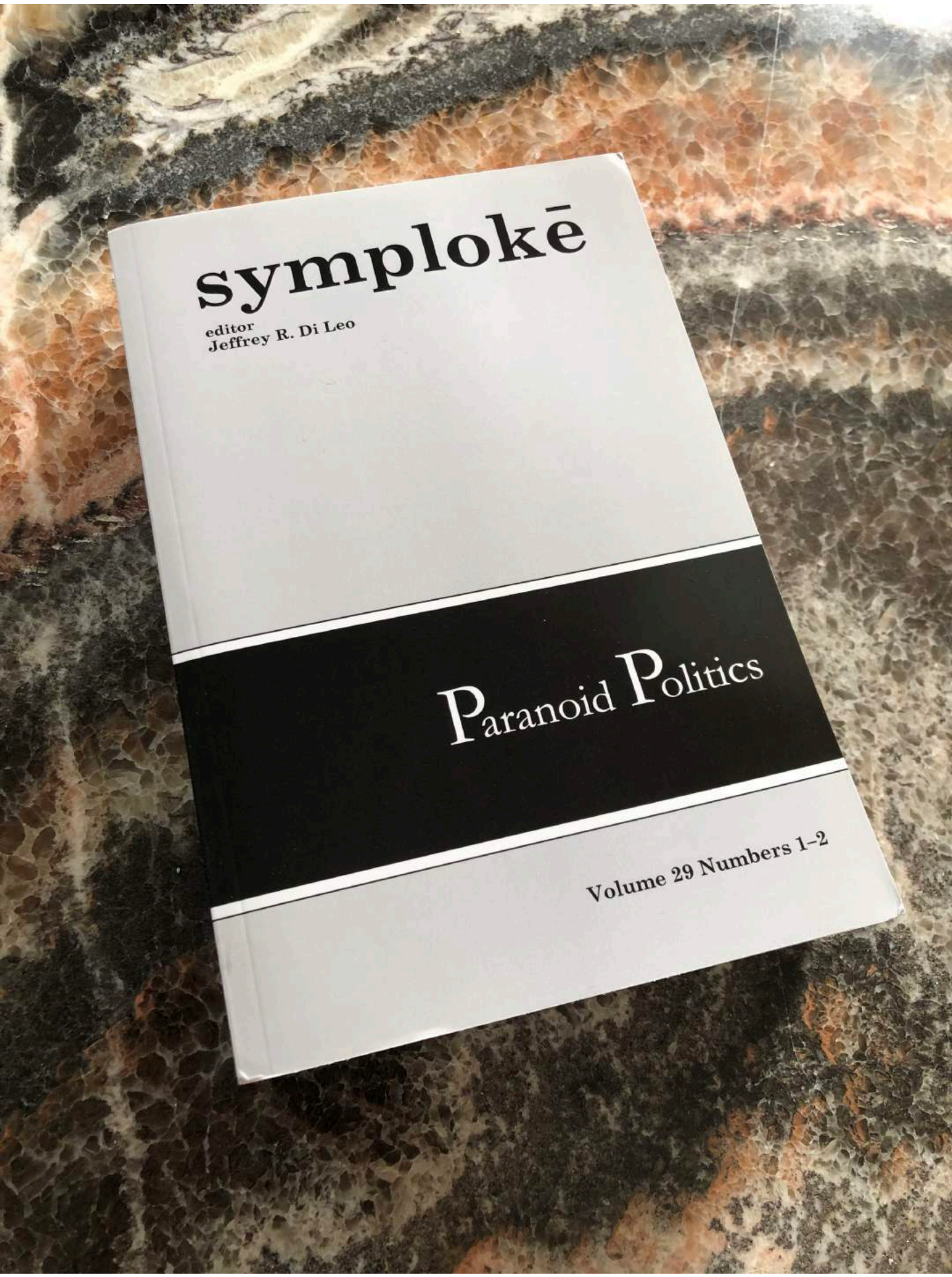
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Jeffrey R. Di Leo
Paranoid Politics
Volume 29 Numbers 1–2

voices in the field. Our aim is to provide an arena for critical
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Violence and Abstraction

Brad Evans and Chantal Meza

Abstractions are everywhere. They fill the air. Abstractions can belong the realm of the pure imagination. They can inspire wonderment. And they can also summon forth the most terrifying gods and empires of worl destruction. Abstraction becomes apparent every single time an orig thought is birthed. It is also apparent in the conceptual delivery of each every philosophical claim. There are no metaphysical principles withou abstractions from which they emerge. We cannot think without them. are the energy defining our existence. Without abstractions, we are re to the mere biological fact of being or sometimes in the darker mom history even less so. Everything in these base-level terms is simplifi reduced to the question of pure survival. Hence, mindfully thwar attempted destruction of the human as abstractedly conceived, huma continually aspired to become worthy of the abstractions of its ow ing. How often do we wish to live up to the expectations of our in dreams? And how often do we torment ourselves when the real vision doesn't match expectations? We live through and are gover abstractions of our impositions and choosing. Belongings, borde they all appear as abstractions before they are consecrated in th realms of the symbolic real. Abstractions are in fact what purpos rates us as humans. Only the human is capable of conceiving of in thought and deeds. It is the only life form we know that i imagines beyond itself. That was what made us exceptional. T now.

Ever since Plato ventured into the dark and illusionary cave, political philosophers have debated the distinction betwe and the real. Plato for his part actively mobilized the shad their phantoms in his scathing attack on artistic pursuits.[1] in thinking, these concepts have given rise to fundamental d fiction and truth, imagination and science, madness and ci security, along with deeper questions concerning absence a the abstract offers not only answers and permits imagina

[1]Plato's most scathing critique of poetry and the arts appears in Re version is available here: http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.ht

would in turn promise to bring order to this chaos and to mitigate against its eventual return. From Zeus to Apollo, so the battle was always about managing the chaos that was now condemned to the underworld, while unleashing the forces for violence from time to time. This idea would be later picked up by Christian eschatology and its story of Genesis. There too the idea that everything emerges from nothing would be integral to narratives of creation. In both cases, the primordial wouldn't refer to complete absence, but could be imagined in the form of some primordial darkness, primordial air or the primordial waters that birthed life. When we think of it, in many ways the latest thinking in the fields of quantum physics haven't really moved too far from this original proposition.[4] Here, too, there is still a certain allegiance to the idea of the unknowable void out of which the universe and its galaxies are formed. Indeed, if it can be assumed that the original state to life is the beckoning void, what becomes the original state of creation has to be the scattering of yet to be formed energies across the darkened expanse. Such scattered energies in their atomized state are what we elect to call "abstract." The abstract is the sum of all primordial energy, whose traces only become visible when the sands of time fall. To speak of the abstract then is to speak of the original appearance in the explosive forces that give rise to life. The abstract is the coming into being of things before they are named, formed and determined. It is the ephemeral dust (figure 1), which contains within the generative capacity to create infinite universes through its chaotic distributions, colliding energies and unpredictable events.

Figure 1. Chantal Meza. *Dust formation*. 2017. Mezzotint.

[4]For an accessible overview on the relations between quantum physics and the concept of the void see Weatherall (2016).

the rectilinear is the first means of breaking with the nonaesthetic imitation of nature upon which the prehistoric, savage, and childish supposedly depend, lacking as he thinks they do, a "will to art." On the contrary, if prehistoric art is fully art it is precisely because it manipulates the abstract, through non-rectilinear, line: "Primitive art begins with the abstract, and even the prefigurative…Art is abstract from the outset, and at its origin could not have been otherwise." The abstract line is at the beginning as much because of its historical abstraction as its prehistoric dating. It is therefore part of the originality and irreducibility of nomad art, even when there is reciprocal interaction, influence, and confrontation with the imperial lines of sedentary art. (Deleuze and Guattari 2002, 496-97)

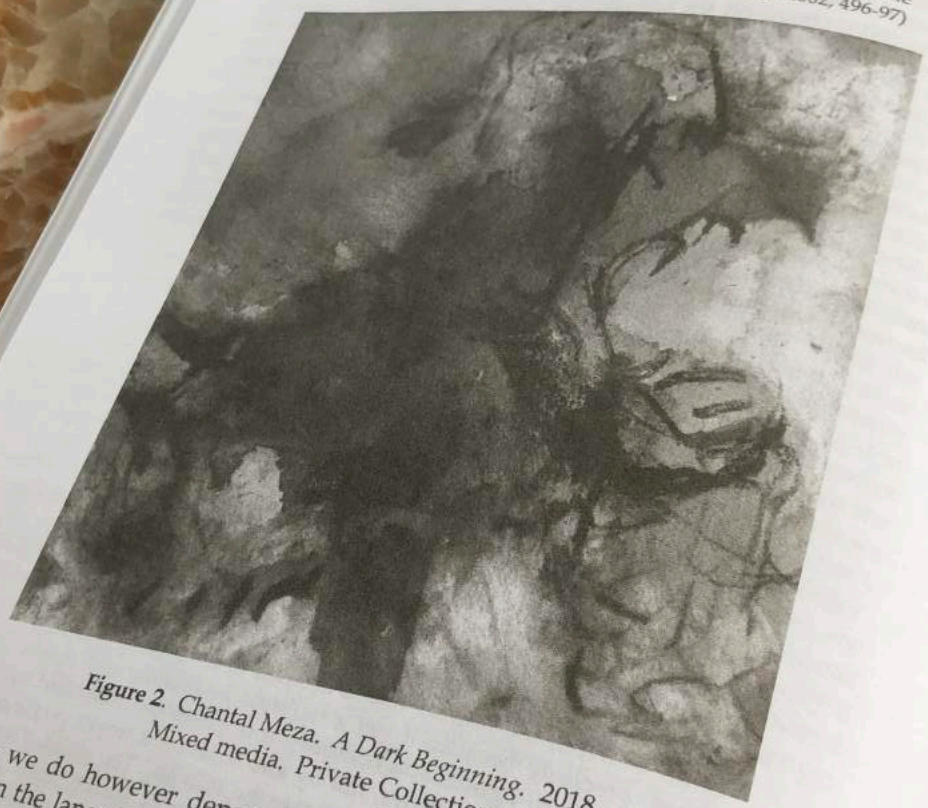

Figure 2. Chantal Meza. *A Dark Beginning*. 2018. Mixed media. Private Collection

Where we do however depart from Deleuze and Guattari is in their insistence on the language of "the machine." In their corpus, everything is machinic: art machines, war machines, sex machines, and so forth. To our

better mastery of technical devices. And secondly, we note how Heidegger was deeply suspicious of the abstract, seeing it in fact as something which takes us away from the very essence of being and merely serves to uphold some false unity and mystical claims to the absolute. Being in fact is the furthest away from abstraction, for true thinking lies in "something lying near, that which lies nearest" (Heidegger 1977, 111), which in virtue of a certain proximity, still remains hidden in plain sight from us. This demands a more grounded notion of artistic beingness that's vigilant to the conditions of the real. While Heidegger is notably taking aim here at what we refer to as being the secondary order of abstraction—a suspicion in both mythical thinking and its devastating effects we share, that there may be something more original to the abstract runs counter to his entire ontological project. This in turn means undoing the Heideggerian idea that art "grounds history" by "allowing truth to spring forth" (Heidegger 1971, 77). Or if we do recognise the primacy of art, which is always a form of poetry, it's never for such a foundational concretion, but to shatter with artistic fury Urizen's stone (Figure 4).

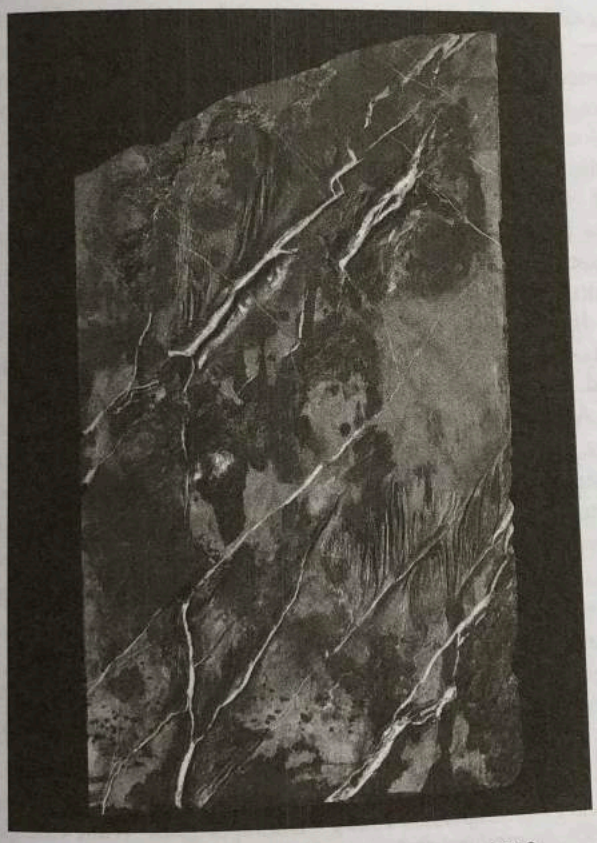

Figure 4. Chantal Meza. *Urizen Stone*. 2020. Low-relief on Marble.

the ultimate sacred victim.[12] But like all religions, Christianity needed to ensure the power of the abstract was regulated. That Christ might be seen as a transgressive poet or revolutionary[13] would be cast side by the notion that while the power of an abstract God, including his love and justice were infinite, the human capacity for imagination must be put to use in his name, thus respecting the limits of his truth. Operating within these limits, Christianity would however bring about its own lasting revolution. From *Genesis* onward (figure 5), so the question of power would be primarily shaped by the question of time. The power of the abstract in fact would be tied evermore to a temporal framing of life wherein the question of existence reaches beyond here and now. If the original scene remained beyond all comprehension, at least the future could be imagined in both its heavenly and hellish states. Indeed, following Dante's own exhausting traversal into the depths of the earthly abyss, so the idea of life as being indebted to the future for the sake of its own salvation became an integral part of the political imaginary.

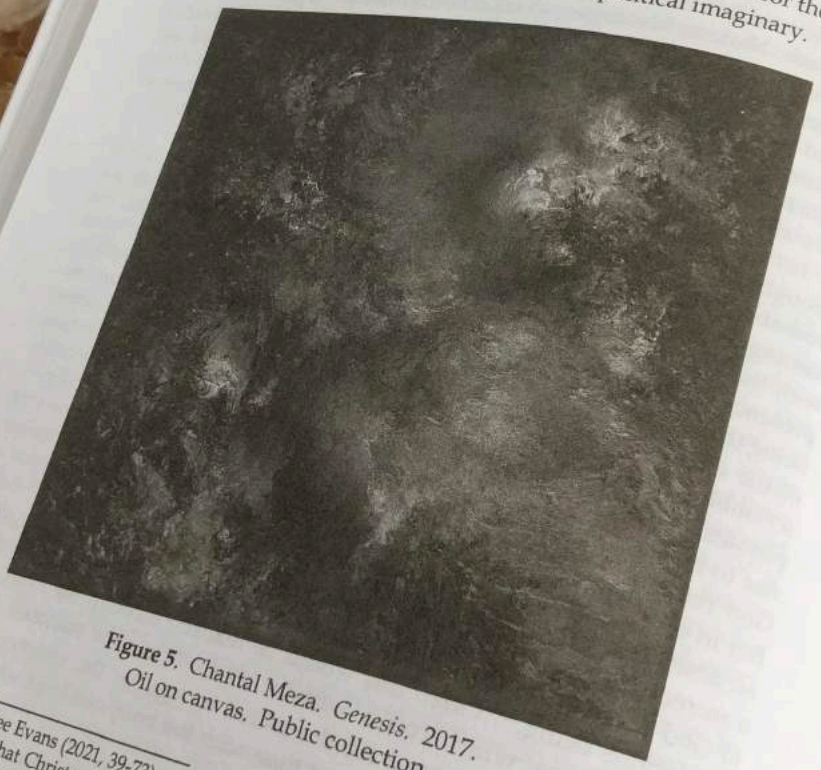

Figure 5. Chantal Meza. *Genesis*. 2017. Oil on canvas. Public collection.

[12]On this see Evans (2021, 39-73).

[13]The idea that Christ was a revolutionary poet was forcefully advanced by Oscar Wilde (2013) in *De Profundis*. For a more recent take on this see Aslan, *Zealot* (2013).

that's the next chapter in the story of our survival we now tell ourselves. Life as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Nature as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Art as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. The abstract as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Death as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Survival as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Which is to say, the void as such only makes sense if we begin form the question of technology.

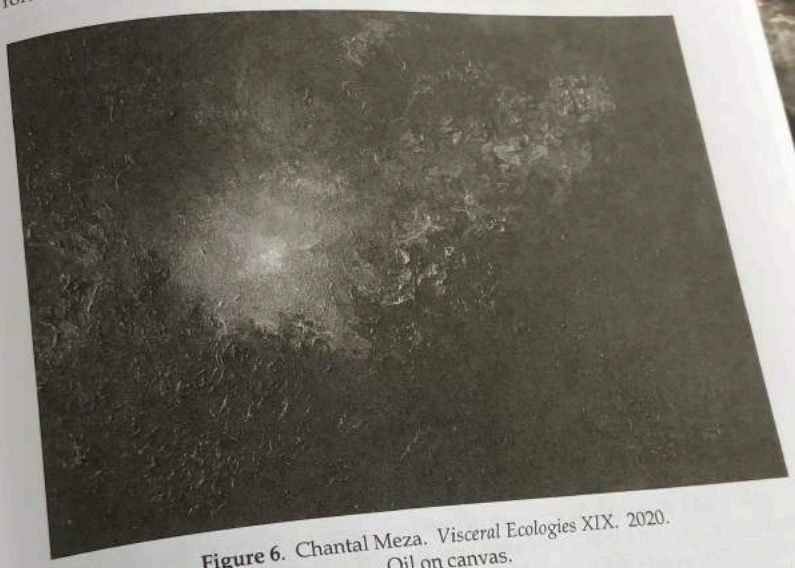

Figure 6. Chantal Meza. *Visceral Ecologies XIX*. 2020. Oil on canvas.

All this confirms the dominance of what we note to be a **digital mimesis**. It is increasingly apparent that contemporary artists need to give over to the digital if they want to remain relevant to the world of art. Even artist such as Maria Abramovich, who for so long insisted on the originality of her performative being and the radical relationality of her situated encounters, has now made herself virtually present, hence virtually immortal, at least until the electricity dies. Then again, maybe the performative already opened us onto a post/trans-humanized terrain, where the question of subjectivity actually became less and less important, while further enabling the potential for digitalization especially in respect to visual cultures. It certainly seems that the two most viable routes open for contemporary artists is to 1) present oneself

poetic and technical, reveals a new ethics which is more about a giving than exploiting, hence truer to our self and truer to the world, allows for new ways of seeing outside of the frames that contain us (Figure 3).

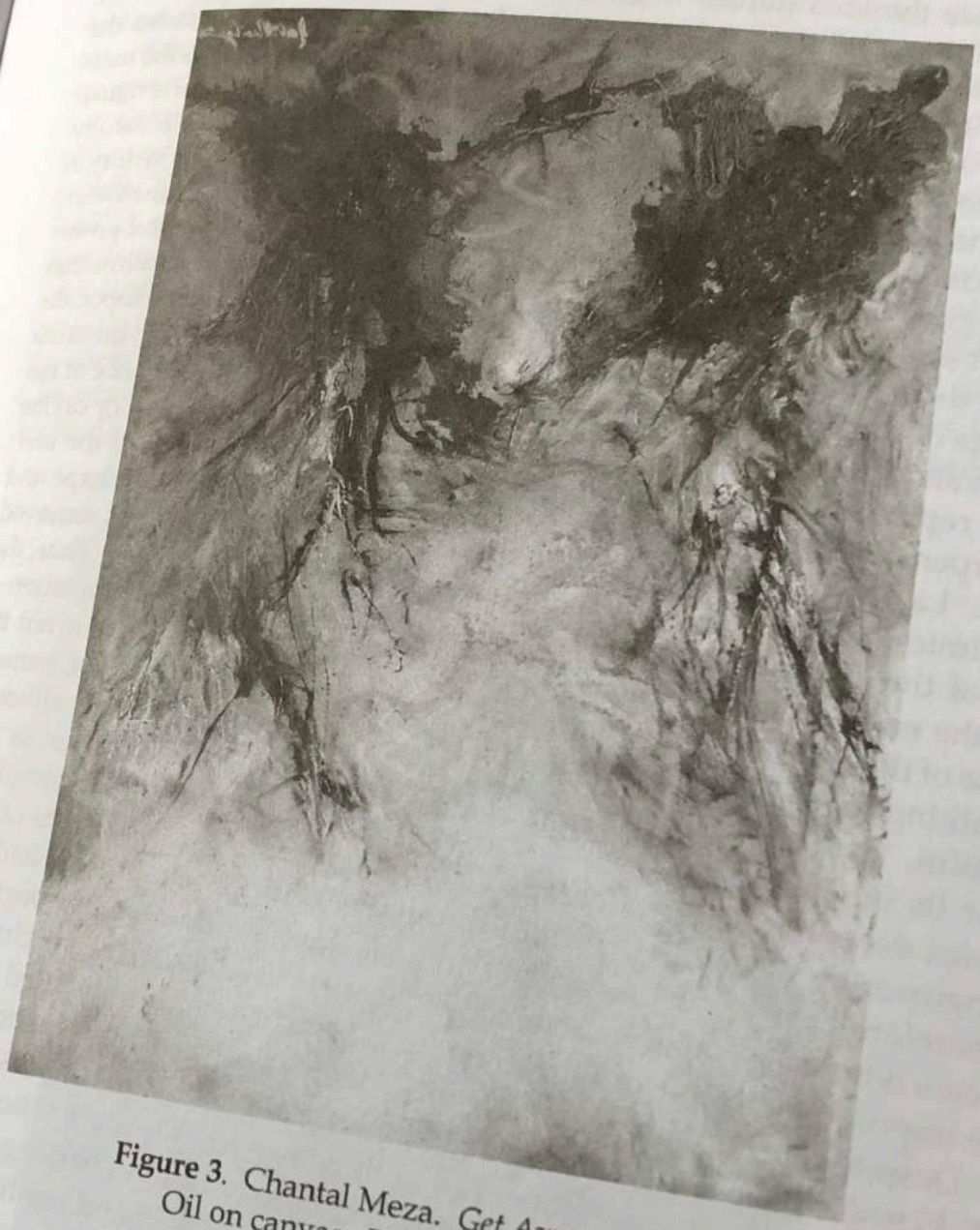

Figure 3. Chantal Meza. *Get Away*. 2014.
Oil on canvas. Private Collection

But let's not also forget here that Heidegger wasn't a lover of all things Greek. His disdain for Plato in particular is well noted, especially when it comes to poetics. It is worth reminding here that it was with "Plato's continual attacks poetry, especially the final and complete exclusion of poets" (Partee 1970) in *Book X* of the *Republic*, where we first encounter the between the poetic and the technical. A ugh the Platonic doctrine of E y: "the gods, th