

Jana Baumann     We’ve been in close contact for several years now, preparing your first European retrospective at Haus der Kunst in Munich. It’s a great gesture of trust and dedication to the project that you’ve developed three new, central groups of works for the exhibition *Soy Energía*, including two groups of four- and eight-part works, which range in size from large to monumental. What themes have you been exploring in these pieces? In *Aymara* (2025; fig. p. 67), for example, a woman is depicted in a physically impossible pose—twisted within her own body—looking at her hand as if in a mirror. At the same time, her long braid resembles a spine, and the colours that shape her body give her an aura of energy. What message are you conveying with this work?

Sandra Vásquez de la Horra     There are many symbols in this picture. One of these is the stones surrounding the figure. They resemble the staircase sculptures of the Incas, which also represent a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. Another symbol is the mirror that the woman is looking into. Our family cook, Uverlinda Aguilera, told me about the myth that if you quickly look over your shoulder, you get a glimpse of supernatural worlds. The Spanish adapted this to Catholicism, saying that you see the devil instead.

Braids also hold great symbolic significance in many countries. In some Indigenous Latin American cultures, hair is considered to have spiritual significance. For example, there is a custom of cutting off one’s own braid and placing it in the grave of someone who has died. In many cultures, braids are associated with agriculture, such as when braids are woven using herbs, garlic, or straw. This tradition can also be found in Europe. During the time of slavery, people hid seeds in their braids. Braids were therefore not only decorative but also served a practical function. They offered protection, a place where you could hide something when you were vulnerable. In this sense, braids also became a symbol of resistance. Among the Yoruba people, cutting off one’s braids or hair is part of the initiation process. And in many other rituals, hair is sacrificed to the gods. It has a protective function, for example on altars.

My work is influenced by many different cultures. I became interested in Buddhism at a very early age. That’s why I was so familiar with the Tai Chi figures or the

symbols from the *I Ching* (also known as the *Yijing* or the *Book of Changes*), a Confucian volume on divination. Lola Hoffmann, a student of Carl Gustav Jung, had translated it into Spanish, and I studied it when I was about twenty years old. It offered me a different perspective, far removed from the Catholic worldview prevalent in Chile. This is why I often talk about cultural bridges. I build these bridges to connect things, to make boundaries permeable, and to learn from different cultures.

JB     Would you say that many of your life experiences come together in this group of works and that you bundle them into visual ideas? Do these experiences also form the main theme that connects all the figures? Then again, the series explores your ideas about energy and spirituality. Does this description fit?

SVH     My drawing entitled *Mapa de una anatomía* (Map of Anatomy, 2025; fig. p. 66) depicts the human body as a kind of map, crisscrossed by lines that resemble veins or rivers. In Nigeria, rivers are named after deities, and I view these lines in a similar way: as a connection between the body and the cosmos. To me, they represent energies that embody these deities, each with their own life and story.

I have studied various cosmologies, such as that of the Navajo, an Indigenous group from North America. I was particularly fascinated by their sand paintings, which are arranged according to the cardinal directions, colours, and minerals. Everything follows a certain logic. This impressed me deeply. It demonstrates the interconnectedness of landscape, body, and spirituality.

JB     In *Mapa de una anatomía*, the body is criss-crossed by veins, the ends of which are marked by white, empty fields. And it’s a head that seems to have completely mutated into a brain. This is a bit reminiscent of a family tree. Was that your intention? How would you describe your roots, and how have they shaped you?

SVH     Yes, I think it has to do with the fact that I view the body geographically. I perceive the body as a kind of geography. To me, the body is like a map. In my drawing, there are small white fields that resemble pieces of paper on which different places are noted. This is because we humans have this tendency to name things, especially

places. I’ve noticed this in many South American cities, where streets often have names that were given by the Masón, the Freemasons. It’s a power game, because a street isn’t just given a name by chance. Behind every name, there’s a concept, a consciousness. It’s not just about the fact that a street points north; it’s about what that direction means. Cities didn’t develop randomly; their structure and geometry play an important role. The point at which the river runs through the city, or where the centre is located, always has a meaning. This centre is often a place of power. In colonial South American cities, for example, the government district was laid out in the form of a square, with everything else arranged in a grid around it. The intention was not to create meaningful orientation, but rather to emphasize the importance of these places and their location.

JB *Niño de polen* (Pollen Child, 2025; fig. p. 64) is a poignant image of a parent’s body interwoven with palm branches, which also resemble a network of veins. The body seems to be permeated by, or at one with, nature. A child is carried on the figure’s back, completely unblemished by its monochrome colouring of warm yellow as a pure source of energy. Do you understand your own motherhood, or motherhood in general, as a driving force in life that is rarely discussed socially and publicly in all its complexity?

SVH True, I don’t think we’re really fully aware of our relationship with nature anymore. Or rather, we’ve become alienated from it. Our thoughts and perceptions have become separated from nature. Nature is like a portal, a dimension that also exists within us. However, we no longer listen to it, and thus we lose our connection. The woman I drew is a kind of reflection of nature. To me, it’s like a jungle, and we ourselves are a part of it. The child on her back symbolizes this for me; she is, so to speak, a pollen carrier. This is an important metaphor, especially in today’s world where we’re experiencing real natural disasters and where bees are dying and where pesticides have wiped out entire species. We need all of these insects and plants to produce our food. However, our food is so heavily contaminated with chemicals that we’ve lost our natural balance.

The woman in the drawing is balancing the child on her back; it’s like an attempt to restore balance with nature.

By carrying the child, she is also carrying pollen, which symbolizes what is to come. The child represents our future, which we need to restore to balance. Right now we are living in a system characterized by overproduction, where survival is based solely on money rather than exchange or other forms of cooperation. To me, motherhood is also a metaphor representing many different aspects. Here, I see the child as a symbol of the future and everything that lies ahead.

JB But you’re also reflecting on the responsibility of motherhood, aren’t you?

SVH Yes, motherhood means taking on responsibility. But this responsibility doesn’t just apply to the child; it also applies to nature. Because when we have a child, we’re no longer just individuals. We’re connected to life and to the future.

JB In the work *El florecer* (The Blossoming, 2025; fig. p. 65), there’s a hybrid plant-human figure with roots like veins on its face and leaves like eyebrows. It looks out at the viewer, its face floating disembodied, like a divine apparition. In front of it, a flower adorns the picture, with a chalice filled with water in which two people embrace each other. The concept of hybrids, whether human-animal or human-plant, has been a recurring theme in your work since your earliest pieces. This is particularly evident in your early series *Botánica de la evolución* (Evolutionary Botany, 1997), in which pollen, plants, and embryos merge. Looking at this picture, how would you describe the development of your artistic practice? Your works have become more colourful. Botanical motifs appear more frequently. What does the embrace symbolize in terms of harmony?

SVH For me, it’s all about symbols. Plants have an aura, and I believe they can even have a soul. For example, I once heard that someone was going through a very difficult time, and at that very moment, their favourite plant died. When you love a plant very much and it dies, it’s not only sad, but it can also reveal something positive. Perhaps it sacrificed itself to protect you. Perhaps it left so that you wouldn’t become ill. It’s like a spiritual exchange, as if the plant gave itself up for you. I also discussed

this with Mamita, the shaman who led my initiation ritual. During a spiritual session, she connected with Osaín, an Orisha who lives in the jungle. This Orisha heals through plants and herbs.

The two people embracing in my drawing *El florecer* also stem from this symbolism. I wanted to show that cultures come together, that an exchange takes place. We can learn from the Yoruba, who in turn may learn from homeopathy in Europe or the knowledge of the Aztecs, Incas, or Mapuche. For a long time, we ignored or even eradicated all of this knowledge. Now, however, we have the opportunity to relearn and pass it on. Even if it is not customary in many cultures to openly share such ancient knowledge, it still lives on. Slowly, in small gestures. This knowledge reappears time and again, even if we often no longer know exactly where it comes from. Perhaps someone is still familiar with a home remedy passed down from their grandmother: you use a certain medicinal plant and feel better.

When the colonizers and enslaved people came to South America, this also influenced knowledge about the respective plant worlds. The plants in Africa were completely different to those in South America, but they found ways to heal using what they encountered. We have discovered so many things that heal and nourish us. I believe there is healing in everything.

JB Would you say that this new series captures the essence of your ongoing preoccupation with themes such as humanity, nature, family, motherhood, and the experience of being a woman and a human being? Even these later works in your oeuvre are multipart, with each one consisting of four or eight sheets. The large-format pieces can easily be taken down, carried under your arm in a folder, and transported. Has this also become a part of your practice, given that you have always been on the move throughout your life and that the theme of migration has had a profound impact on you, through both your family history and your own life story?

SVH My paternal grandfather was Bolivian and married an Indigenous woman. I showed you a photograph of her as a child. I believe there’s a story inscribed in the body. You can’t explain it, but you can feel it. The legacy of migration was always present, even in my grandfather.

My other grandfather left Spain because of the Franco dictatorship. He first lived in Brazil before moving to Chile. There, he founded a small village called El Sol, meaning ‘The Sun’. He even built a small train station there. The village was located exactly between two cities, but the train didn’t originally stop in El Sol. However, he wanted the village children to be able to go to school, so he scraped together all his money to build the station. The train was later able to stop there, enabling the children to attend school in Limache.

JB Let’s talk briefly about your arrival in Germany in the 1990s. You moved to Düsseldorf with your partner at the time because he had been accepted as a student at the art academy there. What was that time like for you?

SVH I first came to Germany in 1995, and again in 1999. The first year was a very difficult time for me, but it was then that I met Jannis Kounellis. He had a profound impact on me; he was very appreciative, and I saw him frequently at the academy and in other contexts. In 1997, I fell seriously ill and returned to Chile. We spent almost two years there, and then we were in the United States for a while. Finally, I returned to Germany after receiving an invitation from Rosemarie Trockel. I remember exactly how I arrived in Cologne on Shrove Monday. I sent her my application to enrol as an auditor at the academy, which she promptly signed and returned.

I had many ideas for animating my drawings and sculptures, so in 2003 I decided to begin postgraduate studies at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. I had long been preoccupied with the idea of depicting rebirth filmically, as if through a tunnel. I already had the images in my head, as well as the movements, the light, the transitions. I wanted to work with photographic material to animate this idea, similar to a trance-like experience, something very mysterious. And I felt that it was important to make this visible. At the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, I discovered software called Morph, which I began working with. It enabled me to animate my photographs, and I thought the results were fantastic. However, at the time, no one really understood the concept. The idea of showing rebirth is very abstract. What exactly can you make visible? I found it incredibly fascinating. Later, when I was back in Chile, some people came up to me and said: ‘How did you do that? I’d like to use something like that

in my film.’ Though I don’t think morphing was a new technology back then—it’s actually an old technique.

JB What was it like for you when you arrived in the Rhineland and encountered its vibrant art scene? In your early photographic works, where you work intensively with your own body, I see visual parallels with artists such as Anna and Bernhard Blume or Jürgen Klauke. However, you introduced content and perspectives that were completely different and almost entirely unknown to the Rhineland at the time. For example, you used honey, cornmeal, and cinnamon on your skin to explore themes of healing. You have often hinted that it was a painful time for you, and this is evident in your early works—a time when you were confronted with experiences of marginalization, racism, and isolation. Would you like to tell us something about that period? I’m interested in how you experienced it, because you had contact with the art scene while also forging your own artistic path. I wonder: Was any of this understood back then?

SVH You’ve just touched on many aspects, such as healing, separation, and isolation. What affected me most at the time was the indifference. People just weren’t interested in me. I often felt invisible. I was verbally abused in the street. I felt like I meant nothing.

My understanding of the theme of healing was different. I learned that you must heal your aura before illness takes hold of your body. I used cinnamon and other substances to cleanse my aura. This is because, as I learned, spiritual beings or gods come to us through these foods. They ‘eat’ these substances and then heal your energy, meaning you either don’t get sick at all, or at least not as badly. At the same time, I found it difficult to communicate. For me, it was easier to learn about shamanism than to engage in the confrontations at the art academy. There, the focus was mainly on technique or the visual aspect. I, on the other hand, was interested in processes: rituals, initiation, transformation—that was my approach. Many people around me were preoccupied with aesthetics and fashions. But I wanted to go deeper. I wanted to understand what healing really meant for my own journey.

Then I traveled to Cuba as part of a project at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. I wanted to understand what was happening there, and what the difference

is between a performance and a ritual. I asked myself: How far could I go? Could a performance really be transformative—not just symbolic, but real? With real blood, with ancient practices? Such rituals have existed for thousands of years. This trip was important to me because I felt uncomfortable in Düsseldorf or Cologne. The atmosphere at the academy was difficult. I didn’t feel welcomed. In Cuba, however, I met people who were completely different: very open and generous. I felt like a door was opening. I felt as though something was calling to me.

In Havana, I also met Mamita again. When Mamita entered a room, the atmosphere changed completely. I immediately sensed that this woman had a strong connection to her ancestors, to nature, to other dimensions. Sometimes I feel as if she were still with me. Our relationship was very intense; we spoke every day for many years. I learned from her for nineteen years, from 2003 until her death in 2022.

JB Since the early 2000s, your work has become strongly transmedial. You began incorporating materials such as beeswax into your work in 1997 and have increasingly used your own body as an artistic medium. You told us that, after studying as an auditor with Jannis Kounellis and Rosemarie Trockel, you moved to Cologne to study at the Academy of Media Arts, where you created videos and photographs that are central not only to your own body of work, but also to a transnational, medially expanded art history. Most of these pieces are based on performative practices. Can you tell us how this came about? How and why did you begin to consistently place yourself—your body—at the centre of your artistic focus? Your works also have striking titles, such as *Identity* (2001; figs. pp. 102/103) and *Ich bin nicht* (I Am Not, 2002; figs. pp. 110/111). What are you exploring in these pieces?

SVH Yes, that was before my trip to Cuba. For me, there’s a clear distinction between the time before and after Cuba. I remember the phase before Cuba very well. Back then, we had a camera from Rosemarie Trockel. Each student was allowed to use it for a week to make their own video. I took advantage of this opportunity to show myself, to portray myself.

That was the moment, I think, when I really started to understand myself. Armed with a tripod and this camera, I started recording short performances to express what was going through my mind—what it’s like to live in Germany as a woman, as a migrant, as a mother with a small child, confronted with so many prejudices. I immersed myself completely in the process. It was an inner journey in which I learned so much about my history, my expectations, my skin. I asked myself questions such as: Who am I here? How do I live here as a ‘foreigner’?

I was ignored and belittled. That was very difficult. In Chile, I’m just an ordinary person. I’m visible. In Germany, however, I constantly felt vulnerable. With each passing day, I closed myself off more and more. That’s exactly why I had to do these performances. It was my way of healing myself. My way of expressing myself—of not remaining stuck in the trauma, of transforming it instead. These ritualized gestures came quite intuitively. I didn’t plan them. They just happened.

Back then, no one really saw this work. The videos remained on old cassettes for years, unnoticed. It was only when you asked about them and I found them again that I started watching them. They were almost like a diary.

JB Why did you wait so long to show them? Or why didn’t you show them publicly back then?

SVH For me, it wasn’t art. It was a process.

JB Your videos often deal with very subtle nuances and observations, such as how the body is perceived. The naked body is portrayed not in a sexualized way but as a place of confrontation with feelings and pain—beyond external control and voyeurism. In hindsight, this is precisely what makes your work from this period so historically significant. Don’t you think?

SVH At the time, I wasn’t aware that it could have such a context. Perhaps it does today, but at the time it had nothing to do with art history or historical context for me. I wasn’t trying to categorize myself; it was solely about my personal history, about my healing and my confrontation with what it meant to live here as a migrant.

JB But you were present in Germany in the early 2000s with your artistic practice, and you opened

up new perspectives in the art world here. While this may not have been recognized at the time, I would argue that your work transcends historically reworked forms of Western feminism. You once told me that, in response to the question ‘What does it mean to be a woman?’, the soul is neither male nor female.

SVH Yes.

JB I find it fascinating that you film yourself—that you show your own body, but not through a sexualized or male gaze. You observe yourself; your body is not controlled by others. For me, these are precisely the aspects that feminism often struggles against—these attributions that always refer to gender. But for you, it’s about something else. Let’s return to your statement that, for you, being a woman is ‘neither male nor female’. So it’s about stepping out of the socially assigned role of the body, also as a reaction to what you yourself have experienced, with the help of spirituality. Maybe you could say more about that—also about the scene where you’re sitting on a barstool, almost floating, almost enlightened, as if you were in a state of meditation.

SVH Yes, I saw my body as a temple. I experienced it as empty and almost weightless. It was as if I had become one with my soul. At the same time, however, my body also felt like an empty shell, devoid of content or meaning. I remember sitting in the lotus position and drawing a line from my forehead down the centre of my body. That, too, was like a map, a kind of inner map.

In another video, *Ich bin nicht*, mentioned above, I write on a mirror with red lipstick: ‘Ich bin nicht exotisch’ (I am not exotic), because we were constantly stigmatized, partly because of our bodies. The body became a stigma. When you have children, people view you differently and judge you. As a ‘foreigner’ with long black hair, I also experienced a different kind of gaze, even in personal relationships.

My husband went back to Chile, and I stayed here alone. Everything was so foreign, and for a long time I couldn’t speak German. In addition to Spanish, I could speak English and Italian, but not German. When I started learning German, I found it very challenging. Feeling

limited by my language skills, I found a physical language. This form of expression also arose from isolation. When you're at an elite school, you're often seen as nothing but competition. It's hard to make friends. I did have friends among other foreigners, but many of them led very secluded lives.

I had friends from Eritrea and Italy, and I could speak Italian quite well with the latter. Ultimately, we came together to support each other and help one another out of this difficult situation. It felt like a desert; there was no one to ask: 'Could you look after my child for a moment?' That didn't exist. You're in a foreign country without family; no one's there to help you. You're alone with a child, yet you still have to fight your way through, get up from the comfortable sofa, go to work, and earn money to survive. As an artist, it's twice as hard because you're hardly noticed.

We supported each other, and our German friends showed us things, too. Some of them had technical knowledge, while others had special talents. If you needed help with something, you would simply ask: 'Can you help me with this?' That's how we learned—through exchange and trial and error. However, we often encountered limitations.

It was almost impossible to cope with it all. I studied at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne for two years, and all I could think about was that I had to get out of there as quickly as possible. At the same time, I was teaching in a prison, where everything was completely different. The prisoners even gave me a nickname: they called me 'the sun'. When I arrived, they were really happy to see me. The atmosphere there was the complete opposite of that at the academy. In prison, I met people from all over the world and had to communicate with them in different languages. They were so grateful, even for small things. This contrast between the art academy on the one hand and prison on the other had a huge impact on my artistic development. The experience in prison helped me enormously to cope with this tough world outside. The contrast was huge, and I realized how privileged I am to simply live in freedom. It was a stark experience, but a necessary one.

JB Your early work was strongly influenced by diversity, combining themes such as your experiences under the Pinochet regime and other biographical influences, as well as incorporating other media into your practice. How has your work

evolved since the 2000s? Which processes were particularly important to you during this period?

SVH For example, the video *Hemisferios* (Hemispheres, 2002; figs. pp. 112/113) has a lot to do with the theme of closure, with my experience under the dictatorship and what I went through during that time. I did this work as a form of therapy, and afterwards I felt much better. I tried to write down my story with my eyes blindfolded and using both hands at the same time. The sentences came to me as if through a medium; I hadn't planned anything. Comparing the right and left hands symbolizes justice, as well as the difference between the right and left parties in Chile; I wanted to relate both sides to each other. This work is very important to me, as an attempt to restore my inner balance.

JB And then during this period, in the 2000s and 2010s, you developed your practice further?

SVH A lot changed for me after 2003 because that was the year I travelled to Cuba. From that moment on, there was a life before and after the initiation. They say that an initiation is like being reborn—and that's exactly how it felt for me. The 'old Sandra' was gone, and a new Sandra took her place. One who was healed on a spiritual level—from previous relationships, from old traumas. All of that was wiped away. I started from scratch, like a child just born into the world.

My trip to Cuba took place at Pentecost in 2003. Everything was shrouded in a mysterious atmosphere. I went to the cemetery with Mamita, but it was completely different to those I had seen in Chile or Europe. In the middle stood a chapel where Mass was celebrated. The place was filled with many religions, many levels of spirituality. It was like entering a new world where everything coexists. Mamita said to me: 'You're taking the gods from the cemetery with you.' In fact, I have felt ever since that these deities have been with me, like guardian angels. One of them is Obá, a goddess of the sea. Later, I got to know another one, Ochún. Mamita herself was Ochún.

Encountering the Orishas and understanding the role they play in nature and life changes your view of the world. It's like putting on a new pair of glasses. You no longer see things the same way as before; you see them differently.

JB And what effect did that have on you?

SVH When I returned from Cuba in 2003 after my initiation, I was an Iyawó, someone who has just been initiated. I was dressed all in white and wore this attire to the art academy. Needless to say, people stared. Many had no idea what was going on. I just said: 'I've been initiated by the shamans.' For many at the academy, it came as a shock. They couldn't understand it; it was foreign to them. I think they thought: 'What happened to this woman?'

JB What else was on your mind at that time?

SVH There was a lot of censorship in Chile, particularly with regard to the body. I had to overcome this—to shed my shame, learn to work with the naked body and show it in public. Because at that time in Chile, being naked was unthinkable. The body was hidden and not talked about. Nudity was forbidden and punished. Everything was strongly influenced by Catholicism and full of taboos. Working with the body liberated me. Because in the end, it was my own censorship, in my head. You judge yourself, categorize other people, restrict yourself—and I wanted to let go of all that. I wanted to break down those inner barriers and all the norms I had adopted from the Western world.

I wanted to experience life intensely, to really feel it. I tried to achieve this through performative elements. For example, when I covered my body with honey, cornmeal, and cinnamon, it was an ecstatic experience. I was completely at one with myself. And in that state, it was as if something had been released from me. Afterwards, I felt like a new person.

JB In your latest series of large-format, eight-part works, you once again place women, and perhaps yourself, at the centre of your art, tying in with your early years. Looking back on your early work, and considering the context of your retrospective *Soy Energía*, this is a significant gesture.

SVH I think I was trying to find order again, and that has to do with different aspects of my origins. It's like a migration, like walking through water. *El Ojo del Huracán* (The Eye of the Hurricane, 2024; fig. p. 30), for example, is based on an autobiographical experience. I actually experienced this hurricane, together with my daughter

Clara. We were right in the middle of it. For me, this storm became a symbol, also in a spiritual sense.

It's connected to the Orishas, especially Oyá, the goddess of the storm. Oyá appears repeatedly in the oracles. They say: 'Oyá protects you; she wants to warn you.' This warning comes often. I think it's about recognizing something, perhaps that you need to reconnect with your origins. This theme is also present in the work *Vo/ver al origen* (Back to the Origin, 2025; fig. p. 32). In the foreground is a male figure, dressed in Western clothing and thinking rationally. He returns, back to being a woman, a woman like Mamita. And for me, that's our origin, the origin of humanity.

JB In *El Ojo del Huracán*, there's a scene in which a mother carries her child on her shoulders while wading through water. This scene is reminiscent of the dramatic migration across the Suchiate River between Guatemala and Mexico towards the United States. However, it can also be interpreted as a timeless metaphor that transcends the autobiographical. Ultimately, it's about the lifelong responsibility we bear for ourselves and others, isn't it?

SVH Yes, yes, definitely.

JB Works such as *Cascadas* (Waterfalls, 2025; fig. p. 31) always explore the idea of a physical connection to the environment. The body connects with the world through a network of veins and embryos that are embedded in them and emerge from the vulva. This process can be understood as both organic and spiritual, and it lasts a lifetime, revealing invisible connections to the environment.

SVH Yes, the way the hair is depicted also evokes the image of a temple. It's about the idea that the female body is like a temple of humanity. Our bodies are our sanctuaries, and we must care for them, clean them, and nourish them. This is all a part of our life cycle. This cycle is connected to the here and now, to our origins, to these tiny embryos, as well as to the image of a waterfall.

In the past, sacrifices were made through blood rituals. But I used water as a symbol of washing away the blood of the past. The blood hasn't disappeared; it remains as a memory and a symbol. What we perceive as the end is often multilayered.

JB     These are all very existential experiences, both in their collective validity and in their individual intimacy. Yet, when expressed visually and shared publicly, it still seems to me that they offer radical insights. Is there a way to understand life with empathy? Would you say that? I find your work radical in today’s visual culture—especially in the way you portray women. You focus on their emotional world: excitement, nature, sexuality. Would you say that this is still radical for you? Is that how you feel when you create such images?

SVH     Yes, I do find it radical, and it has to be radical. Life is so close to death, all the time.

JB     Why is it considered radical to describe life honestly? Isn’t it frightening that, although we all experience, live through, and feel this life, we find it radical to talk about life honestly?

SVH     In the end, we’re confronted with the truth. We have to be authentic and honest and stop hiding. We have nothing to hide; on the contrary, we can open up and show our sexuality. It’s important that we talk openly about menstruation, masturbation, and many other topics. As long as we keep these things taboo, nothing will change. If we don’t talk, we’ll remain trapped within these limitations.

JB     You’ve titled one of your works *Volver al origen*. Is it a swan song for a male-defined, Eurocentric art history? A clever, courageous, and humorous gesture of greatness in your artistic practice after so many years?

SVH     There’s a very famous Symbolist painting that you’re probably familiar with: Arnold Böcklin’s *Isle of the Dead*. It depicts a place where people go to die. I wanted to create my own version of it, offering my personal interpretation of this piece of art history. What if that which we consider to be the origin is actually the same as the end? What if the beginning and the end are one and the same? We enter this world, and then we return. I believe in rebirth. In many religions and cultures, death is seen as a transition from one realm to another. However, for atheists, death is the ultimate end. For me, though, death is not the end. I believe that, after death, a new life begins.

JB     The last of the eight-part works is titled *Los Ríos* (The Rivers, 2025; fig. p. 33). What spiritual inspiration led you to formulate such ideas about corporeality?

SVH     The image shows a woman dancing with two flowers in her hands. These flowers are deliberately placed in specific locations, almost as if they were merging with nature. The shape this creates is reminiscent of a temple, suggesting that we carry something within us that protects us. This concept is important in many cultures. There’s something higher, like a crown. I painted this crown in gold here. In the past, such crowns were worn by kings and queens, but they also feature in Buddhism and Taoism. For example, Guan Yin, the embodiment of compassion, wears one. The flowers all have such crowns or auras. I have often worked with this aura. I used to practise the Taoist greeting, which is performed in three places [*shows the three places*]. I saw this in Singapore and found it very fascinating. I think experiences like this flow into my paintings; for example, when I greet Guan Yin in this way. It’s a kind of alignment. When I’m in Asia, I practise Taoism, and I have a much better understanding of it when I perform these movements myself. In Qigong in particular, the movements are associated with images: you ‘bring down the clouds’, you ‘move with the rainbow’. I find that very fascinating because, in this practice, nature is so present.