *Ofrenda*, Chuls expresses the life force Lorde speaks about and invites us to fully connect with every part of ourselves.

Chuls establishes a series of power relations in the exhibition space, defined not by the size of the work but by their location. *Acariciame hasta el aborto* (2023), a ceramic and textile piece shaped as an erected

9 This artwork also connects with other interests in Chuls’ work, in which she explores extractive practices in the land and their entwined relationship with sexual and reproductive practices. See *Tierra Incognita* and *Regiones Remotas* by Romina Chuls, <https://www.rominachuls.com/> (August 2023)

10 Lorde, Audre. *The uses of the Erotic*, Sister Outsider, Essays and Speeches. Crossing Press, 1984. 55

11 Lorde, *The uses of the Erotic*, 59

clitoris from which knitted pieces fall from its sides, is located centrally on the main wall, emphasizing its importance and establishing the idea of erotics and female power as the central theme. A piece that demands a closer look, *Acariciame hasta el aborto* extends its shape and transforms from a solid to a soft form by prolonging the ceramic work through a flowing knitted body from which, on one side, small skulls emanate, and on the other, a silver metal thread evoking the female force of the moon¹², merges ceramics and fabric.

The evocation of fertility and wet soil is also present in *Embriones* (2023) and *Transiciones* (2023), a series of ceramic figures shaped as a chimera between embryos and corn. The shape, colors, and glazing of *Embriones*, a pile of ceramic embryos in the corner of the space, strongly resemble seeds. Across the room and presented in a staggered manner, *Transiciones* dialogues with Chuls' previous drawing/knotting practice based on academic studies of *huacos*. Here, embryos and embroidery techniques materialize some of the speculative exercises explored through the drawings; in this case, sculptural elements are obscured by small woven pieces in tones of hibiscus red, purple, and beige and by their position in the exhibition space. The array of tones and colors in the ceramic pieces depart from dark brown tones to ochre, gray and yellow, and some parts are filled with dyed sand resembling volcanic particles. The work insinuates a relationship with fertility and plants, not with their contemporary representations but with the prehispanic ones that we can see in objects from precolonial times. For *parir los pétalos*, the accumulated mountain of *Embriones* and the series of *Transiciones* maintain a bodily feeling; Its aliveness fills them with possibilities on what they could become—fertile land and flowers.

12 “According to an Inca belief, silver came from the moon, a female entity, and gold came from the sun, its male opposite.” Bernier, Hélène. *Dualism in Andean Art*.

The power relations that the artist articulates through installation are particularly evident in *Protectora del cauce* (2023), a ceramic piece portraying a woman from which a long-woven pattern emerges and falls into the ground. Above the woman is a metallic bowl and a hose, from which she is being fed Misoprostol.¹³ Her position in the gallery space allows her to observe the audience, but the audience cannot observe her in return. Chuls has described this figure¹⁴ as one inspired by the Moche culture, displaying a wide clitoris from which the long embroidery piece emerges. For Chuls, this exhibition is also an evocation of queer communities and women collectives who have created networks of support that help and make available information and care methods for women across

13 *Misoprostol* is a medication that causes the cervix to soften and the uterus to contract to expel the pregnancy.

14 Chuls, Romina. Interview with the artist. Conducted by Elisa Gutierrez Eriksen. July, 2023.





Latin America.¹⁵ This evocation to a support network imagines a new narrative of abortion that is also present in *Para el tesito de Misoprostol*, composed of five porcelain pieces resembling pills, and a ceramic toad inside a steel bowl, orienting its regard to the women up high in a gesture of care.

parir los pétalos invokes other women and ancestors who could not interrupt their pregnancies and were forced to become mothers. In the face of criminalized abortion in both the United States and countries such as Perú, Chuls proposes a collective approach rooted in communities of affection. How do women heal from imposed societal roles, whether it is motherhood or the refusal of it? For Chuls, it is about thinking and sensing the power of actions that can happen within an interconnected community and from seeking *a world in which we can all flourish*.¹⁶

15 For support networks in Latin America see Yela Quim *Celebrar (Aborto Libre, Seguro y Feminista)*, 2020. <https://open.spotify.com/track/5zpCAo5ECcIObR1mhKJbm-L?si=k0iadtdDSYeh2zkmrZG9uQ>

16 Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*,



Real Art Ways is a contemporary arts organization with a record of linking artists, innovation and community. Programs include visual arts, with exhibitions, public art projects, and artist presentations; cinema, with independent and international films; music; performance; literary events; community and educational programming.



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