



Esto es una Papa

Peru, 2011

One often starts a project with a specific idea and plan in mind. However, through the process eventually a distance opens up between that original idea and the actual outcome.

This project was something I thought of over the course of many years when a Peruvian friend—speaking about my work in a tangential and associative manner—told me about a man in Peru the people call “the Potato King”. He is an elderly man who has spent his entire life cultivating the largest possible variety of potatoes.

My friend began to relate my work to the story of the potatoes because of the way in which they represent an infinite number of forms—and my interests in this area—as well as the kinds of shapes that at times seem more related to geological forms than to what one might imagine a ‘potato’ to be.

The only thing that I could find out about the Potato King, Leonardo Timoteo Salcedo, was from an article in a newspaper where he vaguely indicated his place of residence. The article introduced him as someone who cultivated potatoes for scientific purposes, almost as a kind of European collector.

Leonardo Timoteo Salcedo lives in such isolation that there was no way of locating him before my arrival to Peru. Instead, I decided that I would go to the town where the newspaper mentioned he lived: San Miguel de Putaca, an annex of Huasahuasi, district of the province of Tarma, in the department of Junín, Peru. I went in May since it was during the season of the native potato harvest.

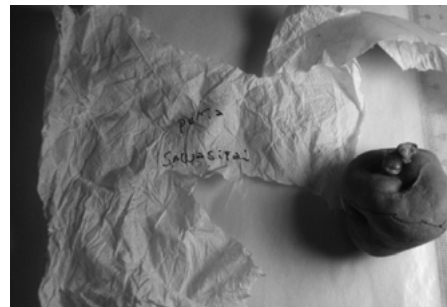
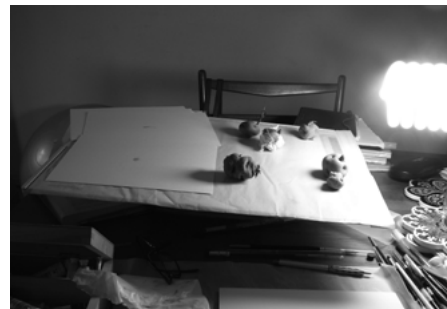
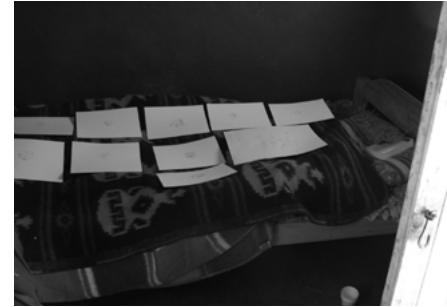


I arrived in Huasahuasi at dawn after hours of traveling along a windy route behind a long chain of cars. I stayed in the town hotel that the locals referred to as the “nice one.”

I waited for the daylight and walked to the municipal office to ask about the land deeds of the people who lived in the area. The receptionist looked up at me and asked “Who are you searching for?” and I responded, “Mr. Leonardo Timoteo Salcedo.” She gave me a surprised look and said, “He’s right over there. He came down from the mountain today for the first time after many months for a meeting at the municipality.”

Luck was on my side. Mr. Timoteo and I planned to take one of the municipal trucks to the farm the next day. I had breakfast with him and they interviewed me on the local radio: “painter Irene Kopelman from our sister nation Argentina.”

One breakfast with Mr. Timoteo was enough to clear up any of the preconceptions I had formed from reading the newspaper article. The “collector” described in the newspaper, was a peasant who cultivated crops undoubtedly for his own subsistence, cultivating Andean potatoes that only grow at 4,000 meters where he lives. His parents cultivated these potatoes, his children do and with a little bit of luck his grandchildren will too.



i
pencil drawings, series of 18
pencil on paper, 21 × 30 cm





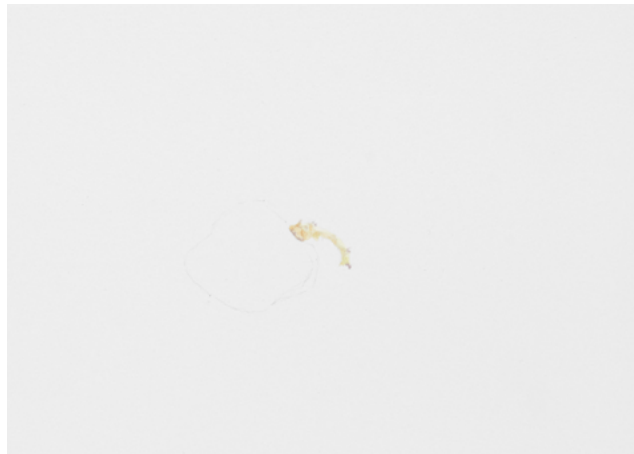
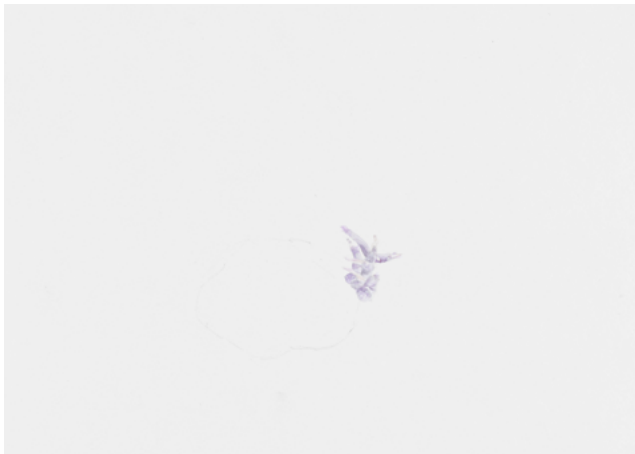
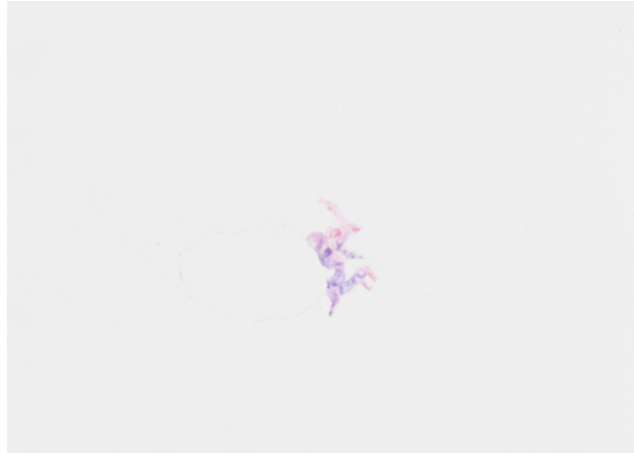




ii

watercolors, series of 19

watercolor on paper, 21 × 29 cm









iii

diptychs, series of 4

part I: pencil on paper, 21 × 30 cm

part II: potato peel on paper, 30 × 41 cm





Irene Kopelman
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