

JOSEFINA TEMIN: THE LIVING WORLD IN PAPER, STEEL, AND WOOD

A Curatorial Review

Josefina Temin has been making sculpture for more than four decades, and the breadth and consistency of her practice across that span constitutes one of the most remarkable careers in contemporary Mexican art. Based in Mexico City, she has exhibited in over forty countries, placed permanent works in public parks and institutional collections across Mexico and Latin America, participated in artist residencies from Portugal to Colombia to Italy, and received international recognition at venues ranging from the Museo de Arte de Querétaro to the Palazzo Mateus in Vila Real to the Scuola Grande San Teodoro in Venice. Yet her work is not the product of institutional ambition or fashionable positioning. She describes its basis simply: she loves nature — plants, flowers, animals, living things — and her work is rooted in that love. Everything else follows from there.

Temin works in three primary materials — paper, steel, and wood — and she characterizes each with an intimacy that makes clear these are not neutral substrates but active participants in the meaning of her work. Paper is ductile and resistant, silent, clean, full of surprises, feminine. Steel is hard and noisy, even musical, urban, masculine. Wood is warm, friendly, aromatic, and of many colors. These characterizations are not fanciful but formally exact: they describe real differences in how these materials behave under the hand, and they explain why particular bodies of work demand particular materials. The paper sculptures — which span decades and constitute what might be called the central thread of the practice — carry qualities of quietness, delicacy, and surprise that steel cannot offer. The steel works, by contrast, carry an urban energy, a resistance and sonority that paper cannot sustain. The wood pieces bring warmth and organic irregularity to a practice that might otherwise tend toward the monumental.

The paper works are among the most formally distinctive and technically demanding objects in contemporary Latin American sculpture. Temin has spent decades developing a mastery of paper as a three-dimensional medium — cutting, folding, layering, and constructing forms that exploit the material's paradoxical combination of fragility and structural resilience. The series titles across the years tell the story of her engagement with the natural world: *Semillas* (Seeds), *De Insectos y Semillas* (Of Insects and Seeds), *La Vitalidad de las Formas* (The Vitality of Forms), *El Papel del Papel* (The Role of Paper). In each case, organic form — the curve of a seed pod, the geometry of an insect wing, the spiral of a shell — is translated into paper with a precision that makes the material seem to have been waiting all along to become exactly this shape. Her website describes each piece as succumbing to its own body in the divine gesture, as if it were alive. That aliveness — the sense that the forms are caught in the act of being rather than fixed in the act of having been made — is the quality that most distinguishes her work from decorative or craft-based paper art.

The series *Zoológico Imaginario* (Imaginary Zoo), which has been shown at the Museo de Escultura Contemporánea Federico Silva in San Luis Potosí, at the Casa de Cultura in Azcapotzalco, and at the Galería del Teatro María Teresa Montoya in Mexico City in recent years, brings together works in wood that demonstrate the full range of Temin's formal imagination. Turtles, dragonflies, rhinoceroses, smiling lions, butterflies, snails, columns of

figures — the natural world rendered with simultaneous formal precision and playful invention. The *Leones Sonrientes* (Smiling Lions, 2021), carved wood at 25 x 40 x 20 cm each, are emblematic: the smile is not anthropomorphized sentiment but a formal event, a curve that transforms the entire character of the surface and invites the viewer into a relationship of warmth rather than awe. Across the *Zoológico* series, scale and medium are calibrated to subject with the care of an artist who has thought deeply about what each material can communicate about each creature.

The steel works represent the most physically demanding dimension of the practice. Temin has participated in international stainless steel sculpture symposia and created permanent outdoor installations across Mexico — in the Parque Hundido in Naucalpan, in the Parque la Punta, in the Parque de las Esculturas in Jalapa Veracruz, and on the Paseo Montejo in Mérida, among others. These works, at urban scale, demonstrate that the formal intelligence visible in her intimate paper and wood pieces can operate equally at architectural dimensions. The sculpture *Imaginaciones* in Naucalpan, *Movimiento* in Jalapa, *Alegría* in the Parque Lázaro Cárdenas — the titles consistently signal an emotional register that is affirmative, vital, and oriented toward the living world rather than the monumental or the commemorative.

Her studies formed her across an unusually diverse range of disciplines: sculpture at the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, tapestry at the Taller Nacional de Tapiz, drawing with Maestro Eduardo Cohen, design at the Escuela Nacional de Diseño y Artesanías — and, crucially, Ikebana with Professor Asako Ogata in Minneapolis, a study she later honored with a solo exhibition at the Japanese Embassy's Cultural Section in Mexico City. The Ikebana training is not incidental. The Japanese art of flower arrangement is, at its most serious, a discipline of attention to natural form — its asymmetries, its seasonal particularity, its vitality — and a practice of creating compositions that hold that vitality in balance with empty space. These are precisely the qualities that animate Temin's sculpture across all three materials. Her forms are never overcrowded or overworked; they breathe, as living things breathe.

Her collections span institutions from the Museo de las Ciencias UNIVERSUM at the UNAM to the Palacio Mateus in Portugal to the Museo Doctor Rafael Calderón Guardia in Costa Rica. For collectors of serious contemporary sculpture, her work offers the uncommon combination of formal invention, material mastery, and a genuinely felt engagement with the natural world that has sustained and deepened over forty years without losing its freshness or its joy.

Despina Tunberg Curator

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