

## Women of the Moon<sup>1</sup>

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Amazons, female heroines from a land forgotten in time, from an era before Greek society established the basis of what is still, today, understood as civilisation.

Myth or Reality. The Amazon culture, which includes the idea of Woman participating in all facets of human activity, is a fascinating subject. Whether it is a dream or “true”, imagined or real, it is to be approached from an angle that recuperates forgotten accomplishments of female power.

Data from documented research and archaeological findings come and go without solid confirmation of the Amazons’ real existence. It is this uncertainty that drives me with great interest and passion to this area of History, around the fifth century B.C.

Could the Greeks imagine something like this without it being real? Truth is biased, like a story or fantasy that someone has dreamt or imagined. If we are capable, as humans, to think about it and create mythological history, we are capable of fabricating and experiencing it on every level of existence.

With this exhibition and taking myth as a “historical product of Greek thought”<sup>2</sup>, the artist wants to portray the Amazonian essence -an independent, powerful female warrior- as a vehicle to transcend history, and make us rethink our diversity as women. What’s more, not as beings who express a temporary stereotype of femininity subject to social evolution, but femininity as an act of creativity and intuition, unveiled in any person.

It is wonderful to appreciate this story through time up to the present and to be able to recover and experience it in Clara Carvajal’s (Madrid, October 22, 1970) art work. Its title is Amazonomachy, literally meaning conflict between Amazons and Greeks. The myth in which the Amazons were defeated, was carved on the Athenian Parthenon’s metopes to glorify the classic Greek hero.

Democracy originated as a model for a new civilisation where men governed society, trained for battle and personified the splendours of wars; whereas women were educated and trained in maternal rituals and other occupations, but never as warriors.

The artist’s hypothesis is based on her readings of recent archaeological tomb discoveries, where the remains of women’s bodies with their war equipment have been found. And this is where reflection leads to a body of art work, having linked female warriors of the past, to today, with what Clara Carvajal defines as the new Amazons:

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The second most common explanation of the word “Amazon” is that it is “armania” meaning “women of the moon”, p. 31. *The Amazons: Women Warriors in Myth and History (Brief Histories)*. Wilde Webster, Lyn, Alianza Editorial, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> *The Amazons. A Study in Athenian Mythmaking*. Blake Tyrrell, William. Breviaris Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001, p. 14.

women who want to use their complete skill-set and are part of society, of the work-place, of everyday life, of motherhood and especially of life's daily struggle.

Far from elaborating a project based only on historical data, which would inform us about the Amazons, I have committed to this Amazonomachy as a curator from an emotional connection. On one hand, I am interested in the undoubtedly exciting historical thread of a culture, as seen from scientific, documentary and mythological points of view, but on the other, as a woman, given the resonance that Clara Carvajal's work generates today. I am involved with the project to highlight the spirit or essence of the Amazon, who de-fended her territory and refused to be a woman only as her era demanded, who wanted to defend her territory and be a warrior fighting for fairness on the battlefield. An Amazon who evinces all the talents women have and that we individually possess. I am also interested in highlighting attitudes and temperament that are common to everybody, to a greater or lesser degree.

For Greek patriarchal society metopes depicting battles with the Amazons represented civilisation versus barbarism. History was created from myth and has perdured in our subconscious through time, burnt into memory that woman should not fight because she is defeated.

The artist's visual story begins here: she confronts us at eye level with a dreamed reality, so we wake up to question and reclassify our History. The piece "Re-classifying" illustrates one of the five statements the artist makes in this oeuvre, perhaps the one that best fits the scientific data that inspires her. Recent discovery of tombs with bodies of female warriors have inspired this premise.

In Amazonomaquia 1.1, the artist's statements appear individually or combined, casting shadows like a mesmerising ritual; like the rituals performed by peoples of that time: veneration of goddesses and female rites of passage. These phrases, written with the letters of an alphabet created by Clara Carvajal, evoke spatial labyrinths and hieroglyphics that have waited centuries to be deciphered. Perhaps an original language, which disappeared with a whole culture, as the artist suggests in the declaration "The loss of a language and culture of the defeated".

In Amazonomaquia 1.2 silhouettes inspired by other Amazonomachy, cast shadows onto photos of the metopes printed on wood and onto the wall. The outlined black silhouettes undeniably represent the Amazons on horseback, in action, with all their warrior equipment: bows, arrows and axes, similar to the ones found in tribal tombs, between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Sea. At this point, two more statements are made without prejudice: "Female Warriors and The reality of Battling".

By filming female boxers training and in combat in Amazonomaquia 1.3, Clara also raises the issue of fighting in the literal sense. In this video women fight women in regulated sports, they declare however, that they would be ready to fight men on a par

using the same weapons, like the ancient Amazons did. They know what they want and they go for it, totally focused on defending and attacking if necessary. They are Contact Sports World Champions, with braided hair and a keen eye on the opponent. Nothing distracts them from concentration on their strategy. Dancing foot moves to advance and protect, agile legs and body on the ready for whatever hits. Warriors.

Today's Amazon transmits this attitude. Clara has chosen well to depict today's professional fighters to remind us that we are strong and equal. Let's not forget.

### The Power of Art

Why has history denied women some common human attributes in its artistic representations? Many factors answer this question but I want to focus on the artist's proposal: an opportunity to approach, reconcile and acknowledge our full self. To look again at current discourse and reflect on what is happening today regarding the female mindset.

History has not depicted an active woman, focused point-blank on achieving objectives head on. We now have the opportunity to rethink inherited roles that have been passed down through tradition and visual and written works, and to manifest the talents we all have. It is our choice to use these skills or not, but they are present, ready to be discovered and revealed. We are History and the legacy of the women that went before us, embodied today with firmer step.

Stories come to light when they have to, just at the right time to be avidly heard.

I was greatly impressed during my first invitation to Clara Carvajal's studio, when the work was still in process. The first two Amazonomachy were quite advanced, they caused a big impact, a deep emotion in me, the kind of wordless emotion produced by sublime works of art that reach beyond formal or theoretical analysis. A feeling that made me instantly empathise with Clara, with the metopes of the Parthenon and with the Amazons mentioned by writers and historians before our era, such as Homer or Herodotus.

Beyond my initial motivation and enthusiasm, this empathy made me reflect from a personal stance and, I dare say, from a collective need to make visible, with Clara Carvajal's work, aspects of society and of the human being that had been hidden throughout the History of Art. Her assertiveness, her way of looking and her accurate explanations, transmitted the same energy I sensed in her works. Works which were Clara herself, wanting to speak, to propose, to feel and to do something important.

From that day almost a year ago, to now, the energy has been forging ahead with determination, enjoying the journey, along which allies have been made. Allies who have vibrated with the same emotion that invaded me on day one at the artist's studio.

This energy has materialised and made a part of our human essence visible. Rendered by contemporary art, it is respectful of history, wondrous, fresh, decisive and courageous. A tribute to the “Women of the Moon” who live on in us.

So many stories to listen to and so much History to learn, starting, as the Artist proposes, by reclassifying Art. Clara says of her work “language is the message”. She communicates with the language of visual arts, one of the most powerful creative forces for personal and collective transformation. Having descended from their lofty classic Athenian frieze, we listen, in amazed, serene silence, to Amazons speaking about a reality that we only caught a glimpse of in myth, and we hear them retell their story from a different angle.

Clara Carvajal softens our gaze, she draws us closer to and reconciles the Warrior Woman’s past, so we can identify with them, without criticism or justification, to courageously and enthusiastically lead us to the last of her statements: “It’s not myth, it’s history”.