



NOGUERASBLANCHARD

Paired Stories
Chapter 3: Spring
André Romão

Curated by Joaquín García Martín

Barcelona
Ene 15, 2022 - Mar 18, 2022

NoguerasBlanchard is very pleased to announce the third chapter of *Paired Histories*. Continuing the experimental curatorial programme we have been developing over recent years, this season will be overseen by Joaquín García Martín, founder of the former Madrid gallery garcía | galería. Proposing relationships between various artists and literary figures and works, this cycle presents an/other look at some of the key artists showcased by the gallery between 2012 and 2020 in Doctor Fourquet, Madrid.

Death in Spring is a posthumous novel by acclaimed Catalan author Mercè Rodoreda (Barcelona, 1908 – Gerona, 1983) that narrates the life cycle of its protagonist in the context of a small, closed village. Set in a fictional rural world tied to nature and its cycles, the novel presents a society ruled by sacrificial rituals and traditions which are as cruel as the natural world that surrounds them, and where the individual loses out to the needs and welfare of the collective.

André Romão (Lisbon 1984) has also examined astonishment, cruelty and transformation in his recent work, notably in his cycle which revolves around the classical myth of the Metamorphoses and the writings of Ovid, and which the artist presented in the project “Fauna” at the Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon in 2019. The work method he employed in this cycle is the same as that which Mercè Rodoreda used in her novel, with the union of apparently disparate elements forcing us to look at the world from another perspective. In his case, Romão dwells with special interest on the tactile and the sensory, using the physical as a point of entry into systems of representation.

The world of the novel is evoked through André Romão's sculptures, which are neither a literal illustration of the book nor a collection of works inspired by it, but rather an immersion into a world they both share, into the forms that populate this world, and into a work method shared by both creators.

André Romão, *Ghost* (2020)









André Romão, *Perna (raposa)* (2021)





André Romão, *Diagrama (Cascata)* (2020)



André Romão, *Grafting (Red Wood)* (2021)





I. I think it was only a matter of time before André Romão discovered *La muerte y la primavera* (*Death and Spring*), the strange and unfinished posthumous novel by Mercè Rodoreda. Romão has always been very interested in fiction literature (especially the most heterodox) and has also used it as a base or starting point for some of his works. He has also on occasions, chosen the text as a form of materialization in his work. But above all there is an evident coincidence between the world and the themes that appear in the novel and the poetics of the Portuguese artist. When reading the novel, it is easy for his works to come to mind.

However, beyond the imaginary realm I think that their main point in common is the working method. The Catalan writer and the Portuguese artist share a similar creative strategy: the assembly of initially disparate elements or elements of different origin, which, when joined, produces a subversion of reality to expose other possibilities, multiplying readings and interpretations, opening the way to the strange qualities of metaphor and paradox.

II. *La muerte y la primavera* narrates the life cycle of its protagonist from childhood to death and beyond, through the discovery of love and sensuality, fatherhood and his clash with the social structure in which he lives. It is a small town, closed and rural, isolated, with no historical relationship with our reality, linked to Nature and its cycles, and absolutely determined by rituals and traditions. These have a clear sacrificial character and in them the individual disappears before the needs or well-being of the common. Their customs are as cruel to us as the natural world around them.

From the beginning of the book, with the protagonist-narrator crossing a river, almost like a passage to another life, we witness that world from his eyes, we know what he knows and we suffer it with him. There is no true questioning of these social constructions just as the natural cycles that exist to mark classic milestones: birth, fertility, sacrifice and death are not questioned. However, for the protagonist and for the reader, the estrangement is constant: it seems more like a hallucination or a dream, than a reality that somehow references our own.

Mercè Rodoreda describes this world to us with an extraordinarily simple vocabulary, with clean sentences, which tend to be enumerated, almost like an oral story. Through this apparent naturalness, very powerful visual images emerge, of an eminently poetic character, that surprise the reader both for their beauty and for their brutality: pregnant women remain blindfolded so that, at birth, the baby resembles their own father and not another man who they could have seen and desired; the black birds nest and lay eggs that will be incubated by the white birds that will die at the hands of the first when the eggs hatch; When one of the townspeople is about to die, their body is filled with cement to prevent their soul from escaping, and then they are inserted into the trunk of a tree so that their body merges with nature: it will be a painful agony.



III. Romão has also recently worked on wonder, cruelty, and transformation. Especially in the cycle that revolves around the classic myth of the Metamorphoses and Ovid's text and which he presented at the Centro Cultura do Belém in Lisbon in 2019. In them, the working method is very similar to the one we saw in the Rodoreda novel: the union of disparate elements that forces us to look at the world from another place. In his case, Romão pauses with special interest before the tactile and the sensory, using the physical as an introduction into systems of representation.

In these works Romão questions basic aspects and general assumptions but also established social norms and structures and many of our most ingrained assumptions on issues such as the feminine and the masculine, the natural and the artificial, power and weakness. Many express violence and eroticism. That is, the same themes on which Mercè Rodoreda bases her novel.

The result is therefore a superposition of references, signifiers and relational readings that Romão makes irremediably unattainable. It is almost impossible for us to limit the reading of his works to a single direction or to a fixed, closed and unique reality. They cannot end in themselves because they present a constant mutation. As the village in *La muerte y la primavera* we cannot know for sure the goodness or the reality or the realization of processes that we do not know if they are the product of an abomination or the result of a natural or legendary continuum.

The reading of the novel by Mercè Rodoreda and the vision of the sculptures by André Romão are as if we arrived Franz Kafka's castle as the character of land surveyor K. Relating to the world through estrangement.

This exhibition is an evocation of the world of the novel through the work of André Romão. It is not intended as a literal illustration of the book or a collection of sculptures inspired by it, but rather an immersion in their shared world, the forms that populate it and in the common working method. Some of the pieces existed before and others have been made with this project in mind. The fact of not distinguishing between one and the other aims to highlight these common points.

The writer herself is present in the exhibition with the inclusion of her drawings and the presence of the chrysanthemum, a flower linked to a foundational childhood memory and which, in our opinion, perfectly shows the relationship between the artist's biography, memory and creative process.

Joaquín García Martín



André Romão (1984) was born in Lisbon, where he trained as an artist and where he continues to work and live. He has participated in residencies in London, Barcelona, Rome and Berlin. He exhibits regularly with the Vera Cortés gallery in Lisbon and with Umberto di Marino in Naples. Among other institutions, he has shown his work at the Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, MACRO - Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Rome, at the CAPC in Bordeaux, at the Serralves Foundation in Oporto or The Green Parrot in Barcelona. He has also participated in the Liverpool Biennial in 2021.

Mercé Rodoreda (1908-1983) is one of the great Catalan-language writers of the 20th century. She was born in Barcelona in a family environment linked to the Renaixença that instilled in her a love for the Catalan language. Her fascination with flowers also began in childhood. She began her literary career in the 1920s as an escape from the limitations of the life of a wife and mother, although she would later deny her first works. During the war she actively mobilized in favour of the Republican side and wrote her first great novel, *Aloma* (1936). During the more than thirty years of exile in France and Switzerland she wrote fundamental works such as *La Plaça del Diamant* (The Diamond Square) (1962) o *El carrer de les Camèlies* (The Street of the Camellias) (1966). She will not live in Spain again until 1972, when she returns as a myth of Catalan letters and settles in Romanyà de la Selva and publishes *Broken mirror* (Mirall trencat) (1974). Over the last ten years of her life, she worked on the manuscript of *La mort i la primavera* (Death and Spring) which remained unfinished at her death in 1983.

Joaquín García Martín was born in Madrid and studies Art History at the UCM. He has been part of the DOMÉSTICO collective from 2000 to 2008. As a manager, he has collaborated with a large number of contemporary art institutions, both public and private. In 2012 he founded garcía | galería that will run until its closure in 2020. He is currently conducting the series of podcasts of interviews with current Spanish creators "Hablar normal y corriente for Editoril Caniche. Recently curated the exhibition Cuestión de Ambiente at CentroCentro, Madrid.

With many thanks to Galeria Vera Cortês, Lisbon.

Todas las imágenes cortesía NoguerasBlanchard, Barcelona/Madrid
Fotografía Roberto Ruiz