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# NEGRO MARFIL IVORY BLACK

POETRY BY MYRIAM MOSCONA

TRANSLATED BY JEN HOFER

Winner of two national poetry awards:

2012 HAROLD Morton Landon Translation award  
PEN Award for poetry in translation, 2012

Images by Myriam Moscona  
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“Myriam Moscona’s extraordinary book, *Ivory Black*, is a treatise on the senses.”

—from the introduction by Francine Masiello

***Negro marfil / Ivory Black***, Myriam Moscona’s first book translated into English, is a book-length experiment in inversions: at times the text can be read from left to right or vice versa, the poems reverberate from top to bottom or the other way around, at moments the book itself can be read backwards or forwards. The visual and the textual converse acrobatically. Binaries become multiples. As any painter knows, ‘Ivory Black,’ also known as ‘bone char,’ is the name of a color: to obtain ivory black bone is burned.

“Writing backwards (by English- and Spanish-language standards, that is) evokes an array of cultural, linguistic and even spiritual connotations. Further, it objectifies language: words are ‘only fragments/lack,’ a mark on the page in relation to the negative space around it. A thing written backwards is not the thing, nor is it the inverse of the thing. It is another thing, which is also the original thing yet is not the original thing. In other words: translation.”

—from the translator’s notes by Jen Hofer

***Negro marfil / Ivory Black*** is published as part of the TrenchArt: Recon Series, with an Introduction by Francine Masiello and visual art by Renee Petropoulos. TrenchArt is an annual series of new literature, selected and edited to create a textual conversation between some of the most dynamic and exciting writing today—and tomorrow.

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## ABOUT MYRIAM MOSCONA & JEN HOFER

**Myriam Moscona** is from Mexico, of Bulgarian Sephardic descent. She is the author of nine books, from *Ultimo jardín* (1983) to *De par en par* (2009). Two of her published books are outside the realm of poetry, yet remain connected to poetry: *De frente y de perfil* (literary portraits of 75 Mexican poets) and *De par en par*, which explores the phenomenon of poetry beyond its traditional construction. When *Negro marfil* was conceived, Moscona focused on the use of visual materials (inks, pastels, graphite and acrylics), which led her to explore alternate means of expression. In this way she came to visual poetry: drawn in through the side doors of writing. Moscona has received numerous awards, including the Premio de Poesía Aguascalientes and the Premio Nacional de Traducción; she is a grantee of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte, and she was awarded a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation.

**Jen Hofer's** recent translations include *sexoPUROsexoVELOZ* and *Septiembre*, a translation from *Dolores Dorantes* by Dolores Dorantes (Counterpath Press and Kenning Editions, 2008); *lip wolf*, a translation of Laura Solórzano's *lobo de labio* (Action Books, 2007); and *Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Her most recent books of poetry are *one* (Palm Press, 2009) and *trouble* (Dusie Kollektiv, 2009).

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## PRAISE FOR NEGRO MARFIL / IVORY BLACK

"In the tradition of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, Brazilian concrete poetry and Octavio Paz's *Blanco*, Myriam Moscona's *Negro marfil* is a long poem constructed from phrases (or words) arranged on the page in wildly diverse ways: verses in two columns, in dialogue; segments placed in the center of the page; prose paragraphs; splintering words... *Negro marfil* approaches the fragment with a consciousness that the "target" of intelligible discourse will always be frustrated, that we can only aspire to the marbled charcoal of the ink as it spills over, occluding univocal meaning."

—Jacobó Sefamí, essayist, critic and UC Irvine professor

"I perceive and read *Negro marfil* as a text marked by the "memory-laden ear." Such that language—"errant alphabet"—does not dissolve into nothingness, nor does it freeze on the page of a closed volume: signs dot the trajectory of this extended poem, yet they are points that assemble in the eye—like certain colors, or like the very poem made in the process of reading...as there are no fixed senses, but rather mixtures, superimpositions, intersections..."

—Soledad Biancchi, Chilean poet and critic

"Poetry might be the cracking of the unconscious...understood in the most radical way, that cracking wouldn't presuppose painting as a unit of meaning; rather, it would be the condition of its possibility. It's not that the visual image winds up cracking with the passage of time, as experience suggests, but rather the inverse, that there is an originary cracking prior to the image, that facilitates its coming into being...(T)his is a good starting point for understanding the range of Myriam Moscona's most radical attempt to date to subvert poetic work from within its very foundations."

—Evodio Escalante, Mexican critic and essayist