

just below the gums

melanie loureiro and maria nolla mateos
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An arachnid gets its name after the mortal weaver who began to hang herself out of shame for spinning together a blasphemous tapestry replete with the gods' infidelities. Arachne's life was saved when Minerva turned the rope into silk, a material that came from inside of her, just below her gums. She could now excrete this bewitching thread to build more draperies, those that would care for and protect herself. Appearing at first wispy and ephemeral, once her silk hardens, it becomes in fact as strong as concrete, as robust as a complicated structure that can change the course of life.

Lying just beyond this Brutalist complex that holds the gallery, there is a body of water, perhaps not distinct enough to describe as a canal. It is ripe with breeding insects like spiders, plants that had rot yielding new life, macrocosmic beings, bits of trash, iron, bike parts and tar, coalescing in the season's new light. If you were commuting through this part of the city, you would not know it was there unless you deliberately went out of your way to find it. Inside of the former court building, our attention is recalibrated towards such spaces outside of it, where rhythms of time and energies of place run on different agendas, and transformative activity occurs on a microscopic scale.

Maria Nolla Mateos observes and generates interruptions to the order and jurisdiction of the modern city by working intimately with residue neglected by the very system that creates it. Dunking webs of cotton tapestries into this strange and hidden pool and bringing them out to dry for us to look at and smell is somewhat perverse, but there is indeed an aspect of beauty in the obscurity of the process and the transience of how the document persists. As time slowly passes, beyond our eyes sight, matter mutates and cures within the woven fibres, darkening the texture of the abject presence that's weirdness is enhanced by white walls. This particular focus on decay points to a fracture within the Western capitalist systems of value, beauty or knowledge that Nolla criticises through her transmutations. Often

performing organic gestures considered domestic, such as embalming, fermenting, dying and tying, she turns to such matters of care, nurture and reproduction that meet primordial needs.

Going out of her way to re-integrate with the natural environment, Melanie Loureiro hones in on, what is to a human, the beguiling details of plants and creatures that have the power to heal and metamorphose. Shrinking her human audience into a visual simulation of the macrocosm, we are urged to see habitats existing above or below us as animated and alert, bright and diverse. These frozen renderings in oil depict the peak stage of slow cyclical processes, such as how a caterpillar traps itself inside of a self-made silk chrysalis in order to metamorphose into a creature with wings. The passiflora is depicted not just for its medicinal qualities but for its intelligent awareness of its surroundings- Loureiro paints the flowers mute functionality of self defence in which it mimics the dots of butterfly eggs to protect itself from invasion. Interested in the chemical and visual strategies that such creatures have evolved in order to lure, repel, protect themselves and survive, Loureiro respects the intelligent consciousness of non-human beings as not just something to admire but to learn from. This line of thought is invoked by Donna Harroway's Chthulucene, in which she suggests that humans be tentacular- embrace other forms of being, find kinship in differing inhabitants of the world, and fabulate a future in which we tenderly overgrow and dissolve the hierarchies which currently ensnare us.

In the audible background of a video work by Nolla Mateos is the artist humming a song from TikTok, like an ear worm from the capitalist lair that has infected her brain. Witnessing POV as she nonchalantly wades through the pool whose remnants now inhabit the gallery, we become aware of loops happening on different layers, in the foreground and background, of our world's natural and man-made chain of command. Understanding this web into which we are woven is perhaps an answer on how to liquefy such patriarchal patterns, becoming more tentacular in our approach to life on earth.

Text written by Millie Rose Dobree

