DIALOGS FROM WITHIN
(This conversation took place on May 27, 2016 at MUSAC)

Kristine Guzmán: We are happy to welcome two special guests this afternoon: Pamen Pereira and Dokushô Villalba, the first Spanish Zen Master in history. When Pamen and I were preparing this exhibition, Dokushô's name came up many times in our conversations. And the more I researched Pamen's work, the more I saw Dokushô's name pop up in texts by and about the artist. Pamen often talks about how meditation has changed her life. We see this very clearly in her work, which is almost like a meditative process.

Pamen Pereira: The first thing I would like to say is that this is not a Zen exhibition. Zen is not an art, nor cosmetics, nor an interior design method … the word "Zen" appears everywhere. It isn't a philosophy, either. The press often describes me as a "Zen artist" and my work as "Zen art." I am not a Zen artist. This is something I would like to make clear, because Zen has nothing to do with it. Zen may be related to a way of understanding life, of developing it, reconciling with it, breathing it, and being attentive to how things are done.

Zen is something that cannot be conceptualized. We put names on things for communication, but it should be made clear that Zen is not something concrete that you can see with your eyes. I understand it as a way of uniting matter and spirit: something comes up and becomes materialized.

I don't usually speak publicly about my spiritual practice; it is something that only my friends know about and that I told Kristine about when we first met. It is something internal that helps me to become more comfortable in this world. Learning to meditate, to sit down, to feel, was something that helped me accept various situations and accept myself.

The work that you see in this exhibition is a work that starts from within. It is first an internal work, things find me and I face them without looking for a rational logic. There is a part of chance that *may* be coincidence or may *not* be coincidence, that comes from paying attention; and when you are alert, things are scattered here and there, and your attention goes *whoop* and clings to one thing or the other, and you wake up to this unknown, unacknowledged law that we call chance. There are some works that appear as chance encounters but later become indispensable and produce wonder. Because paying attention leads you to unexpected things. I think that this is part of the magic of this exhibition. The other part is the energy and attention that is put into things that become latent—they do not disappear. You let go of something, and that thing remains, but it is not only the thing that remains but all the attention with which it was made.

My work starts from a vital experience—it is almost always a pure, vital experience; praxis. Notice that the exhibition has a pulse. Not only do you hear a pulse from the recording of my heartbeat, but I think that there is something alive in the exhibition.

Dokushô Villalba: I believe that it is not the objective of this conversation to explain the work of Pamen Pereira. The artistic work does not need to be explained intellectually or rationally; it must be felt and connected with from a place of

profound intuition. This is not an explicative dialog about the work, but a dialog that is in a way part of the work.

I also have to say that I do not like the tag “Zen painting” or “Zen art.” it is nothing more than a tag, and in a way Pamen was already a creative genius before she discovered Zen. Pamen already showed creativity and good work as an artist before practicing Zen, because her art is part of her nature.

I remember when we first met twenty-three years ago, when she came to her first retreat. She was a volcano in continuous creative eruption. An internal flame pushed her as if she was mounted on the back of a runaway horse whose reins she couldn’t control. It is significant that one of her works that is in the Luz Serena Monastery is a figure in meditation pose, a figure that is outlined by a flame, a meditating figure on fire. I think that this was what she felt, especially at the beginning when she would sit down to meditate and would come into contact with this internal flame, the flame of creativity. It is true that as the years passed, the practice of meditation has penetrated, impregnated, her own vital process as a person—as a human being, as a mother, as a wife—and has contributed to her own maturity. I believe that the result of this process is what we see in this great exhibition.

We can appreciate the silence in the background. This morning, before entering, I looked at the whole space, how it was constructed, the figures, the forms, but also how the works are placed in relation to each other and in relation to the emptiness of the halls. What touched me was the silence of the background behind each work. And this silence is something that one gets in touch with when meditation is practiced on a regular basis. In the beginning, one gets in touch with the mental and emotional activity itself like in a cricket box, with a lot of internal noise, many memories, many expectations, many plans for the future. But once one’s respiration is controlled, one’s mind starts to calm itself little by little, and one experiences a state that in the Buddhist tradition is called *samadhi*, a state of tranquility, a state of profound peace. I feel that this tranquility, this profound peace, is the background of the exhibition, the background of creation, of Pamen’s dynamic, astonishing creation. And I like this astonishment. When you have lived for many years, it seems that nothing in the world can astound you anymore, that you have seen and known everything. Pamen’s work gives you back the childlike wonder, the wide open eyes, the glee that makes you say, “What is this?!” Her work cannot be understood rationally; for me, her work cuts through the rational discourse and forces you to face new realities such as a flock of swallows lifting a series of objects that are normally on the ground, or the perfect union of a palm flower with a deer’s antlers. I also perceive the harmony of contrasts in these works, the harmony of opposites, of things that may seem illogical and desultory. The artist makes us see that these opposites maintain a profound and harmonious relationship.

The title Pamen chose for the exhibition is a line from one of the oldest works in the Zen tradition (or *chan*, in its Chinese version) called the *Hôkyô Zanmai* in Japanese. It is usually translated as *The Precious Mirror Samadhi*. It is one of the most important works and is studied in all the Zen monasteries around the world. The text refers to a state of meditation when the mind is converted into a still mirror, like the surface of a calm lake that reflects reality as is. One of its verses goes,

> When a wooden man breaks into song

The stone woman gets up to dance

This is what we call a *kōan* in Zen tradition. A *kōan* is like an enigma, something that must be fathomed, something that must be penetrated, neither with the intellect nor through discursive-rational thinking but through intuitive comprehension. It requires you to open your mind, your heart, and your sensibility in order to pass into another dimension that is beyond pure reasoning. A wooden man that sings … Can you imagine a wooden sculpture of a man singing? How can we hear that voice, that sound? And then the stone woman gets up to dance … Imagine a sculpture of a sitting stone woman that gets up and dances. How can we see the movement of a stone woman who gets up and dances while listening to the voice of the wooden man singing? This is something that cannot be understood, it is illogical. It goes beyond our everyday logic, and it is what we see in this exhibit. Each work seems to be contrary to logic, to our usual thinking, and it is precisely because of this that each of the works in the exhibition and many others that Pamen has created are like visual *kōans*. Something forces you to stop the usual rational discourse and to enter into a state of shock, a state of opening up to see what is before your eyes. And it is this exercise that Pamen has unconsciously internalized and that allows her to express what she expresses.

We can say many things, but we think that it is much better to give you the opportunity to participate, to state your points of view, your questions, your observations, so that all of us can create a richer dialog.

Pamen Pereira: Let me say something that might encourage you to ask questions … When I chose the title *The Stone Woman Gets Up to Dance,* I chose it because it was a phrase that gave me goosebumps each time I read it. I did not need to understand anything about it. I thought that it was an incredibly poetic image, and because I liked to play with these paradoxes and reconcile them, I used this phrase from the *Hôkyô Zanmai*, but taking it out of the text's context. It is interesting how this puzzle began to fall into place. At one point Kristine said it would be interesting to know where the title came from, and I said, "Yes, it would be interesting," but intuitively I just wanted it as a title regardless of what the *Hôkyô Zanmai* says. Whatever the *Hôkyô Zanmai* had intended with this phrase doesn't matter. Later I was happy to find out that the *Hôkyô Zanmai* wanted to say the same thing I wanted to say with this phrase. I think that in this moment of my life, at 52, there are many things that begin to settle … It is a very important moment for me … and there is an empowerment of the feminine in this phrase. The stone is passive, apparently inert. In this phrase the stone not only gets up, and is therefore no longer passive, but even starts to dance. It is a call to a magical ritual. "When a wooden man breaks into song, the stone woman gets up to dance." Life arises from inanimate matter, so the stone can start to dance. Traditionally, the feminine is that which is receptive, the creative principle that which is masculine … but here we have a mixture of the two things. The feminine becomes empowered, recuperates her power, and dances. From the origin of humanity, shamans—and not only shamans—have used a ritual invocation to attain something that is not within their reach, to fertilize the earth, to make it rain … so that things may find their internal order. So, little by little, I realized that it was the perfect title, and I was thankful that Kristine insisted on relating it to the *Hôkyô Zanmai* because intuitively I was really reaching something very important with this poem.

Kristine Guzmán: I think that if one thing was clear, it was that we needed a *kōan* as a title for the exhibition, because almost all of Pamen's works have a *kōan* as a title: *The Whole World is Medicine*, *The White Horse Penetrates the Cane Flower*, and so on. Initially, I wanted to use the whole verse for the title, but I think it was correct to just focus on this phrase, because it includes everything we wanted to say about the exhibition: the reference to the woman, the reference to matter, and the reference to the mirror, like a reflection of Pamen in all her works. And in this short title, we have all our references.

Pamen Pereira: Dokushô, wouldn't you agree that the mirror covering the window in the hall can be viewed as the *Precious Mirror Samadhi*—the mirror, always still, reflecting the silence of the exhibition? When we walk through the exhibition, we see ourselves reflected in it like in a calm lake that reflects the sky. Like the thoughts in our head, our mental flow interacting within this space, in this lake.

Dokushô Villalba: It can be seen that way. Where there is a mirror, there is a reflection. What the mirror does is reflect. The work itself is reflected.

Pamen Pereira: And moreover, inverted, so you have two views of the exhibition.

Dokushô Villalba: This might be a good cue to let the audience have the floor. We can then continue our dialog from your questions and observations.

Audience member: I would like to bridge a gap, if I may. Your work reminds me of the spirit of Magritte … Since the East is very far, I would like to know if you approached the translation of objects almost like a spiritual exercise the way Magritte did at one point with objects that were very Western, with a Western attitude of transgression.

Pamen Pereira: I'm glad that you've asked this question, because the idea of mixing realities, of combining different objects, of playing with a paradox and reconciling it … is not exclusive to the East. I have used references to alchemy and Central European mysticism many times; they have always fascinated me. I don't think that the idea of an internal process that combines different ideas and concepts is exclusive to Eastern thought. In fact, alchemical symbolism, the spiritual processes of this alchemical transformation that is actually very similar to a meditative process in all its phases, has nurtured me a lot and keeps on nurturing me. I find Magritte marvelous, as I do many other things here … In this sense there is no "Eastern" inspiration at all. My inspiration is in the streets, I don't need to go to China. What happens is that sometimes one connects with these things and realizes that, in fact, the origin is the same in everything.

Dokushô Villalba: Yes, everything has the same origin; we are all one.

Pamen Pereira: We are accustomed to things being separate. I mean, I am here and the world is there. Only it's not really like that, is it? I am the world; I am the same as you. I mean, there is no difference between me and you and what is there.

The same happens with our relationship with nature. The other day I was asked in an interview, "You use nature a lot, so what is your relationship with nature? Do you use it only as an aesthetic resource, or is there also an implication of responsibility?" Let's see: I *am* nature. The mistake we humans continue to make is that we think nature is there and we are here, different from it, and so we are free to manipulate

it: now we fix it, now we don't … for our benefit or for purely personal reasons. When we realize that we are nature, will there be a compromise? By simply saying, "I am nature," I am already implying compromise. I rarely use anything as an aesthetic resource. The forms are the result of a process; if the forms turn out to be more beautiful or if they have a more harmonious shape than the original material, then all the better, but the form is only the result of an internal process.

Dokushô Villalba: For me, one of the things I like about Pamen's works is that each does not reference anything else; they are all in themselves a reality; they create a reality; it is not as if they refer to another reality. And here I see a parallel to Magritte, to one of Magritte's works, the famous pipe below which he writes, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe"). When people see the work—they ask if it is a joke. If this is not a pipe, what is it? Well, it is not a pipe. It is the representation of a pipe. In Zen practice, it is important to realize that our thoughts—the mental representations we create of reality—are *not* reality. What we think is reality, is *not* reality; it is a mental representation. But we often confuse our mental representations with reality, and we get angry when that reality does not coincide with the mental representations we have of it instead of adapting or engaging in a continuous dialog between our mental representations and reality. When I see a fishbowl with an ocean inside, for example, it is not a reference to the ocean. It is not a reference to a fishbowl. It is not a reference to anything. It is not a representation of anything. It is what it is. It is that and nothing more than that. And I like that because all of a sudden you become free of mental representations.

And one asks, "What is this?" Well, it is that. It is true that you can create a narrative. One can explain a work, for example the jacket with its inside coated with gold leaf. One can say that this is like this or like that, that the inspiration was this or that, that the jacket belonged to Pamen's grandfather … okay. Behind each work there is always a narrative. But when you see that that is there, that is all that is there, just as it appears before you. It is a complete work in itself and does not need to be referred to as once belonging to Pamen's grandfather or anyone's grandfather. It is what it is, here and now.

Or when we look at the desk that is lifted in the air by swallows as if it were weightless, and we ask ourselves, "What does this refer to?"—or "What is it trying to say, what is the reality beyond it?"—it is because there is no other reality beyond it. That is the reality. Reality is what you feel when you contemplate the work. So in this sense I think the exhibition and many of Pamen's works function as a *kōan* because they short-circuit our representations of reality and force us to see what is there, exactly what is there just the way it is.

Audience member: I and maybe others here are unaware of what Zen is. You said it is not a philosophy. But then the word seems to be misused a lot. Could you go into a little more detail about what Zen is? And my second question relates to the vision of things. I am reminded of a passage in Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, in which he doesn't know what he sees, if it's a hat, a boa, an elephant … Does this have anything to do with Zen or is it related to the artist's vision in her work?

Dokushô Villalba: Zen is one of the main schools of the Buddhist tradition. It has its origin in the teachings of Buddha, the historic Buddha, who lived in the sixth century BCE in the north of India. We call the teachings of Buddha, which in the West are known as Buddhism, Dharma Buddha. Dharma is the way of Buddha, it spread

throughout India, throughout Southeast Asia, and in the first century CE, it reached China, where it evolved and fused with the Chinese sensibility. In the fifth century, China's own Buddhist school emerged, the Chan School, which we all know by its Japanese name, Zen.

The Zen school is one of the oldest and preeminent schools of Buddhism. It is mainly characterized by a devotion to the meditative practice following the teachings of Buddha, applying them to the internal cultivation of attention, self-observation through a very delicate, developed psycho-corporeal method that normally leads to a continuous state of awakening, in which we become increasingly conscious of ourselves and the world.

Zen is not a philosophy, because it doesn't resort to speculative thought. Neither is it a religion, because it is not a system based on dogmas of faith. We call it "a way of awakening." In the twelfth century it was passed from China to Japan. In the twentieth century it came to Europe and America, where the practice of meditation continues to be explored and expanded.

As it spread to different cultural fields, Zen generated a cultural influence. In Japan it has influenced traditional Japanese art, and in the West it is creating its own creative dynamics beyond any control or intentionality. If a plumber practices Zen, his practice will be reflected in his way of practicing plumbing. Similarly, an artist who practices Zen will naturally reflect the practice of meditation in the artworks.

In answer to your second question, there is a very old story that is told in Zen that comes from India: There was once a faraway kingdom where no one had ever seen an elephant. No one knew what an elephant looked like, but the king had heard that such an exotic animal existed. So, he sent all his wise men to go look for an elephant. These wise men all had a common trait: they were blind. They went to a country in the south and they were shown an elephant. But because they were blind they could only touch it. When they came back to the kingdom, the king asked them, "Tell me, what does an elephant look like?" One said, "It is like a very large, fat, fleshy hose." The other said, "No, it is like a column, very solid, very heavy." The third protested, "No, you are both wrong. An elephant is like a giant fan that moves back and forth and creates air waves." Here in the West, you could say: each tells the story in his own way. Each perceives what he wants to perceive, believes that what he perceives is reality, and doesn't realize that *that* is not reality, but only one way of perceiving reality. The same thing happens with the Little Prince: The bulge of the snake looks like a hat, or a box, and so forth …

Every time I talk about this, the same question arises: If each one of us sees our own version of reality, what is reality? Is there a "real" reality? The truth is that we have no idea; no one has any idea. Kant spoke about *noumenon*, the real essence of things, and *phenomenon*, which is how these things appear in the conscience of each person, or how each one perceives reality. Kant said that we cannot come to know *noumenon*, that the human being cannot know the essence of things. We can only come to know how we perceive, can only know our perception. This is important, because it gives us the humility of realizing that, in the end, our way of perceiving things is nothing more than a subjective way and not the absolute truth. Imagine what our human coexistence would be like if we all accepted that no one had the absolute truth but only relative, partial, and subjective truths. Our relationship would be much more harmonious and easy, because many times in interpersonal, or

even intrapersonal or international conflicts, you hear people say, “I am right, things are exactly how I see them, and if you see it in another way, you are wrong.” Thus more conflict is created. We need not look further than any argument among couples, but it exists everywhere.

Audience member: Pamen, do you spend a lot of time thinking or doing Zen meditation before you create a work, or can you start on the spot, in any moment, in any mental state?

Pamen Pereira: I can start working in any moment but not in any mental state. It doesn’t mean that I have to practice *zazen* to think about what I’m going to do, because, after all, in Zen meditation you have to try not to think about anything. I mean, I don’t say, “I’m going to sit and see what I’m going to do.” Of course there is a mental state that favors creation, but there has to be a moment of tension. A state of tension is essential in order to create. It is impossible to create from balance and stability. There has to be a spark, there has to be something that moves in order to find a different balance. It is in the search for these balances from the initial chaos that I feel the creative force, from the point of view of turning chaos into order. I feel that I have turned chaos into order each time I finish something. However, the ideas tend to arise in a moment when I am not searching for anything. There is a moment of calm, perhaps when I’m strolling through a park, walking the dog, or whatever—in an instant something arises, and that something generates movement, an imbalance that makes me move too, a moment of great tension until it finds balance again and I proceed to give it form. And at any moment, chaos surges again. I like taking risks, that state of tension … I’m always restless. As soon as that chaos is resolved and balance is restored, I start looking for ways to break it again in order to start something new. In order to create you have to get out of your comfort zone, because in your comfort zone you will never find anything new.

Kristine Guzmán: What you’ve just said, Pamen, is interesting, because this whole process that you described of finding balance, of trying to turn chaos into order, is what I experienced when we were setting up the exhibition. I’m sure you remember that we started with twelve floor plans, and we knew exactly where each work would go, and when it came time to install the works in the hall, not everything turned out the way we had planned it. But things just started to fit in, like a puzzle; one circumstance led to another until everything fit.

Pamen Pereira: Everything found its place. However, all the floor plans we made were interesting. Although we changed everything around in the hall, all the planning we had done before was useful, because it gave us confidence. I like to improvise. I like it when people trust me and say, “Go ahead, go and create …” and *boom!* I like that. If you give me your trust, I think I will not betray it. My life is in each of these projects, and, moreover, each of these installations were created on the spot, even if I had thought about it a thousand times. Yes, it is true that I have to prepare, but when I install an exhibition, I look around at the given conditions, and ultimately, everything is created on the spot. That is why the collaboration with the installation team, their involvement, is so important. This was a beautiful installation, even if it took twelve days of high tension and close attention. It was certainly like a masterclass in mindfulness.

Kristine Guzmán: It was an exercise in total scrutiny and discipline, and the energy that Pamen mentioned, all that positive energy in the form of attention that we put

into the work stays there and is transmitted to the visitors. If it weren't for this energy, the exhibition wouldn't be the same.

Pamen Pereira: The installation without the team's involvement is impossible. I can't hang 900 birds all by myself, or the bones, or the bread. The people who work with me need to trust me, and I am infinitely grateful when they understand my work. The birds that were hung didn't matter. What mattered was to know how to hang each thread, how to place our hands and the scissors amongst the thousands of threads to cut the leftover thread. This was really an exercise of concentration and understanding the work.

Dokushô Villalba: In this context, I think what said earlier about your art being like a transformation of chaos into order is very interesting. This is important, because all our perceptions are mental constructs. They are necessarily artificial, and sooner or later they are deconstructed. In other words, they go back to chaos. Living is a continuous exercise in transforming chaos into order, and sometimes order ceases to be and is transformed into chaos again, and from this chaos new order must be created. And each day is like that: When we wake up each morning, we come out of our unconscious chaos and we have to reconstruct the world, our world, our mental categories, our perceptions, our mental constructions. We do this every day, without even realizing it. This is important. When one sits down to meditate in Zen, the mental constructs are seen as what they are: mental constructs. We make ourselves conscious of them, and we let them dissolve naturally. In this way we can come back to the zero point, the point that we call a state of non-thought. The mental quieting has its source in this state of non-thought, and from this state, thought or mental constructs emerge again, organizing everything. This is the continuous cycle of life. We see the construction of great buildings, countries, empires, families, companies that are deconstructed sooner or later. Because everything that is born will end up dead. And this is an unsparing, unchangeable law of existence. In a way the artist feels this restlessness that leads to chaos and then transforms this chaos into new order, and so on, continuously in the creation of each work. As such I think that meditation, at least Zen meditation, helps to deconstruct, to go back to the zero point and from there to begin to construct again. To create again. Because the strength is in the zero point. The original strength is in deconstruction. And from there emerges construction.

Pamen loves to compare her artistic activity to those of shamans. Shamans are priests of the primordial religion of humanity that have existed in all cultures. Wise men and women, creators of bridges, pontiffs between different dimensions of reality. One of their main functions has been to heal. Sickness is an imbalance; something is being deconstructed in sickness. Sickness supposes chaos in the organism, so the shaman must feel, must prevent the chaos, must understand its origin, where it comes from, and through his healing practice, he must create a new order in the person that suffers from the sickness, especially in his mind, in his spirit and in his conscience; and once new order has been established in the sick person's mind or consciousness, his body obeys the order of the mind and consequently is put in order again. This was how shamans cured sickness in ancient times. This is in relation to the process of the construction or creation of order and deconstruction and return to chaos. Right now our bodies are more or less in order; we are well-fitted organisms. We may have problems, but in general we are alive and continue to be alive. Sooner or later this order, this harmony will collapse, the organism will

break, and what follows is the deconstruction of the "I" and individuality. It is the process of death through which individuality fuses with totality again. It is the process of life.

Pamen Pereira: On this note, I think that the exhibition constantly refers to the ephemeral, to death, always coming back to the paradox, to that apparent confrontation of opposites. Take the ossuary of bone-shaped bread: The loafs of bread are very appetizing, but with their shape, what usually nourishes life references death …

Dokushô Villalba: Attraction—repulsion.

Pamen Pereira: Children enter the exhibition and say, "bread, bread …" They do not mind that the bread is shaped like bones. But death is not only in the bones; the swallows that carry objects from my studio—the desk is a desk from my studio, the chair as well, the objects that are there are objects from my studio—there is detachment in that. It references ephemerality, the presence of death, that which was there but is longer there. Once one is able to accept that, I think one has really learned how to live life fully—when one is conscious of that fleeting moment: that we are here for a while and then gone.

Kristine Guzmán: This is about contrasts, because a reference to death does not make sense if there is no reference to life. In the same way that the bones made of bread are the nourishment of life but remind us of death, the bed also represents life and death: We sleep in it because we dream, but at the same time it is a tomb. So the contrasts are always present in the exhibition.

Pamen Pereira: It is the reconciliation of paradoxes. Everything flows and ebbs.

Kristine Guzmán: Attachment and rejection can be seen in the hat, yin and yang, …

Pamen Pereira: The piece with the hat is entitled *Equanimity*. Dokushô's and my friend Mar gave me the idea for it. She visited my studio while I was working on the piece and we spoke about equanimity, and I realized that *that* was the title of the work, because there is a magnetic field that generates a tension made up of the forces of attraction and repulsion just at the right time so that everything remains in an equilibrium. It might be a good metaphor for attachment and rejection, how to find the balance between attraction and rejection.

Dokushô Villalba: It is not a metaphor, it is reality.

Pamen Pereira: Yes, it is reality. Moreover, the hat has a lit candle on its crown. A lit candle also has a significance. The verticality of the candle and its flame are a clear reference to a state of permanent alert. After making the piece I found out that the old yogis used to put a light on their head that helped them to measure time and to remain in a vertical position. I thought, "Look at how many things there are in a hat that I never imagined!" I began to learn or realize these things little by little; I had not thought of all this before. There is an impulse of doing something, and I follow it, and while I am following it, I begin to discover, and in this discovery, there is this tension that we talked about before. Imagination creates; reason does not create. It is the imagination that creates and reason helps imagination to turn what was projected into reality. So we must always put reason at the service of imagination, not the other way around. I think this is also important when it comes to living.

Audience member: At the beginning of your conversation, you wanted to make clear that this is not a Zen exhibition, but what I glean from all the explanations is that a lot of thought and meditation goes into your work. What I would like to know is, had you been an artist twenty-three years ago, when you became interested in Zen, or did you become an artist later? What changed in your artistic work when you entered into the world of Zen? Surely, Zen life has had an impact on your work.

Pamen Pereira: What changed was not the things that I did but the way of doing them. Zen helped me to become serene, to dominate the runaway horse Dokushô mentioned before, and to lead it where I wanted, to reconcile myself with the world. It also helped me to breathe. In 1992 I wrote a text for the catalog *Metafísica sin cielo* [Metaphysics Without Heaven] that said, "day by day I stumble on the same stone, breathing." There was a state of anxiety, of wanting to do something, of wanting to offer something and open up but not finding the key, the mechanism to be able to produce the big wave that I knew could come out of me—a huge wave with a coherent form. I think it helped me with all this. But just look at how works from the 1990s co-exist in this exhibition with works from 2016! I like to see them together, because I can see how, even with the passing of time and their evolution since they were completed, they look good together. There is a discourse that binds them together. Yes, of course I was an artist before discovering Zen. Zen gave me clues to understand the world a little bit better, to be able to raise that wave and let it go further.

Dokushô Villalba: What calls my attention in your works is the continuous allusion to weightlessness. The fact that suddenly all the objects that seemed solid, that are usually on the ground and are held on the ground by the law of gravity, start to float in the middle of an empty space. And here I don't see a metaphor but a sensibility. Moreover, it corresponds with the period in which we live, with the discovery of quantum physics, for example, and with the experience of vacuity that is taught in Buddhism and Zen. For example, we still believe that things are solid. We still believe it. Common sense tells us that a table is solid. In fact, the saying "knock on wood" means we hope for something to become real, because we take wood to be real. What we don't know is that 99.99999% of wood or any matter—iron, quicksilver, any material thing—is composed of emptiness, and the physical load is the least of what makes up the reality in which we live. Matter literally floats in emptiness, although from our common point of view, from common sense and conventional perception, we do not see it like that. Just entering the exhibition space and seeing the solid objects floating in emptiness has a great effect on me and liberates me from the weight and density of matter. Quantum physics already confirmed that we live amongst emptiness. Not only that we live amongst emptiness but *in* emptiness. And that emptiness is 99.99999% of what we are, though we usually identify ourselves with a solid body, with dense matter, with the law of gravity. So seeing everything go up, be elevated, lose weight, and float, is like a movement of liberation for me.

Pamen Pereira: However, in order to have a paradox, there is this bed on the ground. And the cushions of stone that seem to counterbalance everything else taking flight.

Audience member: There is one piece in particular that I liked a lot; it is a kind of mountain range made of grease. It reminded me a little of the way Beuys used fat in

his works. This work of yours goes a little unnoticed in the whole set, because it is a little different from the others. Perhaps you can speak about it a bit?

Pamen Pereira: This is a work I made in 1998. It was the year my son was born. He was born in April, and I had an exhibition at the Pontevedra Biennale in August. So I breastfed the baby, and I had the enormous satisfaction of converting myself into food. And the baby grew … I thought it was incredible; nursing was a fascinating experience, more so than the pregnancy. I wanted to sit on a rocking chair and just have babies brought to me … I liked that thought … These mountain ranges are inside the drawer of a table with another mountain range on top. So the table is also pregnant with the mountain range. The grease is from my village in the province of Lugo in Galicia, where my mother's family is from. Grease was the basic ingredient in cooking. There was no oil; grease was used in everything. So I transferred this into my work: The tabletop mountains that are the mother, the earth. Someone took care of my baby while I was molding the mountains, and so I would go back and forth, from the table to nursing the baby. My friend Alberto González Alegre, who was the curator of the Pontevedra Biennale that year, called this work *Himalaya for a Baby*. It is a very beautiful title for the piece.

Audience member: I see an important contrast to other exhibitions of contemporary art, the aesthetic component, like a goldsmith's, in many of your works. Maybe you won't like what I'm about to say, but I would put your works in my living room. They are aesthetically beautiful pieces.

Pamen Pereira: How could I not be pleased that you like looking at my works? It is true that the aesthetics of my works are a result of everything else. Yes, there is attention to detail. Sometimes I am the first person surprised by the result. And, of course, I like to find the harmony. Sometimes, my intervention is minimal, just a small but precise gesture.

Audience member: I noticed that two works have a technological component: the hat and the fishbowl. Can you tell us about the difficulties in making these works?

Pamen Pereira: The fishbowl took me almost a year to make—from the idea to finding a way to make it. It is really a costly piece in terms of production. Doing it was a question of trust. I had to do it. It is the simulation of an ocean using state-of-the-art software called RealFlow. It was what was used in movies like *Titanic* or *The Impossible*. They are not real recordings of the sea, but numeric data generating waves. RealFlow is a Spanish software developed by a company in Madrid called Next Limit Technologies, and they even won an Oscar. I had the good fortune of working with Jorge Medina, a specialist, perhaps the best in the world. Everything was expensive, not only in terms of money but also time. It would've been easier had the fishbowl been rectangular, but when one speaks of the Whole, the Whole is not square, the Whole is round. When we say that everything is perfect, we say it is complete. When we are talking about something as big as the raging sea, we are talking about the Whole, and the Whole is round. The technicians kept asking me, "Why not make it square? How are we going to put in the screen?"—there is a screen inside the fishbowl, and many people have asked me how we were able to put it there. Well, I don't know how we managed to put it there. The important thing is that we did. And now, how do we project it onto the screen? The projectors have a projection distance and for the images to have the right size, we needed a specific distance. The table did not have the right distance, and so we played around with

mirror reflections. So, this state-of-the-art software coexists with some more analog physical structures. I like this mixture.

Kristine Guzmán: I think this is a good moment to wrap up our conversation. Thank you very much. Our discussion of Pamen's work broached many subjects that Dokushô was able to expand on. We thank you all for coming. We thank our guests, Dokushô and Pamen, for having shared this time with us, and I hope to see you on another occasion here at the MUSAC.