

Constellations and Drifts

Solo Exhibition by Pilar Mackenna at Pedro Oliveira Gallery

How can we artistically translate the intrinsic complexity of life? The sole possibility resides within infinitude, implying, paradoxically and simultaneously, an act of resistance by the artwork against the finitude of the body, against its inevitable end of death, striving to capture the elements of the body and life that are infinite.

In Pilar Mackenna's work, the body is neither a figurative body, nor is a model. Rather, it exists before any artistic creation, before thought itself, as a foundational unit within an ecosystem of boundless dimensions. Nourished by desire, it intricately intertwines with diverse elements and contexts, forged in the readiness for encounter, thus weaving a complex web of interdependencies. Despite each individual's unique "here and now" experience, this interconnectedness unveils enigmatic facets of shared existence, igniting a kaleidoscope of human plurality. This idea – recognized by the artist as a catalyst for the artistic condition (in which – we can add – the mutation of elements and contexts over time regenerates the perennial relevance of the artwork as a conduit for transducing what is unbridgeable in human life, reaffirming that same plurality) – permeates both the experimentation characterizing the artist's creative process and the resulting artwork, whose constituent elements interweave a new relationship with infinitude.

This achievement, increasingly scarce in contemporary art, where the prevalence of conceptual or ideological planes impedes an effective transduction into the visual domain of the artwork, stems from the intimate connections that arise between the inscription of the unconscious, manifested in the intuition emerging from the body, and the mysterious reasons of geometry. Or as the title of the exhibition suggests: between constellations and drifts.

Pilar Mackenna reclaims the Situationist-inspired practice of drift, naming it "territorial drift," a cornerstone in her artistic process. However, instead of focusing on topographical accidents or the fissures and social conflicts of the city like its predecessor, she delves into the realm of the body – its movements through time and space, its gestures, and, most significantly, its sensory receptivity – to unveil the overarching complexity that envelops and endures within us. She weaves together the multifaceted tapestry of human experience, intertwining heterogeneous elements and gathering scattered fragments, remnants of everyday use, banal artifacts, and *minor*¹ materials, that she transforms into a realm of playful and poetic substance.

At times, the drifts are accompanied by performative actions and compositional exercises, wherein the artist's body becomes an integral part of the aesthetic composition – as a counterweight, center, rod, or arc – engaged in a delicate interplay of forces, balancing between tension and unstable equilibrium, gravity and suspension. In other instances, the body and its rehearsed positions undergo a transfiguration into abstract signs – lines and circles that represent flows and radiant planes – however, they incorporate an idea of movement derived from the drift, the activation of

¹ "Minor" is used in the Deleuzian sense of the term.

memory, inherently volatile to atmospheric pressures that influence the inscription of the experience on the body, and the spatialization of associations, encounters with the layers enigmatically coating the world, seeking in this temporary organization, diagram, or constellation, some semblance of order, some meaning. Much like natural ecosystems or the relational art theorized by Bourriaud (a pivotal influence for the artist), the elements are not perceived in isolation but rather are understood in the context of the relationships they forge, momentarily suspending order and significance within infinitude. However, inherent in them persists a curiosity that emerges from their own combinations, an openness intrinsic to multiplicity, and paradoxically, to geometry² itself, reminiscent of the infinite compositions of Hilma af Klint and Paul Klee, both of whom serve as significant influences for Pilar Mackenna.

The signs permeate both the drawings and paintings, as well as the sculptures and installations – they are free. The artworks attribute them a physicality that inevitably relates to the body. The body walks, traverses space, opens its eyes, listens, selects, collects, and loves. These actions are encoded within the artwork through geometric forms and the manipulation of collected fragments and materials (which resemble, in turn, planes, points, lines, and pure geometric volumes) through various operations such as stacking, weaving, tying, bending, folding, and fitting, among others, echoing some of Louise Bourgeois' ideas about materials and their relationship with the body. Each material – and particularly, in Mackenna's work, each junction of materials – expresses an idea: a bodily movement, a sensitive memory, a ray of light through trees, an encounter with urban conditions, that no other material or combination of materials can express. The plastic work on the junctions will then be as complex as the ideas that the artist finds in human life and the conditions that delimit it in a certain time and space, going beyond what can be identified at a superficial level, which includes, for example, chromatic and morphological associations through the physical and constructive qualities of materials, such as texture, flexibility, rigidity, modular structure, among others, that the artist skillfully manipulates these elements to create a plasticity within the visual ecosystem of her artwork.

The tasks of re-signification, as the artist terms them, operate on this first plane of transformation, while artistic creation – and with it, the ineffable – emerges in another realm of plastic work, particularly in the paintings that the artist creates on found fragments. This is evident in the unique color palette she favors, in addition to the consistent presence of certain elements, such as circles, semi-circles, and lines depicting ascending or descending movements, which fosters intimate dialogues between drawings, paintings, and sculptures (forming visual families), in the lines she weaves with threads of wool, ropes, clamps, and other materials, whose gestures evoke the need to comprehend the complexity of life by connecting and embracing the shattered

² Louise Bourgeois once said that the discovery of geometry allowed her (at least for a time) to feel secure, due to the order and predictability of relationships within a mathematical system: "Studying geometry, I learned a system in which things proceed without surprises. One is, essentially, safe. That was a revelation: that it was possible to anticipate! You could predict the position of the stars. The sun would rise where it was supposed to. It never failed you. Never betrayed you. Principally, it was a world of order that I wanted. I had been in a state of anxiety and needed reassurance. Solid geometry and cosmography – the dynamics of the stars," Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father. Reconstruction of the Father. Writings and Interviews 1923-1997* (London: Violette Editions), 113-114.

fragments of existence. Yet, these connecting threads conceal a fragility, inherent to their nature: the thread can be easily pulled, or the clamp cut. What sustains them is their belonging to something greater – the sequence they form within the vast expanse of infinitude.

With each new sculptural installation – such as the one we encounter within the space of the Pedro Oliveira gallery – the artist explores a possibility of approaching the unfathomable. Notably, fragility and delicate equilibrium emerge as compositional figures in many of her works, demonstrating that the attempt to impose order upon chaos is only possible if the work embraces a trace – however small – of chaos itself. This trace is called beauty. In Pilar Mackenna's oeuvre, beauty or poetry transcends familiarity or empathy; it reverberates within the body and experiences of each observer, resonating within the intricate systems she creates.

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