

Duarte Sequeira

Vanessa da Silva & Waya Weishof

May Your Mouth Contain the Shapes of Strange Words

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(Text written by Valentina Buzzi)

“Please bring strange things. Please come bringing new things.
Let very old things come into your hands. Let what you do not know come into your eyes.
Let desert sand harden your feet. Let the arch of your feet be the mountains.
Let the paths of your fingertips be your maps. And the ways you go be the lines of your palms”.

Ursula K. Le Guin

For the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology - as in, the way we make sense of and experience the world, is fully embodied. There is no understanding of perception outside the framework of a connection between the mind and the body: everything goes through our five senses, to then find a synthesis, and thus a definition, within our own logos filtered by our reason. The duo show of Brazilian artists Maya Weishof and Vanessa da Silva, which combines vibrant expressionist paintings with sinuous biomorphic sculptural works, starts at this very first idea to then recombine its possible declinations through the personal, the universal, the symbolic, and the spiritual.

The vocabulary of Maya Weishof is composed of the most various sources: medieval manuscripts, Korean pottery ornaments, art history, her personal tea set that she uses in the studio, and the bodies she encountered in her life. Recombined and sublimated as protagonists of her paintings, the various elements are molded through the lights and shadows created by the juxtaposition of oil paint and pastels - a technical combination that the artist calls almost profane, yet that allows a poetic revelation of volumes. The sacred and the mundane blend together in Maya's painting, combined in continuous storytelling that is never defined, never confined, but rather open-ended: whether this translates into two bodies in an intimate house setting, or a

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beheaded woman's bust showing an eye between her chest, able to open a portal to a mystical realm - the artist creates characters that embrace mythology and in the same time the everyday life, always investigating the infinite allegories of magical symbols, while never forgetting the poetical dimension of the mundane. In one of the central pieces of this show, we see two lovers kissing in what seems an embrace that recalls Rodin's sculptural masterpieces - a reference fruit of Maya's most recent residency at Cite Internationale des Artistes in Paris. The two bodies occupy almost all the space, their movement continuing with the curves of the natural background, where we see mount Vesuvio - Naples' Volcano, the dearest element among the artist's biographical references. In the painterly frame, various colorful birds fill the space, reinterpreting the aesthetic canon of illuminated manuscripts. In other works, the bodies are often beheaded, or rather vice-versa we find body-less faces, and the human skin is always painted with the most varied choices of colors - blue, orange, green, red - enforcing this ongoing dialogue with the possibilities that they could be characters of an ancient fairytale, as much as they could be us. Sometimes surrounded by beautiful and detailed painterly frames, adorned with flowers and animals, other times composed of selected patches of various works sewed together - the narrations of Maya touch the oneiric, inviting us to step in and become part of these dreamlike tales. They capture the ephemeral and the otherworldly and create a dialogue that allows an endless coexistence.

We come to abandon figuration when encountering the sculptural works of Vanessa da Silva: the same fluidity and sinuosity that once adorned Maya's expressionist paintings are now translated into newfound codes and canons which explore the essence of our own duality, where mind and body combine and recombine. The inspiration for this new body of work is a reflection - or rather rejection - of the dualistic approach proposed by the enlightenment of the superiority of the mind over the body: "ancient peoples considered reason and mind to reside in the heart and chest, while the head contained the psyche, fertile essence of incorruptible life" writes the artist. In other times, the head would symbolize the unconscious or human awareness - yet, the experiential capacity of the body to feel, touch, and smell, our primary tools for knowing the world, cannot separate from consciousness and psyche, too often considered as detached entities. Vanessa's exploration is formally rendered by the blending of pigment into the core of the sculpture, and soft pastels under the last layer: the color emerges from within and comes as a revelatory messenger of the archetypal connection between us and the world, between the head and the body, between logos and cosmos - as Lucy Irigaray

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would affirm when championing a fluid reading of reality in response to Nietzsche's more masculine vision of all things. The titles of the works are as well revelatory of a further investigation into the process of our constant becoming within the world: "In cycle", "Eternal Liminality", and "Transcendent Disintegration" are all revelatory of a state that is in constant transformation, where an attempt for fixity exists only as a result of an endless dance. Standing elegantly on steel pedestals, Vanessa's biomorphic sculptures invite us to reconsider our body as "a permanent condition of experience, and constituent of the perceptual openness to the world", where spirit and reason connect, exchange, decode, fluctuate, and make sense of all things worldly, and not.

Combined, the works of Maya Weishof and Vanessa da Silva are an invitation to re-consider our modality of perception, leaning towards a oneness that sees the human and the worldly, the spiritual and the mundane, as profoundly interconnected beyond modernist paradigms of categorization and aseptic division. They recall ancient archetypes of reading our phenomenological tools, to then - perhaps - shifting to the ontological dimension and suggesting to reconsider who we are, and which stories we are part of. "May your mouth contain the shapes of strange words", the exhibition title - an extract from a poem by Ursula K. Le Guin, sets the leitmotif for a newfound direction of understanding: sometimes the most strange words, and the most uncanny combinations, are the only ones containing revelations that help us moving forward in this ongoing journey of interpreting life.