

NILS STÆRK

Tears, crashes, memories, disruption

A moth drinking tears of a sleeping bird. Let's start here. Let's stop here: A moth drinking tears of a sleeping bird. As we are talking about the work by Runo Lagomarsino, it makes sense to focus on a possible detail; the universe – in Runo Lagomarsino's way of doing – is defined through a close observation of small gestures, a poetical perception of politics, a warm approach to tragedy, a dichotomy paradoxically based on multiple possibilities. The starting point could be everywhere yet understanding that this "everywhere" requires a desire for narrativity, observation and the assumption of a reality that both touches your skin and the one from many others before you and me.

A moth drinking tears of a sleeping bird. A sleeping bird in tears. Tears as food, as nutrients, as material. Tears of a bird. Tears as starting point. In plural. We will find more tears in Runo Lagomarsino's work – connected tears in disconnected times. Individual tears, symbolic tears, societal tears. Tears becoming nutrients and a way to scream. Tears being culture, injustice, violence. But also, delicate caresses loaded with fragility. Historical tears and fictionalised ones. We will talk about more tears, some of them "real", some of them maybe too beautiful to be authentic. The tears of a bird and a moth drinking. Can birds cry? Can birds sleep? I seem to remember some conversations about animal brains being ready for a possible problem: half of the brain awake while the other one is asleep. I don't remember any conversation about birds crying.

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In *Le Miroir des Limbes. La corde et les souris*, André Malraux remembers a shared moment with Picasso. Malraux, Picasso and Bergamín are at the painter's studio. Picasso is finishing *Guernica* but he is not sure if this is the time for a black and white painting. To discard possibilities, he has tested a layer of colored papers covering parts of the massive work. It will be black and white; the reference to Goya is pertinent, *the disasters of the war*. Picasso is taking down some metal garnet-red tears that he has placed on the painting, making some figures cry. As we know, *Guernica* will have no extra layers, no traces of color, but Malraux describes the moment when Picasso gathers all of the tears and places them in Bergamín's hands. In Malraux's memory, Picasso says to Bergamín that he is getting the tears of Spain. The same situation is slightly different if we follow Bergamín's version: it's just one tear and made of red paper. In this version, Picasso asks Bergamín to place the tear on *Guernica* every Friday at the time the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic is opened to the public.

The 1937 Pavilion of the Spanish Republic in Paris was both projection of desired joy and real rage, sadness and desperation. Bergamín was the commissioner, Miró had another iconic political painting, the photographs by Josep Renau defined a possible egalitarian society, Sert was the architect of the functional building structuring the project, Calder had a mercury fountain that is now at Miró Foundation in Barcelona. On the ground floor of the pavilion, next to the patio, *Guernica* covered one of the walls. *Guernica*, the painting, *Guernica*, the devastated location in the Basque Country. *Guernica*, history in present. *Guernica*, memory of war.

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Runo Lagomarsino observes – again – the possibility of the expanded narrative to look closely at *Guernica's* never included tear. The red tear. A tear that would change the role of the work. If the tear was supposed to be the activator of the painting, then the artwork would not be a painting anymore, but time and a performative situation. The historical value of Picasso's painting as symbolic vocabulary for the pain provoked by any war would not just be iconic but in movement. And, furthermore, what happened to the red tear or tears? Some voices say that the tear never left Paris when it was time for Bergamín to escape from Europe for exile in Mexico. Other Spanish refugees died in France; some were able to fly away again. Lost tears. Forgotten memories. Runo Lagomarsino takes the tears back and creates an infinite machine to provide a space and time for the red tears to be present. Movement is included, time becomes visible, tears are produced and they fall. They fall again. Tears falling in a continuum of lost memories, future images, statements, history, fragments of time. The gallery space observes the soft movement of the tears falling, the slow tempo and the continuous mechanical work that supports and maintains fragility.

If we think about historical moments happening now in front of our eyes, what do we do with historical places? How does a place remain in the past? *Guernica* is also a present place; it's a moment now; it's day or night. Runo Lagomarsino connects the now at *Guernica* with the desire for the tears defining the temporality of a painting. A glass globe in the exhibition space shines with the same amount of light that *Guernica* has at this very moment. The light, a fleeting moment, connects two places sharing time. What happens here happens there. *Guernica* is alive: *Guernica* is alive and the tears are

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alive; sunset will come, and darkness will appear. Or electricity and the mechanics that destroyed a past Guernica will help us to see. Now. At the middle top area of *Guernica* there is a light bulb.

The gesture is visible, the connection is fragile and temporary. Life is. It can be light, it can be a tear, it can be a desire to bring the past to the present, it can be the need for a memory and for justice after devastation. Bodies and stones, buildings and culture. Probably more tears will bring us to Melina Mercouri.

Who is Melina Mercouri? Why is Melina Mercouri appearing now in this text about the work by Runo Lagomarsino? Well, the successful Greek actress Melina Mercouri was, after a long film career, Minister of Culture of Greece. In this position she was a key figure in reclaiming the marbles of the Parthenon for the country. Removed from the Acropolis in Athens to be presented as part of the collection of the British Museum, the marbles were kept far from their original location. The desire to solve an historical dismantling and to bring to the same spot the stolen material was a driving force for Melina Mercouri. With her incredible talent for emotional and cinematic storytelling, Mercouri was able to put feelings and words into a dialogue previously impossible while touching the marbles. Greece could be the place for its stones, Greece could safeguard the history of Europe. Greece was ready to take on the responsibility. In Mercouri's narrative Greece was the cradle of what European culture and to disrespect Greece was to disrespect Europe. Melina Mercouri in conversation with the director of the British Museum, Melina Mercouri connecting with past stones, Melina Mercouri feeling the

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stones, Melina Mercuri reclaiming the right to own the material for the narrative. The narrative of Europe. A Europe that is not anymore a simple narrative, a Europe that is not in a book, a Europe being destroyed, dismantled, sold.

Europium is the chemical element with the symbol Eu. Named after Europe, Europium is an extremely fragile metallic element. Very reactive. Europium must be stored in the absence of air, as it rapidly oxidises. A fragile construction, a historical one. An element needing specific conditions. Care. But do we want to keep this material in a secured context? Is it possible to keep tears in the void? Runo Lagomarsino proposes at his exhibition a process of visible degradation. The gesture, the fall and to see how it matters. Europium and Europe crashing against the wall, the rest being oxidated, the tears falling as lost memory, the marbles still in London. But the light, the light. Every Friday in 1937 no tear was attached to *Guernica*. In 2023, tears, crashes and oxidation.

- Martí Manen

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