

## From North to South. On Two Tall Political Paintings.

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The first time I visited A K's studio in Oslo was also the day we met. I remember a long walk through an unfamiliar area—a desolate yet powerful industrial landscape and a tall building amid a skyline of highways and narrow pavements. On the fourth floor, A K greeted me from the open door. We stood by a window, talking as we looked out over the landscape that blends the scaffolding of a growing city with the mountains in the distance. *I've been to Argentina* was one of the first things she said to me, *I have a long and beautiful history with Latin America*. Those words felt like a welcome, perhaps the beginning of a pact of complicity between us. We talked about north and south, about distances and rapprochements. I thought of Julio Cortazar's short story 'The Other Heaven'<sup>1</sup>, the displacements and crossings, the sights of Okern and La Boca, and the fresh air smell that could belong to Patagonia or the corner of my house in Grunerlokka.

Her studio is as impressive as the mountain, with high walls and a scale that would make us small if we tried to measure ourselves. As I looked around that concrete space, a five-metre-tall painting caught my eye. We walked closer, and I understood that the red pattern, visible from afar, was made up of fingerprints pressed onto the canvas. It was strange, I felt a sense of recognition, as if I'd seen that image before, or as if that corporeal, powerful language was speaking directly to me. In Argentina fingerprints hold a strong significance, though they're universal as a means of identifying people, there they've been key in the search for justice and truth regarding human rights violations under the last civil-military dictatorship. Thousands of people were disappeared and murdered, their identities stolen by the institutional violence of a de facto government. I thought about the universality of art, that huge concept that rarely touches me. I also thought about the evocative power of images, the impact of a simple yet strong gesture like the imprint of a fingerprint on a surface. In a studio in Oslo, more than 12,000 km from Argentina, a painting, without any specific context, brought me home making me think of the disappeared, the erasures, the silences—not only in Argentina but across Latin America.

We walked towards the painting, and A K began to tell me about it. She knows how to tell stories, her soft voice saying just enough, with a synthesis that leaves room for imagination. Her words don't close off possibilities; instead, they open up new senses.

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<sup>1</sup> Cortázar, J. (1973). "The Other Heaven." in *All fires the fire* (S. J. Levine, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.

The work is called *this is a tall political painting* (2019-2024). From top to bottom, she pressed her oil-covered middle finger onto the surface, repeating the gesture until there was no paint left. The intense red cadmium fingerprint fades as the finger moves down, it disappears, marking a journey, the passage of time, or the cycle of life, restarting as the finger dips back into the red paint. Time takes on a unique dimension in this painting; the finger, exposed to oil and the pressure of her other hand removing the leftover paint, needs to heal after a while, so the work and the body rest, recover and start again.

The red spot recalls Helene Schjerfbeck's *Self-portrait with Red Spot* (1944). Each time A K presses her finger to make a dot on the canvas, she remembers Schjerfbeck, and through her, many others. This pattern, expanded over five metres of canvas, evokes the memory of those erased, forgotten, or set aside. This weft of prints recovers those stories; it is a gesture that seeks to create new narratives.

We moved to the next room where we saw *this is a tall black political painting* (2019-2024)—the same procedure, the same finger, this time on a black canvas with white marks.

The two *tall political paintings* are like maps, surfaces that hold memories of paths, traces of rhythm, of a pulse, of a life journey. They are personal maps that also belong to everyone and become collective.

In 1943, Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García proposed a new way of seeing the world from Latin America, suggesting that “north” should be south. This perspective invited us to look at the map upside down, challenging the worldview imposed by the northern hemisphere and asserting South America's unique identity and place in the world. For Torres García, this inversion symbolised cultural autonomy and the need to construct a vision of the South as a centre of orientation and thought.

If maps shape our conception of the world as political representation, I like to think of these tall political paintings as raised banners, cartographies that keep the memory of a body imprinted on canvas. A body with strength, expanding into space, a body that speaks and multiplies until it belongs to everyone—and, standing tall, becomes a symbol of shared histories.