

ESTHER GATÓN

Kids, don't run around  
the patio.  
It will seem bigger.

A new body of work by Esther Gatón consists of bas-reliefs of burnt doll clay on wood. They incorporate metal flakes, walnut stain, and various inks to form rich textures, volumes and palettes. Their size is moderate but not small, suggesting the works were composed with both control and its abdication. Gatón's sculptural practice, which formally evokes Art Informel and traits of post-war modernism, is summarized in these wall works. No vertical sculptures, they are too protruding to be paintings.

10.04 – 26.04.2025

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Titles such as *The tulips are too excitable* and *Two, of course there are two*<sup>1</sup> (both works on display) remind of Gatón's own writing on her art. The publication for her exhibition at Hothouse in London (2024) is rich in suggestive sentences like the titles, which adds another dimension to the works. The end of the publication is telling: "I wanted to leave the writing to leak [...] I trust that this concatenation of apertures may have entertained you, and now serve you for something else."<sup>2</sup> Titles signal one should not be content with the apparent formalism of the bas-reliefs, or their abstraction.

Talking about post war art, Germano Celant said that "surface and volume of materials were viewed as the fields of unconscious battles, in which it was hoped that the remnants of the social and private self would be redeemed."<sup>3</sup> The programmatic nature of the art mentioned by Celant is where Gatón's bas-reliefs leave modernism. Their surface is a baroque field of clay and inks that has little to do with the humanistic, even militant, approach of abstract expressionism, Informel, etc. At most, the bas-reliefs are the cynical version of these art historical tendencies.

For example, the disenchantment manifests in the chosen material, doll clay. Used by children to play, here it is burnt and tormented. It retains childish connotations through a glittery palette that veers toward fuchsia. The symbolism in these works is not unlike that of Mike Kelley's *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, 1987, a large composition of stuffed animals stitched together like a Frankensteinian monster. (It is perhaps no coincidence that Kelley's compositional model was also a modernist work, a large Pollock drip painting.) Kelley's suggestion in his title is the same as in Gatón's: the ambiguity of the child, stuck between our love and hate, mirroring our greatest issues, embodying them.

Gatón's pencil drawings of toys (war spaceships) complement the presentation of the bas-reliefs. Their dealing with childhood evokes disillusion—just like adults, children can't stay away from violence—but rejects pessimism by hinting at the healing power of critical distance.

—Piero Bisello

<sup>1</sup> Sentences from Sylvia Plath's poetry. Title of the exhibition from a text by Polyxeni Mantzou.

<sup>2</sup> [https://esthergaton.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024\\_Hothouse\\_EstherGaton\\_Publication.pdf](https://esthergaton.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024_Hothouse_EstherGaton_Publication.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Germano Celant, "Piero Manzoni, an Artist of the Present," Piero Manzoni, ed. Celant, exh. cat. (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Arte, 1991)

Left :

*The tulips are too excitable*

2025

Burnt doll-clay on birch wood, metal flakes, walnut stain and ink. Mounted on a tailored-made, steel tray.

32 x 90 cm (wood dimensions).

Front :

*Clownlike, happiest on your hands*

*magnifying your arrival. New statue*

*We'd wink at if we didn't hear*

*Delighting*

2024

Four bas-reliefs, piled one on top of the other. Burnt doll-clay, paint, metal flakes and varnish on stained birch wood and steel structure.

Dimensions variable.

Right :

*Of wars, wars, wars*

2025

Still live pencil drawing of an origami X-wing Starfighter, on overlapping 45 gsm paper.

Framed on thin oak cushion, painted white flat matte, with anti-reflective glass.

21 x 29,7 cm (paper dimensions).

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