

TITLE: Looking through the window wearing only socks

DATES: 11.02.2022 - 13.04.2022

L21 LAB

PHOTOGRAPHY: Juan David Cortés

ARTISTS: Allison Schulnik, Antonio Ballester Moreno, Daisy Dodd-Noble, Dan Schein, Hunter Potter, Jane Bustin, Joe Cheetham, Jörg Immendorff, Karlos Gil, Louis Appleby, Lydia Gifford, Okokume, Ryan Mettz, Saskia Noor van Imhoff, Valerie Krause

TEXT BY: In the beginning, there is at least one story. The tale brings together similar, disparate, complementary and sometimes opposing elements. A narrative contains protagonists, scenes, memories, impressions, descriptions, thoughts, colours, anecdotes. And by presenting them, you share them.

At the beginning of this exhibition, there is a title. The story begins with a question: why do we look out of the window? Among many possible answers, I am struck by the following: we project our gaze beyond our known surroundings because standing on our feet, we inevitably look straight ahead. According to Hans Blumenberg, humans "live their lives and build their institutions on dry land. Nevertheless, they seek to grasp the movement of their existence above all through a metaphors of the perilous sea voyage".

Looking through the window wearing only socks is the second exhibition in a cycle of five projects dedicated to celebrating ten years of L21 Gallery. A celebration doesn't need a title, it needs stories. These exhibitions celebrate the fact that the gallery has reached its first decade and is in great shape to embark on the next one.

The story continues with someone looking out to sea, as we are on an island, wearing socks (but this has nothing to do with the climate zone) and in his or her shelter. In Once in a lifetime, David Byrne sang: "Well... How did I get here? How did I get here?" Perhaps the person who keeps looking out of the window of the house by the sea, where he or she feels safe or secure (the gerund form does not define gender) is also asking this question.

As guidelines for this cycle, its recurring elements, we have chosen the body and language. They give rise to many exhibitions, conferences, books, paintings, sculptures, videos and countless stories to share during long, always suggestive and, recently, longed-for, gatherings at the dinner table. These gatherings are spontaneous celebrations. When the meal comes to an end, so pleasant and enjoyable, its guests stretch the time to get up in order to enjoy the company a little longer. The celebration, like a gathering at the dinner table, is intended to pause and share a special occasion, before starting again. Good diners and time on disposal provide plenty of time for many stories.

How did we get here? What are we celebrating? Most likely, that L21 Gallery has managed to bring together artists, exhibitions and stories. Many of them. Most likely,

we are here now to deactivate the 'autopilot'. To extend a pleasurable banquet a little longer before walking again. Asked about the deeper meaning of the song Once in a Lifetime, Byrne confesses that the lyrics emphasise the bad habit of "operating half-awake or on autopilot". It's good to stop and celebrate that we're awake, that it's not a dream and we're having a good time together.

Our character, absorbed in existential questions, finally solves the enigma that torments him thanks to some stories that he remembers hearing and sharing during memorable conversations. Many artists, many exhibitions, many stories.

In 1986, Ursula K. Le Guin quotes Elizabeth Fisher's Carrier Bag Theory: "the first cultural artefact was probably a recipient[...] a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier". The decisive technology was not the one that serves to kill, as a certain epic would often make us believe, but a humble tool to carry things. Back then, humanity had plenty of time to weave and share stories, "fifteen hours a week for subsistence left plenty of time for other things. So much time that perhaps the restless ones who didn't have a baby around to liven up their lives, or skills to make or cook or sing, or very interesting thoughts to think, decided to go off and hunt mammoths. The most skilled hunters came staggering back with a load of meat, a lot of ivory and a story. It wasn't the meat that made the difference. It was the story.

While in Walking, Running, Falling, presented at L21 LAB between 17 December 2021 and 4 February 2022, the foot (and shoes) appeared repeatedly, in this second exhibition, the part of the body that concerns us is the waist. It is what is more or less in the middle, between the feet and the head. The waist is not only a part of the body (which I'm afraid has to do with the table...) but also a complement. In the Wild West, the gun was held there, on the belt. It would probably have been more useful to attach a bag instead or a similar container there. Gun or belt bag? We chose, without a doubt, what leads us towards the pleasures of the story, something that can contain many things, details, fragments, colours, points of view, etc... This exhibition, thanks to the 15 artists it has brought together, aims to be a container that gathers stories which go beyond the expected, which tell us about the sea and the voyages that happen outside the window, which plant what will sprout in the next 10 years... and other stories, for sure. Because stories make the difference.

An exhibition is a device that brings together and presents works. It can be many other things, of course, but, in principle, an exhibition contains works and their stories. Each one, individually or in relation to the others, appeals to and awaits its own particular public. Not the whole public, but only one particular visitor or viewer. This unique encounter should be celebrated. A gallery holds and shows the works of its artists, not forever. In its exhibitions, in its communication, in its projects it contains, for a certain period of time, the work of its artists. If only there were more celebrations and more after-dinner conversations! And groups of people, artists presenting their work, galleries organising events, the public visiting exhibitions, projects that contain, show, teach and propose. There is always the possibility of another story, another

celebration, because the gallery is, in short, a place where we come together. And, with each exhibition, it reinvents itself by welcoming new proposals.

“When she was planning the book that ended up as *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf wrote a heading in her notebook, “Glossary”; she had thought of reinventing English according to her new plan, in order to tell a different story. One of the entries in this glossary is heroism, defined as “botulism.” And hero, in Woolf’s dictionary, is “bottle”. The hero as bottle, a stringent reevaluation. I now propose the bottle as hero. Not just the bottle of gin or wine, but bottle in its older sense of container in general, a thing that holds something else”, this is how Ursula K. Le Guin delights us with her stories and once again, keeps us attentive.

Francesco Giaveri
February 2022

The exhibition has been organised in collaboration with P.P.O.W. (New York), Maisterravalbuena (Madrid), Copperfield (London), Dilalica (Barcelona), Galeria Francisco Fino (Lisboa), NoguerasBlanchard (Madrid/Barcelona), JPS Gallery (Hong Kong), GRIMM (Amsterdam/New York).