

## VISUAL ART



BRUCE MATHEWS PHOTOS

For her exhibit at Kemper at the Crossroads, Ana Maria Hernando used colorful hand-crocheted petticoats she purchased from women in the Andean village of Mollamarca. Hernando combined the petticoats with plastic disks encasing embroidered flowers in her floor installation "La Montana Trae Barcas de Azucenas (The Mountain Brings Us Boats Full of Lilies)."

# THE SELFLESS WORK OF WOMEN

**Ana Maria Hernando's blossoms and colors reflect the work of Andean villagers.**

By ALICE THORSON  
The Kansas City Star

It's no put-down to describe Ana Maria Hernando's show at Kemper at the Crossroads as "pretty." Colorful flowers are the leitmotif of this Argentinean-born artist's exhibit, "When the Women Sing," but they come in many forms and have special stories to tell.

The show's centerpiece is a 38-foot drift of blossoms composed of hand-crocheted petticoats made by women who live in the Andean village of Mollamarca, Peru. Stiffened by Hernando with glue and resin, they're sturdy — and alluring, in shades of bright pink, green, yellow, orange and blue. The artist purchased them from their makers after she got to know them during the course of several visits to Mollamarca.

Set on the floor, each inverted petticoat serves as a cup for additional floral images, some embroidered by Carmelite nuns in Buenos Aires whom Hernando met through her mother, others created from delicate "nanduti" knotted lace, a specialty of the Guarani people of Paraguay. Some of the flowers hold colorful pompoms that Andean women weave into their braids.

For Hernando, needlework is a metonym for women's labor, which is often taken for granted or rendered invisible.

"I believe in women, their wisdom and I have a deep admiration for the selfless work women do and have done through centuries," Hernando said in an interview with Kemper curator Barbara O'Brien.

And in her artist statement, she says: "My most pressing image would be that of women embroidering tablecloths, washing, ironing. Later these embroidered beauties are stained and covered with food. Hours of loving work have become the background."

In addition to petticoats, her floor piece features plate-size plastic disks encasing additional embroidered blossoms. The disks eddy around the petticoats and shimmer like droplets of water, resonating with the work's title, "La Montana Trae Barcas de Azucenas (The Mountain Brings Us Boats Full of Lilies)."

In 2009, Hernando exhibited "La Montana" in a one-person show at the Boulder (Colo.) Museum of Contem-



Hernando's floor installation also incorporates "nanduti" knotted lace from Paraguay, which she placed in the center of some of the inverted petticoats, and colorful pompoms that Andean women weave into their braids.

porary Art, where it caught O'Brien's eye. For the Kemper, she also created a site-specific wall installation, "Nina Sonando (Young Girl Dreaming)." Measuring roughly 12 by 13 feet, it features dozens of embroidered tulips, lilies, arabesques and leaf forms arranged in a radial design that suggests a giant quilt block or hand-sewn counterpane.

The work pops beside a lime-green wall that enhances the unapologetic crafty femininity of Hernando's aesthetic.

Like the undersung Pattern and Decoration artists of the 1970s — Robert Kushner, Joyce Kozloff, Miriam Schapiro, Kim MacConnel — who also turned to quilts, embroidery and the decorative arts for inspiration, Hernando embraces the decorative side of the creative impulse.

"The underlying premise of the movement is that ornamentation is an affirmation of life," curator and writer Michael Duncan said during a 2003 retrospective of MacConnel's lively patterned canvases. "It's getting back to an instinct that high Modernism tried to suppress or weed out of us from some puritanical reason."

Hernando's work also admits an affinity to that of New York artist Polly

Apfelbaum, an inheritor of the Pattern and Decoration tradition who also has worked with scraps and fragments. Her floor piece, "Split," is part of the Kemper's permanent collection.

During a 2005 residence at Shark's Ink print publishers in Colorado, Hernando created "Las Aberturas, Los Organos que Esperan (The Openings, The Organs That Are Waiting)." Pierced with cutouts, this large lithograph diptych featuring flower and plant forms generated the materials for a series of framed paper collages.

Hernando recycled the bits of cut-out paper into blossom mandalas that invite meditation on women's labor. Several feature swirling designs suggestive of twirling petticoats, harking to the dancing women she saw on her first trip to Mollamarca.

"I decided long ago that all and everything I did in my life was going to be part of my work," she says in the exhibit's accompanying brochure.

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"Pongco, Circulo de Poder II (Pongco, Circle of Power II)" (2010) features flowers embroidered by Carmelite nuns in Buenos Aires.

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ARGENTINEAN-BORN ARTIST  
ANA MARIA HERNANDO

## ON EXHIBIT

The show: "When the Women Sing"

Where: Kemper at the Crossroads, 33 W. 19th St.; 816-753-5784, www.kemperart.org

When: Noon-8 p.m. Friday and noon-6 p.m. Saturday. The exhibit continues through Jan. 15.

How much: Free

