

2019

Real Beauty

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Beauty and sensuality are returning to art concerns. Whereas 20th Century art considered beauty as deceptive, a subject to regard with suspicion –or even treated directly as a totally negligible aspect by those same avant-garde and post-vanguard movements that tried to remove it from art practice– beauty is once again featured on the agenda. However this is all happening under a new relation with *realism*: now beauty appears to act as a binding element, bringing together subjects and objects, keeping them attached to the real world; committing them, meanwhile, to their ultimate intentions and their resulting projects. When facing true moments of action, beauty is an integral agency of any assemblage.

The five artists that take part of this exhibition adopt beauty as bait, one that aims to catch our attention, that intervenes the course of things, structures alternative relations and awakens the potentials of differential thinking. They differ, therefore, from the last traces of an ordered and old aesthetic idealism and that popular thought that believes that all real beauty comes from the *inside*. Instead, the concept of beauty, as it is evident now in art, is exclusively concerned with the external aspect of things, their sentient surfaces, which implies, consequently, more realism than idealism whenever we try to understand and follow it.

Real Beauty encompasses 5 projects in which beauty is understood as neither a cultural construct nor a subjective reaction, but as being always an intentional attitude that certain things adopt in order to have specific effects upon others. That way, beauty is shown as triggering different modes of collaboration among things, organizing those relational venues that go beyond the epistemological divides that are established between nature and culture, as well as between animal, objects and humans.

Beauty is a recurrent element in the work of **Ella Littwitz** (Israel, 1982) when concerning issues of deeply rooted conflict. Littwitz uses beauty to increase attention on the details of the disputes that develop between cultural differences and productions of landscape. ***A Moon in Ramallah is a Star in Hebron*** (2017) is a series of 17 embroidered fabrics (four are actually shown in AND Platform) that expose the techniques and traditional patterns of Palestinian needlework. The artist proposed the members of the Afnan Al Galil association from the Arraba village to translate into embroidery the archaeological maps that the Israel Antiquities Authority drafted of the 17 fulling mills in Wadi Amud, Galilea, a nearby valley that concentrated the most notorious wool industries of the Ottoman Empire. The place quickly turned into an important centre of cultural hybridization, becoming the ultimate destiny of Bedouine peoples and other flows of migrants among which we must highlight the Jews that fled the Castile and Aragon Crowns in 1492. Most of these mills were in operation until their Palestinian owners were deported during the Nakba, at the end of the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. The task to interpret these archaeological maps that Littwitz entrusts to this group of embroiderers is a way to connect the decayed state of the mills with that hundred-year-old tradition of Palestinian needlework in which their ornamental patterns and symbology intermixes with the embroidery patterns of the Jewish tradition, as well as those of Arab and European traditions.

Jasmina Cibic (Ljubljana, 1979) engages also collaborative relationships of work. In her case, she asks 7 science illustrators to imagine hypothetical botanical hybrids between the Europe Rose (created in 1928) and the founders of the European Union who get roses named after them –an exclusive gathering of male politicians: the Sir Winston Churchill Rose (1955), the Konrad Adenauer Rose (1954), the Jean Monnet Rose (1988), the Souvenir de Robert Schuman Rose® (1998), the Mansholt Rose (1966), the Victor Hugo Rose® (1985), the Mazzini Rose (1925) and the Natali Rose (1981). ***The Flower Effect*** (2018) explores the ideological roles that roses had in history when the desire for politics mixes with sexual appetite. According to Cibic, roses have been used, in a broad sense, as allegory to femininity. Until the nineteenth century, the hybridization of roses was a spontaneous event, something done solely by insects and self-pollination. Controlled pollination, the one used to create new varieties of roses, was applied systematically by Andre Dupont, Josephine Bonaparte's horticulturist, who, at the peak of the French Empire, wished to have in her garden a sample of each variety of rose from the world.

Rubén Verdú (Caracas, 1962) focuses on that scopic drive that lies behind the human concept of beauty and all of Western Aesthetics –based, since at least the Romantic thinkers, on contemplative distance. Often, his work references aspects of the plant and animal worlds, but, while not explicitly targeting the optical experience, they can develop highly sophisticated themes of visual seduction, like, for instance, flowers, or in the case of ***Curls*** (2018), snails. Although snails –equipped with what is known as “black spots”– are poorly adapted to vision, their shells are a rare example of spirals in nature. Spirals are probably one of the ornamental patterns that triggers most fascination among humans, a recursive attribute of power and even a symbol of wisdom and speculation, the evolution of the universe and eternity. In the spiral, we can find the origin of the sectio aurea, the so-called golden mean, established by ancient algebra and having a huge impact in architecture and the arts. Verdú returns to the snail, covered in gold leaf, sent free to roam the exhibition space and mingle with the rest of the artworks, as a sign that both marks and emphasizes the effectiveness that snails could have had in getting human's attention.

Stones (2014), by **Kasper Bosmans** (Belgium, 1990), continues the study of how ornament and speculation might establish continuity between the human, animal and plant worlds. Bosmans, who accumulates a large pictorial oeuvre that reexamines the processes and patterns of decorative art, presents, in this occasion, an analogy between what might be a precious stone for a human or for a chicken. The artist, in fact, has built a large glass case to house the 278 stones that were extracted from the gizzard of a Black Orpington rooster that he bought in the market of Moll, a town of the region in where he was born in Belgium. It is normal for birds to swallow tiny pieces of gravel, which, to help digestion, they use as crushing teeth in their gizzards. With the passing of time, those stones become rounder and softer as a result of animal activity. It is very relevant that the Orpingtons were bred by William Cook, a British poultry farmer that, at the end of the nineteenth century, crossed different kinds of chicken to obtain a species with a double improvement: meat of an unheard-of quality and laying large quantities of eggs. In 1891, Joseph Partington presented with a huge success the Black Orpington, which, although it was of a lower quality than its predecessor in relation to its production of meat and eggs, it boasted a dense plumage that made it the best fitted for showings and spectacles.

Lara Fluxà (Palma, Mallorca, 1985) makes, with her ***Fata Morgana*** (2019), an intervention on the large window of AND Platform. With the addition of a series of glass protrusions filled with water, Fluxà is able to bend the direction of light as it traverses the window, producing a set of refraction and diffraction phenomena that contrasts with what we usually perceived as external reality. Refraction is the cause of superior order mirages, the so-called Fata Morgana, that have historically aroused the attention of humans –castles floating in the air, boats that multiply on the horizon, islands that appear and disappear in the middle of the ocean, lakes that do that in the middle of the desert. The mirages that Fluxà produces result in the inverted

projection of what exists outside the exhibition space. In this occasion, however, the eye encounters also multiple organic distortions that gain prominence. Windows enjoy a privilege status in relation to domesticity and the naturalization of the gaze in Western culture; it has also gathered around ensuing metaphors on the supposed immediacy of media –since at least Alberti’s “open window to the world” with which he described the pictorial perspective of the Italian Renaissance. The attachment of these protrusions also seeks to bring to our attention the nature of the window as a kind of interface. Those mirages, therefore, make us consider the window as an opaque surface and natural sight as a mirage that we accept as real.

As quantum physics sustains –and in concrete, Karen Barad–, diffraction is not just an optical phenomenon. It is at the core of a critical methodology that serves to analyze the world with an aim to overcome Cartesian modes of representation, those which, at the moment that the presumably transparent and immediate interfaces become agents with their own entity, show there is no more room for the separation of ontologies that boast to be neither natural nor absolute. All of Fluxà’s glassworks take place in a kind of an *intra-action* with the world that has nothing to do with the optical distance that glass has traditionally conferred to sight, on the contrary, it takes place through the material consciousness of what is linked. In relation to beauty, we can say that a diffracted approach can also be reached throughout the show since the agent that intercedes in the entanglements of the world does so from the interior itself of the links.