

About the Cover

Questions of Time and Nature

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“The Key of Time” burns a hole through the cover of this issue of *EcoHealth*. A fiery sun sinks beneath the weight of a cold desert night. Something vast and molten, glimpsed from within the depths of the earth, flows at the end of time. The artist closes her eyes and falls into a deep sense of self, exploring the emptiness that presents itself in times of solitude and silence.

“The Key of Time (La Llave del Tiempo)” is an oil-on-canvas piece by contemporary Argentine artist Silvana Merello. As a young woman who grew up with paints and pencils, Merello pursued a Ph.D. in biochemistry, as well as postgraduate studies in business and economics. Merello explains that she had been seeking answers to the questions of life, first in the natural studies of science and later in the material pursuits of business. “One day, I ceased my search for the logical, scientific answers and realized that I just had to recognize and perceive them through colors, shapes, and intensities,” Merello writes (2011).

Indeed, the portion of Merello’s life that is *art* is the time removed from the burdens and joys of the physical world. Concrete objects and material boundaries melt away within an abstract dialog of blurred shadows, intense colors, and subtle details. Merello’s artwork includes references to emptiness, space, and time, and is often titled to reflect these themes.

In a superficial way, Merello’s own journey seems reflects the tides of philosophy in Argentina. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular, positivism gained popularity throughout the Western world. A family of

philosophical approaches that influenced law and spirituality, positivism specifically emphasizes the importance of scientific method in understanding the world. Positivists, like many scientists, argue that most of nature and meaning can be explained through science. In Argentina, it manifested as one response to scholastic philosophy and its emphasis on Catholic dogma (Fronzoni 1943). One leading Argentine positivist, Florentino Ameghino, “devoted his career to refuting the Christian version of the origins of humanity and to research in paleontology to prove its material, evolutionary, and Godless beginnings” (Rock 1995).

Positivism in Argentina ultimately wilted under the beginnings of the heated Nationalist movement, which resented the positivist assumptions of “progress,” “materialism,” and “cosmopolitanism” (Rock 1995). Elsewhere, however, anti-positivists questioned the existence of a singular scientific method and a unity among all sciences. Is one technique sufficient for all questions of research and thought? Are the disciplines as unified as even we, trans-disciplinary ecohealth researchers, propone?

A single question lurks behind these musings, and it is universally tied to both philosophy and science: What is the essence of our existence? Thinkers, worshippers, and researchers have asked this question throughout the ages. Merello makes this question the center of her life and work. Voting with her brush, she chose art as the pathway to ponder this problem. Has Merello found, in art, the answers that eluded her in the sciences? Perhaps the search for answers is enough. As a recent critic, citing her work, said, “It is in this search, this curiosity, where the ball of yarn—that is in everyone of us—develops or unravels” (Squirru 2004).

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Silvana Merello (1966–) is an Argentine artist who developed a love for painting as a very young child. She began studio lessons when she was 6 years old, continuing her art studies under Horacio D'Alessandro until she enrolled in the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires*. After pursuing a Ph.D. in biochemistry, as well as postgraduate studies in business and economics, Merello returned to painting as an exploration of deeper spiritual needs. While she maintains a business and a family, Merello also preserves her time for introspection and art. In the past decade, Merello's work has been featured in numerous exhibits throughout Argentina and the US, as well as in private collections in Europe and Latin America.

ON THE COVER

"La Llave del Tiempo," by Silvana Merello, 2010. Oil on canvas, 70 × 80 cm.

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