

Constant mutation

Time and the transformation of matter are essential in Catalina León's installations; one of them can be seen at Alberto Sendrós Art Gallery

By Verónica Gomez

Between contemporary art's darling and naive diva with a Latin-American air, Catalina León knows how to transcend the garments of beauty to organically tear what no wardrobe could cover: the life of materials, from its dormant existence to its decadence, that transition where some rubber plant leaves sewn together become a flayed skin hanging from the ceiling, as if a giant animal had molted its epidermis and left to become something else, leaving a beating piece of its past. In Muda, her current exhibition, the metamorphoses keep bearing fruits, without startles or abrupt changes in its path, like a river that, rather than whimsically steering its way, prefers to keep digging its own bed.

- How did the exhibition's name come up?

-At first the name was going to be another, "The Fall", with a certain Biblical association. But I don't like to explicitly mix art and religion, I think you have to be very careful, everything tends to be distorted or frivoled, I'd rather do a personal synthesis and transform it into something else. I also felt that the name was a little big for me. Why use such big names to describe art works? I don't know how much you can ask of a contemporary artwork. I don't like to use big words, in the sense that I don't want my words to be light years away from my experience, from what my body can grasp. One day Muda occurred to me as title and I started looking on the internet for different associations, and found a video of a little bug that was changing its tiny wings and liked it because it referred to the transformation and the commotion that something marvelous produces that brings you to be quiet. While something is going through you, there's no place for language.

- Which are the materials you choose that embody the physical metamorphosis in your work?

-The term metamorphosis applied to my work is paradoxical because I am not an artist who changes much. I have no concern for change, although I wouldn't want to stay tied to something either. The metamorphosis refers more to the choice of materials that I expose to withstand changes and aggression: durlock, leaves, fabrics? I work in a very carefree way. I use them. I can be lying on a cloth, use it to dry something and later make it part of the piece. I let the materials and the paint and their tracks run their course. I hardly intervene. Or I intervene a lot but without any intention, mostly accompanying the material. I usually use perishable materials that will obviously change over time.

- How does time affect the materials and how does it relate to your working process? For example, in Muda, the laboriousness and time implied in the sewing of so many rubber plant leaves stands out.

-Time is critical in the way I work. I feel that my works are made by a process of maceration. I need to let them be. It is a blind impulse. There is awareness, but there isn't an intention to take the work to a certain place. There is no plan. Only time can arrange. Time makes my works. I realized that something I had done and was lying around one day suddenly made sense. That began to fascinate me. To see how time resignifies and puts things in order again. Time bears and makes matter reflect.

-There is a time that keeps running parallel to your oblivions, and another time, like the embroidering for example, that is more controlled.

-I'm always present. I'm there even in the distraction. Time also has to do with a work politics. While my work is not explicitly political, my position regarding the process is. External demand does not determine my work.

- How do these times deal with deadlines? An exhibition, a contest, for example.

-They don't deal.

- Do you have to say no many times?

-Many. Otherwise what is the work in dialogue with? Where is it coming from? What for? To please whom? I think there are artists for whom the deadline works, it drives them to produce and brings out the best of them. It's not my case.

- How do you get along with the art market -if there is such a thing- when developing a piece that is hard to collect, because of its format and its perishableness?

-I get happy when I sell a piece. It's money that allows me to keep producing. But that does not invade my work, not for a split second.

-If you were to receive a large amount of money to produce, would you change your materials or scales?

-I think not. I like the human scale of my works. Maybe it's a moral issue? Or absurd? But I cannot take that much space! I'm more interested on what intimacy has to give.

-While your works are not monumental, they do give the impression that there was more than one person working on them. A very personal stamp that harbors a community work.

-Yes, it is true that I get a lot of help. In this encourage of losing myself, I need a lot of help after, someone to tell me "yes, this way". I never do a work on my own. In this exhibit my brother José, who is an artist, helped me, Celina Ezeiza, my little neighbors playing around me in my previous studio and altering the work, Lidia and her husband, Agustina, Florencia, Guillermo, Hernán, Nicanor, Laura, María, Sonia, Barbie, Fabián, Dani? So then, in my works appear different voices in the details, which in an overview, are unified.

- What led you and still leads you to being an artist?

-The interest in making things that at first seemed contradictory or opposed coexist harmoniously. In art I found the field where I wasn't forced to do just one thing, where instead I could be in a state of contradiction.

Muda, Catalina León, Alberto Sendrós Art Gallery (Pasaje Tres Sargentos 359), until December 7th.