

An abstract ink wash painting in shades of black, grey, and white. The composition is dominated by dynamic, expressive brushstrokes that radiate from the center, creating a sense of movement and energy. The background is a mix of light and dark tones, with some areas appearing more saturated and others more washed out. The overall effect is one of raw, emotional expression.

**MARTA
ESTREMS:
THE POWER
OF CATHARSIS
& HEALING
THROUGH ART**


BY CARLA GROH

E art & artists



Detail of D.C. Series 350, pastel, oil and charcoal on canvas, 2014, by Marta Estrems.

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Untitled 303, pastel, oil and charcoal on canvas, 2007, by Marta Estrems.

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Argentinian artist Marta Estrems, one of the leading Latin American Abstractionists, imbues her ethereal and often enigmatic canvasses with a powerful repertoire of emotional depth, kinetic energy and visual imagery, evoking complex connotations within deeper layers of the viewers' intuitive perception.

Her work is a form of meditation, an invitation to quiet the noise of the external world and to slow down to access the deeper layers of the self and human interconnectedness.

Marta Estrems' paintings seek to visualize the human capacity to connect with nature and each other, focussing on the inexpressible, the intangible, and the immaterial, with her abstract canvasses forming a bridge between our inner and outer world experiences.

This focus is mirrored in her creative process of deep contemplation and immersion by accessing these raw collective emotions and experiences in human interconnectedness. By surrendering herself into this state of open receptiveness and vulnerability, no matter how painful or disturbing, her goal in this creative process is to allow these formerly intangible and sometimes chaotic forces to find artistic expression, and transmutation by materializing on her canvasses.

Many of the artists' paintings emerge from a need to respond to these disruptive forces representing harrowing violations against women, in this case of the painting titled *N.274*, the brutal abduction of about 274 girls, that occurred on April 2014. These young women were taken from a school in the small community of Chibok, Nigeria, by a terrorist group called "Boko Haram." When Marta



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—PRUNE NOURRY
FRENCH MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST

learned of these events she states it was like “274 thorns that were stuck in my heart”.

She set to work immediately, first choosing the large size of the canvas, to symbolize the overwhelming power exercised by men over girls and eventually trying to resolve and reflect on this story through her immersive process using a neutral palette, with charcoal, oil, graphite, medium and working layer upon layer on the canvas. The interplay of light and dark hues creates a sense of depth and complexity, adding richness and texture to the composition and simultaneously conveying complex, underlying emotions. The sign of the number 274 was interwoven with various other symbols throughout the artwork, creating a dense and weighted atmosphere through the use of kinetic brushstrokes with “its repetition rendering strength to the barbarism inflicted on these young women.” as stated by the artist.

The Chibok kidnapping brought worldwide attention to the need for more concerted efforts to protect civilians, especially young women targeted for seeking knowledge and empowerment through education, from violence and terrorism and sparked international outrage and a social media campaign with the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. However, despite intense search efforts and negotiations, there are still

108 girls that remain in captivity. The brave resilience of these girls who first risked their lives to pursue an education and then in the face of their captors, by resisting their demands also inspired a series of art projects in Nigeria.

One of them, titled *Statues Also Breathe* was conceived by French artist Prune Nourry and consists of 108 life-size clay heads, made by 108 students from all over Nigeria and inspired by Ife heads—terracotta sculptures made in the region centuries ago and considered to be among Nigeria’s most significant cultural artifacts. These clay sculptures, now on display at an art gallery in Lagos, depict the faces of the 108 Nigerian girls who are still missing nine years after they were kidnapped. Artists from all over Nigeria took part in the project as well as some of the girl’s parents and a small group of women who were released from the terrorist group. They used clay from the Ife area was sourced by a community of local female potters, who also contributed to the creative process.

“For the students, for all of us who felt so useless when something so incredible happened and you cannot do anything about it, the fact of being able to at least give a little thing through sculpture, through what we know how to do, was healing,” the artist Prune Nourry said in an interview with Reuters.

Marta Estrems’ painting *N.274* is a tribute to this spirit of compassionate transmutation and serves as a reminder that art is not only a means of self-expression but also a path toward a deeper understanding and connection with the people around us, opening avenues of deep unity and collective katharsis. ■

About the artist

Marta Estrems (born in 1949 in Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina) received most of her professional training in Buenos Aires and initially pursued studies at the Manuel Belgrano National School of Fine Arts, where she obtained a degree in teaching visual arts. She later studied in the Master of Fine Arts program, majoring in drawing, painting, and sculpture at the Prilidiano Pueyrredon National School of Fine Arts. She moved to the United States in 1987 and lives and works in Miami.

Throughout her career, Estrems has participated in more than twenty exhibitions in Argentina, Italy, Spain, and the United States. Her work has been shown in cultural institutions such as PIAG Museum (Coral Gables, FL), Armory Art Center (West Palm Beach, FL), the Alvin Sherman Library (Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale), and the Latino Art Museum (Pomona, CA) among others. Her most recent solo exhibition includes *Containment: The Tao of Aesthetics* (Arch Gallery, Miami, 2012) and “Painting and Drawings by Marta Estrems” (Miami Beach Botanical Garden, 2008).

The artist is currently in the pre-production phase of a new series of works dealing with a very personal and sensitive subject matter—book censorship. This topic holds significant importance to the artist as her home country, Argentina, sadly held a dubious record for banning books during their last dictatorship.

Marta Estrems’ artistic exploration of the history and impact of book censorship in Argentina and other countries around the world seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the issue and its implications for intellectual and artistic freedom of expression. Through her artwork, the artist seeks to raise awareness about the dangers of book censorship and encourage people to stand up for their right to read and access information freely and honor the memory of those who have suffered under oppressive regimes and promote the values of democracy, human rights, and individual liberty.

Editor’s note: Author Carla Groh, art specialist and archeologist, owns and operates Evey Fine Art located in Palm Beach, Florida.

D C SERIES N274, mixed media on canvas, 2023, by Marta Estroms. COURTESY EMMY FINE ART / PALM BEACH / ARTVEVY.COM

