

Press Release

Mónica Mays: Buttermilk

15 April – 27 May 2023

Partir. Verb. (transitive), Span.

1. Share
2. Crack
3. Divide
4. Die

Buttermilk. Noun

1. Delicious, nutritious wastewater separated from milkfat.
2. Inevitable reproductive secretion.

Parto. Masc. Noun. Span.

1. Delivery
2. Birth

In *Buttermilk*, artist Mónica Mays reprises the use of the unprocessed silkworm cocoon as an analogic refrain. Mays delivers a sculptural variation on taxidermy, exploiting the necessary contradictions of production and preservation as they relate to the generative and ironic pleasures of reproduction.

Pieces of furniture enter Mays' studio as readymades and emerge as containers. Categories in general become disputable at her hands, as objects dispel into one another. The central sculptural group sees assemblages of salvaged woodwork tangled with "bodies," each following a unique formal structure. The cast of phallus-like figures is not unambiguous, but also not necessarily anthropomorphic. Wrapped with semi-transparent vellum veils, their fragile guts (which sometimes spill out) constitute wool, feathers, and silkworm cocoons, among other natural (by-)products.

Though most imposing, *without icons* (2023) does not typify the group, primarily because its containership is symbolic. The tall, cascading thing leans forward slightly as if wanting to step off its tabletop pedestal, creating a silhouette reminiscent of the Virgin of El Rocío, the highly decorated devotional carved wooden statue of the Virgin and Child which becomes the centrepiece of an annual procession in Spain. With *no more lists* (*barren lube machine lithium rusty diamond fertile tar*) and *spilled milk* (both 2023), however, the artist develops on containership literally, forcing the bodies *into* the furniture; the sculptures seem to simultaneously birth and ingest themselves. Mays then creates anachronisms by leaving obvious sanding marks on the wood and making small scribbles in crayon, not so much imposing on the work as revealing its tactility — leaving a fingerprint.

out of heat (2023) considers the cocoon itself. A compacted body is ironically suspended from a structure of mismatched arms and legs and seats resembling gallows. The crucial moment represented here exists somewhere between birth and death. This birth-death tautology continues with *shadow boxes* (all 2023), a series of wall-mounted taxonomy drawers. Intended to facilitate empirical and personal classification, Mays puts them to the task somewhere in between: housing cocoons, for safekeeping. Drawn across the front of each box is a fine screen of flower-dyed silk. The same material is the predominant component of *false ideals* (all 2023), a series of large round canvases stained with botanical material in concentric patterns. Not quite visible from downstairs, but from up close, one sees how the surfaces are scattered with whimsical miniature wooden doors and drawers, suggesting a story within the story of the landscape. Mays sense of formal humour is most apparent with the handmade cowhide balls (*balls*, 2023) innocuous placed among the furniture-bodies. Ultimately, only the string of children's chairs above the entrance do not "contain" besides their own meaning (*not giving*, 2023).

Mays' complete extraction of her materials presents the paradox of fertility and reproduction within an established figurative language. A lingering air of decay is mistaken for a fecund smell.

— Olamiju Fajemisin

Blue Velvet Projects

Mónica Mays

*1990 Madrid, based in Amsterdam NL

Mónica Mays' practice involves sculpture, installation and performance art. Through these media she traces the circulations, agencies and economies of various objects, re-framing them as porous and generative identity processes.

In her current work series, Mays explores queer forms of reproduction that might sit outside of nuclear family structures, industrial means of production, efficiency and futurity, and the violence that these logics impose on different bodies. Mays explores these ideas through a close engagement with the life cycle of the bombyx mori silk moth - an organic reproductive process that has been irrevocably altered by human intervention, domestication and industrialization.

Education

2015-2017 MIA / MA Studio
for Immediate Spaces,
Sandberg Instituut NL
2011-2015 BFA Cum Laude,
HEAR / École Supérieure des
Arts Décoratifs Strasbourg
FR
2010-2011 Liberal Arts, La
Sorbonne FR
2008-2010 Anthropology,
University of New Orleans US

Selected solo exhibitions

2023 Buttermilk, Blue Velvet
Projects, Zurich
2023 Cardados, De Appel
Arts Center, Amsterdam NL
TBA, Ryder Projects, Madrid
ES
2022 Tallo que Clavo, Twin
Gallery, Madrid ES
2021 Bucolic Gang, Virgin
Maria Church, Rupert, Vilnius
LT
2021 Sand Shine, Aparador
Monteleón, Madrid ES
2020 Unsayings, Industria
Gallery, Brno CZ
2019 Homies, Corridor PS,
Amsterdam NL
2018 Auricula, Amsterdam
Open Tuinen Dag / Music for
Plants, Amsterdam NL
w.i.l.l.i.a.m., Bologna.cc,
Amsterdam NL

2016 000.000, A Place
Beyond Desire, Rietveld
Pavilion, Amsterdam NL

Selected group exhibitions

2022 TBA, Hannover, curated
by Violeta Janeiro DE
Her Legs, an Egg, Her Toil(e)
and Blankets, curated by
Keiu Krikmann, Linnagalerii,
Tallinn Art Hall, EE
fundamental occurrences,
Brussels Art Week, Nosbaum
Reding, Brussels BE
Reina Sofia Museum, ARCO,
Madrid ES
Getting Lost In the Woods,
curated by Cristina Anglada,
Twin Gallery, Madrid ES
2021 Forest and Shade,
Museum of Segovia, Museum
Segovia, Palacio Butron
Valladolid (itinerant) ES
2020 I'm not your territory,
Atelier Chiffonier, Dijon FR
2019 Hypnequinomagia,
Combo & Microlima, Venice
IT
2018 Conversations w/
Figaro, Museum Nacht,
Museum Willet-Holthuysen,
Amsterdam NL
2017 Art-Cure. Activating the
Potential, Cobra Museum of
Modern Art, Amsterdam NL

2016 Instant Composition,
Extra City Kunsthal,
Antwerpen BE
Bienal Arte Contemporaneo
Emergente, Eve-Maria
Zimmerman, Tenerife ES

Awards / Honors / Residencies

2022 Awarded Mondriaan
Fonds, Young Artist
Stipendium
DOGO, Lichtensteig CH
2021 Awarded 3PD-
Amsterdam Fonds voor den
Kunst with De Appel Arts
Center, NL
Winner Generacion 2022,
Fundación Montemadrid ES
Awarded Mondriaan Fonds
for Appendix Songs
Residency Landscape, Sicily
IT
2020 First Prize Yount Talent
Castilla y León ES
2019 Awarded Amsterdam
Fonds voor de Kunst for
Homies NL
2016 Residency Material
Gesture with Anne Holtrop,
Gujarat IND
2010 Residency Greater New
Orleans Art House USA