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MARTIN SOTO CLIMENT
GENTLE STRANGER
18 FEBRUARY - 19 MARCH 2022

Martín Soto Climent is an artist best-known for his poetic, humorous, and sensual transformations of simple, everyday objects. From the onset, Soto Climent's practice has been both rigorously conceptual and playfully diverse: he has made sculptures and installations with anything ranging from pearl-necklaces to window-shields; he has re-purposed vintage-photography by folding various images into each other rather than collaging them; and he has explored the painterly and sculptural potential of women's tights, to name just a few of his artistic endeavors and innovations. Desire runs like a red thread through Soto Climent's rich body of work – from his early work with found objects to his more recent bodies of work, with which he has ventured into drawing and painting. Indeed, the artist is not only interested in desire's transformative power and how to trigger it via his artistic manipulations of materials and objects, but also in the psychoanalytic apparatus attached to it, as well as the many terms and categories that accompany it.

With this exhibition, Soto Climent premieres a suite of works which are clearly erotic, and his most explicit to date: four works on canvas that oscillate between painting and drawing, and a suite of small drawings, made entirely on pages of vintage books. Interestingly, as is often the case when Soto Climent introduces a new element into his oeuvre, a fictional character accompanies the process, very much in the sense of Rimbaud's 'I is another.' In fact, Soto Climent began this series of erotic drawings in 2013, shortly after deciding to embark on an artistic metamorphosis with which he liberated himself from several tenets – such as the concept of working provisionally – that had hitherto structured his practice. He henceforth adopted playful pseudonyms and staged various exhibitions to gradually reveal the new facets of his artistic output. Contrary to other groups of works begun in these years, Soto Climent decided to keep this particular suite of drawings hidden for more than nine years. He was certainly aware of the fact that the so created secrecy and mystery renders them all the more alluring and seductive.

As the story goes, one night in 2013, after falling asleep in New York with an old book he had previously found on the streets, Soto Climent was visited by a feminine presence whom he witnessed shape-shifting between pain and pleasure, while his hands filled the book with her drawings. The artist described the continued sessions as follows: 'This presence is a force, woman's voice, egg, phallus, heart, light, darkness. It is an impulse that suffers, enjoys, howls, and groans. A will of its own that creates and expresses itself through me. During all these years, I did nothing else, but let her be, making hundreds of drawings hidden among the pages of scattered books.'



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The fact that Soto Climént chose a woman to be the originator of these drawings tells us that he is interested in complicating the gender of their author: both male (Soto Climént) and female (woman). As far as their formal contents are regarded, the drawings are simultaneously explicit and ambiguous in the way they clearly portray vaginas, phalluses, breasts, anuses and other body parts, but without rendering these gendered attributes as separate: the body parts melt and collapse into each other as they consume each other.

As they exist within pages of books, Soto Climént's lush and dynamic drawings are contrasted by the neat sequence of printed letters that together form sentences and progressive storylines.

The dichotomy between lust and reason is further underpinned by the exhibition's curatorial structure and the phenomenological symbolism of the objects included in the display: on the gallery's light-flooded upper floor a small and dark wooden bureau is installed amongst the four paintings. In Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology, bureaus with their drawers and hidden chests are organs of the secret psychological life and metaphors for our intimacy. Upon closer inspection of the furniture, we discover a vintage paperback titled Gentle Stranger whose pages are covered with 108 drawings that together tell an intimate story of lust and pain, becoming and decay. The book's title couldn't be more perfect, as it alludes to the presence of another (Soto Climént's fictional woman), but also to the otherness or strangeness of bare desire. Descending the staircases into the gallery's basement-floor, we enter the irrationalities of depth: flesh morphing from one obsession into another, prolonged ecstasy oscillating between pleasure and pain, and climax beyond the known.

Looking at these old pages that are overflowing with fresh abundance, we are reminded of the nature of books. After all, a book is never shut in by its contours, is not walled-up in a fortress. It asks nothing better than to exist outside itself, or let you exist in it.

Written by Giorgia Von Albertini

