

“Lier et laisser filer” [Bind and let go]: a title that flirts with the confusion of an oxymoron leads to the artistic universe of Silvana Mc Nulty. A universe made up of fragments, microcosms, meticulous hours of hard work, discipline, violent gestures on fragile materials, and objects often excluded from artistic vocabularies because of their mundane characteristics.

What emerges is a repertoire of words: words both bound and in opposition, words that suggest a common thread that one could gradually draw to better navigate within this unsettling yet calming ensemble.

ABSOLUTE

Paradoxical associations that push boundaries— of a thing, or even of our understanding of that thing— reveal the search for an absolute form in Silvana Mc Nulty's work. An absolute that overwhelms and stupefies, yet fascinates nonetheless...

See: hole.

ACCESSION

28,000 holes, 14,000 straws, and months of confrontation between Eva Hesse's hands and an industrial object make up the work *Accession III*. In 1968, the German-born American artist threaded plastic straws through the holes of a fiberglass cube in a repetitive gesture not far removed from Silvana Mc Nulty's weaving. Point by point, each artist combines things that are at odds with each other: the geometric and the chaotic; the manufactured and the handmade; the resilient and the fragile.

Accession could be defined as “an augmentation by an added element”. And with Mc Nulty, as with Hesse, the desire for a complete transformation of a material is replaced by the desire for a distortion and augmentation of an existing object, while creating new physical sensations.

CARAMBOLAGE

In Carom billiards, a *carambolage* is a series of shocks, or the successive collision of billiard balls. Here, the *carambolage* (literally meaning a pile-up) occurs in materials and gestures— each thing leads to another.

EXHAUST

Thousands of circular objects— metal washers, plumbing gaskets, sink strainers— crocheted together and thus entrapped, demonstrate an attempt to exhaust not only a technique, but also a form. Silvana's artisanal background may suggest that her objects are the result of varying techniques, yet if one looks closely, the artist's weft is consistently the same, composed of a single stitch (tight double stitch) crocheted over and over again. This stitch is thus applied, with fury and rigour, to her temporarily favourite materials, until they are exhausted, paving the way towards other textures, other forms... There was, at the outset, pasta, orange peels, leaves,

then beads, hair clips, bells, toys, then shells, eggshells, then soap, wax, and now protractors, scissors, sheets of paper, essentially school materials and functional tools or objects. There are occasional returns to previously beloved objects, but often, when a new material finds its way into the artist's hands, the others are left behind, but somehow still connected.

GEOMETRY

The mathematical dimension of the works presented cannot be denied, nor the unimaginable equations they suggest. A leaf surrounded by an endless weave bears witness to a desire for geometry, or perhaps a desire for control. The admiration, and arguably the fear of such precision, can be interpreted in recent works in which tools for measuring angles and circles are trapped and rendered useless.

See: tool.

HOLE

Hole, holed, holey, hole-word, black hole, rabbit hole, watering hole, butt hole, glory hole, eye hole, black hole, hell hole, shit hole, asshole, wormhole, (wo)manhole, buttonhole, pothole, keyhole, loophole, sinkhole, hole in one, in the hole...

Both a depression and a cavity, a hollow and an opening towards an infinite elsewhere, the hole is the form of the absolute, or at least of the quest for it.

"When I say Holes are conduits or a 'means to' or a space or an intersection — I mean holes are occasions — opportunities which can take many forms, materials, and durations (imagine a hole that is only duration)."¹

Holes and lack are thus to be considered as possibilities. And perhaps even the place in which we can lose, and, eventually, find ourselves (each other) again.

Intangible, yet purely palpable.

KNOT

In the first images of Callisto Mc Nulty's film *Pénélopiade*, we find Silvana tying knots in a hemp rope, over and over again. In the work she is making, the knot serves as a binder, detaching itself from its pejorative aspect. The knot is nevertheless one of the most ambivalent of objects. It is both constraining, complicated, as well as the strength that binds things together. In this sense, contradictions intertwine.

LANGUAGE

¹ Pope L., "Hole Theory," facsimile dans *William Pope L.*, ed. Mark H.C. Bessire, MIT Press, 2002, p. 80.

What a strange sensation it is to hear a foreign language and understand it without being able to formulate a single syllable of a single word of that same language. This is arguably the same sensation evoked by Silvana Mc Nulty's works as her practice marries craft and the readymade to create a new, unprecedented visual language.

Its roots derive from the everyday, composed by a myriad of objects surrounding us. It unfolds, however, across formal conjugations that distort the nature of its own vocabulary. The person who dares speak the language quickly discovers that not even the slightest stutter is possible, because the language in question is one of silence.

In *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Marguerite Duras imagines "both [the] greatest pain and [the] greatest joy, so commingled as to be undefinable, a single entity but unnamable for lack of a word. [...] It would have been an absence-word, a hole-word, whose center would have been hollowed out into a hole, the kind of hole in which all other words would have been buried. It would have been impossible to utter it, but it would have been made to reverberate. Enormous, endless, an empty gong, it could have held back anyone who wanted to leave, it would have convinced them of the impossible, it would have made them deaf to any other word save that one, in one fell swoop it would have defined the future and the moment themselves."²

Silvana Mc Nulty's language could thus be considered as a composition of hole-words that indicate everything and nothing at all. The empty and the full.

See: hole.

LINE

Free line fishing is a technique that consists of using live bait without casting the line. The lure drifts or swims freely while the rod in use is set aside. The title of the exhibition "Bind and let go" thus evokes free line fishing: we free ourselves even when attached.

This technique is also called dead line fishing, as the fisher(wo)man no longer animates the line. The imperceptible line becomes limp, all the while remaining intact.

NET

"It is idle to fault a net for having holes."³

See: hole.

PENELOPE

In the *Odyssey*, Penelope's story goes as follows: her husband, Odysseus, goes to war and leaves her waiting for his return for twenty years. A return that many doubt, and that arouses the

² Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Grove Press, 1966, p. 68-69.

³ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, Graywolf Press, 2015, p. 3.

curiosity of many suitors who strive to wed Penelope. A fervent opponent to this idea, Penelope uses her weaving skills to create her own destiny. She tells her suitors that she will choose a new husband when she has completed a shroud, a veil that she wove every day before undoing it at night, as a means of buying time and deceiving those ignorant to her craft, until her husband returns. And while this dedication often alludes to her devout loyalty to her husband, it should rather be seen as a form of resistance, particularly in a feminist reinterpretation. The etymology of Penelope (pene = weft) evokes the translation of the one who seizes the cloth. We can therefore consider Penelope as a cunning weaver who seizes her own destiny through her expertise. As for Silvana Mc Nulty, her motivation may be indecipherable, but the proliferation of works reveals a devotion to her practice and a desire to create her own trajectory.

See: Callisto Mc Nulty's *Pénélopiade*

PIERCE

The tip of a dremel tickles the surface of an eggshell before piercing it tenderly, over and over again. Its albumen and yolk ooze out of each hole until it is empty. The rigour and repetition of the artist's gesture in transforming the egg reveal her desire to test its limits: she pierces the egg and its perfect structure until it collapses. The tension is thus created between the violent act and the fragile material; just as in the collision of materials and textures of the other pieces presented here.

SCISSORS

Like any sharp tool, scissors are active in relation to the materials they cut, but passive in relation to the hand of their user. In Silvana Mc Nulty's work, they are as much accomplices in the act of initiating a work and determining its finality, as they are prisoners of said work. This contradiction reminds us of the double nature of the tool: scissors plural, or a *pair* of scissors, are simultaneously the symbol of a bond (physical, affective, friendly) and of the tool used to cut this same bond.

See: tool.

SHELL

"I had to start by fixing some signs in this immeasurable continuum, by establishing a series of intervals; in other words, numbers. The calcareous matter I secreted, making it whirl like a spiral on top of itself, was precisely that, something that continued uninterrupted; but meantime, at every turn of the spiral, it separated the edge of one spiral from the edge of another, so that if I wanted to count something I could start by counting these spirals. In short, what I wanted to construct was a time that belonged to me alone, regulated solely by myself, self-contained: a clock that did not have to report to anyone what it was measuring. I would have liked to construct an extremely long, unbroken shell-time, to continue my spiral without ever stopping."⁴

See: time.

⁴ Italo Calvino, "Shells and Time", in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Time*, Whitechapel, ed. Amelia Groom, 2013, p. 77

SILENCE

A refusal of language, or rather a desire for silence, can be sensed in the notebooks and envelopes sealed permanently closed.

See: language.

TIME

“Wasting and waiting; regression and repetition; non-consummation and counter-productivity; the belated and the obsolete; the disjointed and the out of synch.”⁵ These typical tropes of time resonate strongly when considering the aspect of duration in Silvana Mc Nulty's work. Materializing this elusive unit of measurement becomes possible through her obsessive and repetitive gestures: piercing, threading, crocheting, cutting, piercing, threading, crocheting, cutting...

See: shell.

TOOL

“Dreams by themselves aren't enough to destroy the blanket of dullness [...] Every day a sharp tool, a powerful destroyer, is necessary to cut away dullness [...]”⁶

Scissors, needles, staplers, dremels, perforators... Every day, Silvana turns to a sharp tool in a gesture that can also be considered here as the destruction of dullness, since she transforms everyday objects into new and peculiar microcosms. But if the tool serves as a liberator, it is also confronted with its own fate in Silvana's work, as she alters her tools to render them useless. This could suggest the refusal of a certain dependence on said tools and, consequently, a powerful pursuit of autonomy...

See: geometry, pierce, scissors.

WEAVE

“Weaving does not only signify predestination (anthropologically speaking) and the coming together of differing realities (cosmologically speaking), but also creation, the emergence from one's own substance, just as the spider does, building its web from itself.”⁷

Silvana Mc Nulty weaves, not only to emerge from her own substance and create her own destiny (see: Penelope), but also to conjure different realities, textures, materials and worlds: the soft and the hard; the organic and the artificial; chaos and order; the perennial and the ephemeral...

⁵ Amelia Groom, “Introduction,” in *Documents of Contemporary Art: Time*, London, Whitechapel, ed. Amelia Groom, 2013, p. 12

⁶ Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in Highschool*, 1978, p. 36-37.

⁷ Jean Chevalier et Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Robert Laffont, coll. Bouquins, 1997, p. 1098.

Katia Porro

Silvana Mc Nulty's practice finds itself at the crossroads between sculpture, objects, installation and jewellery. She places materials at the centre of her research— materials that she sculpts, digs, cuts and assembles. Her practice of weaving and patchwork allows for heterogeneous assemblages in which organic and artificial materials collide: beads, seeds, shells, metal, as well as plastic trinkets. She thus creates unstable and flexible objects whose hybrid status conjures confusion. The vibrant, protean and even “shapeless” matter that she works with her hands reveal a paradoxical desire to capture the ephemeral.

Silvana Mc Nulty first acquired a technical training at the AFEDAP (2013-2015) in jewellery making. She then graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 2019 before continuing her studies at the Haute école des arts du Rhin in Strasbourg from 2019-2020. She is represented by the Galerie Florence Loewy in Paris.

The film *Pénélope* by Callisto Mc Nulty, the artist's sister, will be projected in her solo exhibition “Lier et laisser filer”.

The exhibition design was conceived by the Studio isé and constructed by Robin Tornambe and Antoine Beaucourt.