

Domestic Fables

“Plastic Flowers don’t die...” (Lyrics of the Titãs song)

By Katia Canton

The work of Bettina Vaz Guimarães is directly descendant from still life. The word still life comes from the dutch word *stilleven* that refers to a nature that is stopped, inert, composed of unanimated objects.

This hereditary language emerged between the 16 and 17 century, particularly in Holand, with scenes created by artists involving set tables, food, fruits and flowers, objects. These thematic scenes were not considered very noble, especially when compared to the portraitures, historical scenes and landscapes.

Nevertheless, it is exactly because of its mundane condition – because it’s an easily elaborated theme within the domestic environment, joining food, bottles, fruit plates, books or other objects – that the still life becomes so important for art. Compositions done based on what the artist brings in his hands; the still life reveals the mechanism of the artistic doing. They serve as exercises of form, color, perspective, paint, dashes, and light.

Demonstrating of what one lives.

The work of Bettina Vaz Guimarães builds up since the beginning of the year 2000 in a presentation of related images. Kitchen utensils, perfume bottles, details of beaks and screws belonging to teapots, jars and pots emerge as main subjects of her drawings and paintings.

In her work however, a displacement of senses takes place. There these mundane images, normally relegated to mere details of existence gain an unprecedented dimension. They unglue themselves from their day to day context, leaving from a condition of mere instrumental object of daily life to acquire an epic tone. In her work each of her objects transforms itself into a true monument of domestic life.

Like plastic flowers subverting their origin and natural condition, subordinated to life on earth, the sugar pots, cups, plastic bottles and mirrors belonging to the artist exile themselves. They leave their mundane situation, mixed to so many other things and contextual mechanisms, to gain life. They are extended, enlarged and suspended. They become autonomous, eternalizing themselves in the process.

The drawings and paintings belonging to Bettina Vaz Guimarães have the narrative consistency of sincerity. Extended, stretched, enlarged her figures turn into protagonists of a bi-dimensional game where the affective dimension is combined to a constructive concern.

When she fell in love with drawings and elected the objects that surround her house to be the subject of her work, the artist opened them to the world. She liberated each one of them from their proportions, contextualization and colors. She dressed them in tones of black and white and went to search in the forceful gesture of the lines a research of reconstruction.

In the process, the lines started to loosen themselves. The drawings stretched and started to occupy several pieces of paper, united in groups, composing a mosaic of free strokes. In these works, a sieve, a little pan, a fruit squeezer, everything seems impotent, liberated from their predestined narratives. Them seem ready to start new stories, domestic fables.

In the recent paintings, domestic objects are again cut and highlighted from their context. In this condition, they multiply themselves and gain colors.

One figure adds to another, images run over each other and overlap. Forms and tones are abundant.

In this unprecedented density of mundane things, pictorial constructions emerge full of nuances and different vibrations. At several times the scenes seem to gain a new life. They seem to have movement. It's as though the canvases narrated fables in which the objects acted: the broom is the one that sweeps, the squeezer the one that squeezes, the blender blends.

It is interesting to conclude with a thought of how this feminine world, composed by domestic images, has for centuries been associated to intimacy and a scale of minimized dimensions. The north-American critic Susan Stewart relates the miniature to the speech of the *petite feminine*, in that the reduction of physical dimensions results in a multiplication of ideological properties that combine intimacy, nostalgia and a link to collecting.

(Book On Longing: narrative, miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection, de Susan Stewart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Press, 1984)

As she enlarges her tea cups, tea pots, plastic jars and sieves and as she liberates these objects in space, Bettina alters their destiny. She gives them strength, lets them go over the white paper or the colors of the canvas so that they can be and do art.

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