

Corporeal Metamorphoses

Interview with Lucía Pizzani

*Capullo A7, 2013, Stoneuxare, glaze, 13.4 x 6.3 x 7.5 inches / 34 x 14 x 19 cm
Photo by Oscar Proktor.*



Your work is a hybrid of sculpture, photography, drawing and performance that addresses different conditions of the body and suggests ideas of transformation and metamorphosis. When did you become interested in exploring the body and the self? What triggered this investigation?

Since my childhood, I have been close to the arts because both my parents are visual artists. I have participated in video art, performances and attended contemporary dance classes, all that along a permanent interest in photography, which was the first language I used in my early works and continued over the years. My subject migrated from outside to inside. I started with nature organisms and micro landscapes that with time were bodily ones.

The body became more and more necessary; it progressed until it was the subject of my Masters Degree research when I studied at the Chelsea College of Arts in London. From then I have explored self/body and nature looking for their intersections.

How do issues related to feminism intersect with biology?

When the interest in the body grew into an awareness of all the gender inequalities that are happening nowadays, I started working in a more research-based way. I started looking into specific historical moments that I encountered through the media, tales or popular stories that had gender issues as a central theme.

Nature and art have always been very close. Nature has been the subject for art for a long time, as well as a source of inspiration for other disciplines and many inventions—nature is everywhere. Growing up in a tropical country with wild vegetation and an immense biodiversity it was both a pleasure and a sense of responsibility that made me a permanent collaborator of environmental projects for more than a decade. In that period, I studied conservation biology at Columbia University while living in NY.

In my process, organic shapes, patterns, and textures are all over the place, no matter the media I use. That is why I find so suited to my practice when I find stories where gender and biology are present and intertwined. Like the attack on the Kew Garden's orchids house by Suffragettes in a time when women were not allowed to have these flowers because of their "sexual" appearance. And curiously enough the name Orchids comes from the Greek word for testicle due to the tubercles of the plants! For this project, I developed a series of ceramic work, photography, and drawings

exploring the feminine and masculine formal aspect of the flowers to go along with archival materials of the Suffragettes attack.

The Worshipper of the Image exhibition, held last year at Beers Contemporary, took its title from Richard Le Gallienne's Victorian novel. How do you research your exhibitions?

When I take upon a subject, I try to go as deep as possible. I did my BA in visual communications at the University in Caracas; back there my career was a mix of photography and cinema studies with journalism. This has given me some tools for the methods of inquiry and in communicating ideas both in a visual and written manner.

It is common that one project leads me to another. For example, when I worked with the Inconnue de la Seine, this mask based on a girl that throw herself in the Seine around the late 1880s. I did a whole installation with video, monotypes and newspaper archives for the XII Premio Eugenio Mendoza, exhibition and award in Caracas. I went to Paris and walked in the places where she has been, and I bought the mask from the same house of moldings that made it. During my research, I encountered "The Worshipper of the Image", a novel written about the mask. I used it to develop a completely new project to be shown in the spaces of Sala Mendoza, the art center that hosted the Premio Mendoza that I won. This exhibition also traveled to London and was shown at Beers Contemporary in a revised version that incorporated new works.

To communicate effectively, you must be aware of the cultural difference of the audience you are presenting to. Is there a difference between the works you show in Venezuela and the ones you show in London or New York?

Contemporary art has become an international language. The internet, art fairs, biennales and the many touring exhibition that we encounter nowadays in museums worldwide bring artists and their work from one place to another constantly.

Caracas used to be one of the most important art centers in Latin America. Its contemporary art museum holds a vast collection of European masters, including Picasso and Matisse, among others. There is a huge tradition of public art there. The Universidad Central de Venezuela is a UNESCO site due to its combination of architecture and art. It hosts a large number of works by international and local artists in its buildings.

The way I research and produce my projects is a multicultural one, with a mix of references from different historical moments in a variety of places where I have lived and visited. In this way, I create and exhibit, with no country customization, as most of the artists currently do.

You have an experimental approach to photography. Tell us about the techniques that you use.

I use different techniques depending on the project. Most of the time I work with a digital camera with which I have made. I print on cotton and photographic paper and have used aluminum as a surface as well. For The Worshipper of the Image, because I was working on a story from Victorian times I used collodion wet plates. These photos are made directly into a plate and were like the Polaroid of the times. It was perfect for doing a series of portraits for that exhibition.

When did you become interested in the medium of ceramics? How does it contribute to your oeuvre?



A Garden for Beatrix, 2015, Detail, Stoneware and glaze on pigment print 23 x 23.5 x 5 cm sculpture on 53 x 56 cm paper

My experience with ceramics started at an early age. A good friend was the daughter and granddaughter of potters back in Caracas, and we got to play a lot with the material. Then, when doing my Masters Degree at the Chelsea College of Arts, I was fascinated by the possibilities in the ceramic department. I was doing very bodily photography and was more and more interested in sculpture, having produced a few installations with interesting results. I did my first series of ceramic pieces while studying there, in 2009. Since then I haven't stopped. After I had graduated, I joined the Morley College, a great place to explore and create.

I think ceramics has made my practice much more complete. There were things impossible to achieve or communicate in 2D, and the malleable, rich and ever changing nature of clay has open a lot of new aesthetic and conceptual possibilities to me. For each exhibition project I've had in these last years I produced a specific series of pieces in ceramics. It's curious to see how the interest in this medium has grown in the contemporary art world in recent years. In Venezuela, there is a tradition of collecting ceramics. My work has received a good welcome there having the chance to be incorporated in important collections, such as the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection who acquired a group of my sculptures in a solo show I had in Caracas in 2011.

In the last years I have done a lot of research and experimentation with glazing in stoneware pieces, producing a series of organic sculptures inspired in the changing phases of a chrysalis that were shown in Caracas and London.

How do you think your work will evolve in the next period? What are you currently working on?

Creating and researching is constant in my practice. Now, I am showing my latest project called "A Garden for Beatrix" at the Cecilia Brunson Project Space in London. The project was inspired by Beatrix Potter and her findings on fungi at a time where women were not allowed to become serious scientific researchers. The decay and recycling that is made possible by the services of fungi in our planet are interpreted in a big mural of photographs with ceramic pieces on top, like a big collage that interconnects through branches of paper and porcelain sculptures. That same decay also eats the faces of women in a series of old daguerreotypes that I use in a video piece of the show, mimicking what the society of the time made to its female citizens. Working again on gender issues I try to pay homage to the brave characters of our history that were, like me, inspired and touched by nature.

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