

Salomas  
Paola Dávila  
Impronta Casa Editora

In 2022, the Oaxacan artist Paola Dávila was invited to work in a residency in Ensenada, B.C., where she developed her project *Mareas* [Tides], an unfolded experimentation with cyanotype—previously explored during the pandemic—, organic materials, and ocean water.

*Mareas* had two initial directions: the visual documentation of water by the seashore on emulsified paper and kelp algae prints on paper. This resulted in a proliferation of tones further away from the bluish spectrum, more towards the reddish and browns, regaining the saline crystallization in these living images which record their surroundings through light, atmospheric conditions, and geographical location. After *Mareas*, Paola Dávila continues to explore almost scientifically the possibilities of cyanotype with different organic materials, like silk and salt, but mainly shedding light on a different approximation to contemporary abstraction. Her recent work opens conversations about the insides of artistic production today and invites us to think about how the new visualities turn to ancient techniques from a different theoretical approach, in sum, their search to reconfigure the relationship between science, technology, and life.

Paola Dávila's work invites us to reflect upon various aspects of contemporary artistic production. On one side, the use of performance as a crucial tool in photographic investigation and, mainly, in methodologies that provide different viewpoints about the relationship between art and biology, or art and ecology. Another aspect that sustains the curatorial work of *Salomas* [Sea Shanties] is the incorporation of marine and ocean forms to unfold our ideas about the future, as has been recently formulated by thinkers such as Chus Martínez; the potential of art becoming an unfinished image and object, affected by (our) different life forms; and the performativity and role that contemporary artists are exploring to relate to new and different directions of artistic production and its surroundings.

*Mareas*, and the series that have sprung from it, open, to my mind, an operant and endowed with agency kind of work, according to the possibility of change through context: the cyanotypes change due to the atmospheric conditions, the sources of light and UV rays, and the geographical context where they are found. In some way, the work is a living and changing body that interacts with the place that fosters it. The title *Salomas* refers to a type of chant that sailors would sing to coordinate their collective work and operate bygone ships, thus, it alludes to the union of agencies and elements that articulate the pieces and activate them throughout their lives.

Dávila's recent work articulates through different intersections to narrate a landscape we know little about, the ocean. In it we may find the potentialities of contemporary abstraction and science's languages and visualities, rescued thanks to ancient techniques; the importance of narrating from different body's viewpoints—flora, fauna, the artist's corporality itself—and the emphasis on the exploration of contemporary art as a place of reflection about urgent questions in critical ecology.

Lorena Peña Brito. January 2024.