

Parts of me

Debris, fragments, fabrics, paint, but mostly a delicate and preciously embroidered skin of leaves: Catalina León returns to the gallery in which she started, to build one of her intimate worlds where to deepen into a quiet ritual that leaves as much behind as it expects.

By Tomás Espina

We live traversed by an imperative anxiety that clings us to things, words, computers, chats, to the idea of God almighty and redeemer.

The apocalypse arrived a while ago and like a virus it creeps on us silent and invisible. Consciousness becomes our worst enemy and a divine urge makes us inhuman. The head of St. John the Baptist was delivered on a silver platter and year zero was preceded by the most inconceivable slaughter of children.

A woman sings thanks to life and blows her brains out, another sweeps the sidewalk by the rubble of her house destroyed at the 1985 earthquake in Santiago de Chile.

We are children of an ontological fear and like zombies we walk through this amorphous matter that we call life without knowing how or when we will return to dust.

You may say I am exaggerating, but I say all this just to engage in that state of exception that comes to me every time I enter an exhibition by Catalina León.

Back at Alberto Sendrós Art Gallery (gallery that saw her hatch) and in an act of restoration (let's remember that her last exhibit in that gallery was cancelled by a misunderstanding between the gallerist and the artist which drove her to auction the whole exhibit at a fruit and vegetable stand in the Abasto neighborhood, at the corner of what was for many years her studio, her home and shelter), Catalina once again, raises her questions upon us. Even though we could say they are the same (crafts, death, religion, beauty, femininity, spirituality, etc.), they seem to have gone through a tight sieve where there is almost no place for the evocations and allegories that have so far accompanied her production. We will no longer see fragments of the history of painting, portraits or ornaments; explicit references of her primary fascination that were closer to the pampered young rebel of the local scene (which sought ladders to catch the backs of heaven) than the woman that has now sifted the mud and calls us to silence and meditation.

In Muda (Mute/Molt) all the symbols Catalina used to put into play seem to have been dusted and woven carefully in search of another order of matters. The material is no longer medium where she evokes and writes. The material has been amalgamated and is pierced by the procedure. She only rearranges, provides another disposition and gives a few taps so that it may sing and rise "as much as possible." But she also knows that the small and disturbing about things should not get too high as they would depart from the order of nature and burn. So then she stops, waits, repairs and gives another small touch. It may

be an extraordinary touch, but never final. Because we are now (as witnesses of relief), the ones to complete the stroke in the writing of that journal.

Usually, when thinking of an artist's production in close relation to her life, we run the risk of entering a collection of anecdotes that keep us away from the symbolic potential of the works. But in this case, to walk into Catalina's exhibit is to enter a bit in the interweaving of her experiences, feelings and most intimate obsessions. Without being self-referential, silently inviting us into her home. And it is always difficult to separate the house from the person who lives there.

For that reason and in order to complete an idea, a secret: Catalina reached her first thirty years and Saturn's autumnal clock already gave her the first scythe. In the astrological language, Saturn is the one who makes us molt clothes, neighborhood, skin and affects; arrange priorities, define vocations and needs to reassert ourselves in the world again. However, it is fair to suspect that the God of melancholy did not catch her by surprise and that she awaited the sacrificial day ready to make of the body that the scythe cut off, her new treasure and battle array. The remnants of the storm, the fallen leaves, the old rags (well, the small things) had to be rearranged again to find another sense, more still, rough and contemplative.

In *Pintura para piso y plantas*, work with which she won the 2007 Petrobras award, she introduced to us a garden that opened anarchically to a world of external reminiscences, from the history of painting to contemporary art, mixed with plants, snails and pomegranate seeds (fruit which Proserpina devours periodically to announce the advent of spring). Now, in *Muda* it seems as if that world withdrew as a shelter or a cocoon to consolidate in itself after the harsh saturnine season. And for this she must ritualize the remains and transform them into offering.

And it seems that she is in no hurry, for there is no urgency now. She knows that the future is circular; that all battles and all deaths are one and occurred a thousand times. So we can only remain silent and listen to the song emanating from the remains; rub the debris, sweep the sidewalk and jealously (one leaf at a time) rebuild another nest on the ground. Waiting for Proserpina to come out, as always, from the abode of the dead.

Muda (Mute/Molt)
Catalina León
Alberto Sendrós Gallery
Pasaje Tres Sargentos 359,
Monday through Friday from 2 to 8pm.
Closing December 7th.