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The Sensuous Transformation

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Desire moves. Eros is a verb.
Anne Carson

Producing beauty is necessarily revolutionary. And that, in turn, is to say that the artist who produces beauty is engaged.
Antonio Negri

Is beauty a public service? A social right? What political value does beauty possess at the present moment?

The Sensuous Transformation questions the role that beauty plays in the framework of artistic and social practices, and presents different proposals through which we can coexist with beauty or make it our own, insofar as it is a vital practice.

Contrary to the idea that it is a matter of individual taste or aestheticisation of social and thought systems, this project understands beauty as an organising principle and as a driving force of knowledge. Beauty is part of the nature of things: it is not in the eye of the beholder, but rather seeks to completely alter perception, and therefore implicitly contains a process of social and political mobilisation.

Beauty is a disposition that ensures life in common between species and agents of different types, yet it is also an attack against any presumption of independence. Sensuous pleasure encourages contact between bodies. This is the way by which we access and relate to otherness, even if it makes us irremediably dependent and, therefore, vulnerable: once a desire for the other has been awakened, there is no autonomy that can save us.

Poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller granted beauty its first political significance: although Enlightenment thought had left it on the sidelines, Schiller defended beauty an indispensable component for social emancipation when faced with the scene of terror into which the French Revolution degenerated. With *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), his proposal was concretised in an idealisation of beauty, which the poet placed at a perfect point of synchronisation between the action of the senses and that of understanding.

With ***The Sensuous Transformation***, we continue to develop thought on beauty as a necessary condition for the attainment of a common world, despite the fact that the Schillerian synthesis is no longer considered plausible: beauty facilitates collective action insofar as it unfolds it, is a multiplier of libido, of affective energy, and even of cognitive possibilities. A politics of the common must recognise beauty insomuch as it is a material basis and an indispensable participant of life, yet without resorting to its capture according to a way of understanding nor even a political aesthetic. A politics of the common must, on the contrary, guarantee the exponential multiplication of the modes of beauty and, thus, do the same with those of existence.

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Assemble (a multidisciplinary collective formed in London in 2010) address the sensuous qualities of environments as a basic principle for the development of life. ***The Voice of Children*** (since 2016) is an investigation that analyses and documents the relationship that children around the world have with their environments. The focus of attention is placed on the modes of child self-organisation that, based on creativity and pleasure, displace adultcentrism as the only model for the development of human life. The work on display at Fabra i Coats is the result of their collaboration with MNNATSOP (National Movement of Organised Children and Adolescent Workers of Peru), a horizontal association of self-organised boys and girls who have the support of adults chosen by themselves (mainly former members of the association). The organisation is dedicated to sustaining the lives of its members, all of them child labourers, articulating support networks and collective empowerment through education, friendship and conversation. In parallel to the exhibition at Fabra i Coats, Assemble has expanded this dialogue by sharing the experience of the children of Peru with 5th grade students from the Ernest Lluch school in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat.

Patricia Esquivias (Caracas, 1979) studies the colonial implications of artisanal work, while at the same time evoking the alternative relational possibilities that unfold through manual craft making. ***Copiar a Manuela*** [Copying Manuela] (2021) has a bearing on the recovery of the legacy of painter Manuela Ballester (Valencia, 1908), who, exiled in Mexico since 1939, contributed to her family's economy by carrying out a visual study of the clothing of the indigenous people of Mexico. Based on all this, the Venezuelan artist has organised an itinerancy of the exhibition that the Museo Nacional de la Cerámica y Artes Suntuarias González Martí dedicated to her work in 2015, introducing a double displacement in this regard: on the one hand, Esquivias invites a group of children who have collaborated with her on previous projects to copy Ballester's drawings. On the other, the artist substitutes the fabrics that the Valencian artist originally brought back to Spain from Mexico with *huipiles* currently produced by Mexican artisans, who sell them through social networks.

Javier Peñafiel (Zaragoza, 1964) and **Rita Rakosnik** (Barcelona, 1993) have established postal correspondence with human and non-human agents who, involved in different struggles, are recognised as producers of beauty as well as of political resistance. Distancing itself from the expectation of direct access that has become widespread through the use videoconferencing platforms during the pandemic, ***Gir postal*** [Postal Order] (2021) reclaims the paradoxical space of letters as a requirement for the mobilisation of desire: letters generate connections while also recognising distance as a constituent element of Eros. A letter evokes confidentiality and at the same time its textuality overflows it, transforming it into a public space. According to Anne Carson, one of the figures who the project is inspired by, a letter conjures up the difference between what is and what is to come, it is a potential space. Peñafiel sends the letters to addresses in transit that no longer exist, while Rakosnik sends them to the lost property department of an anonymous post office. With their recitation, both address a reader whom they want to make an accomplice in a constantly expanding web of seduction.

Julia Ramírez-Blanco (Madrid, 1985) **& Paula García-Masedo** (Madrid, 1984) explore modes of self-organisation based on the representations that communities who inhabit the margins have generated of themselves. In Western capitalist societies, whose foundations lie in the systematisation of exploitation, the ways of life generated by the bourgeoisie have been identified as degrading and even lacking in authenticity. Thus, in the alternatives that ***Back to the Land (archivo inacabado)*** [Back to the Land (unfinished archive)] (2021) gathers, there not only beats a social critique, but also an aesthetically founded critique that is related to the adoption of lifestyles oriented towards the recovery of the sense of

beauty. Due to its validity, Ramírez-Blanco and García-Masedo have focused on the countercultural return to the countryside and how this has emerged as an antithesis of urban life, through recurrent iconographic references to Arcadia and Paradise Lost, as well as other elements from Eastern cosmology. These images respond to the need of the communities who are on the margins to assert themselves, while at the same time discovering them as unfailingly oriented towards the seduction of the other.