

I met Lito on a zoom call for an interview I did with her back in January. I immediately liked her calm, open and generous energy. Being from Romania myself, I always want to know about other peoples' experiences growing up on the periphery of the Western Empire. Lito was born in Cyprus and currently lives in Athens. She tells me about its history and its unique landscape: how it rose from the bottom of the ocean 1.85 million years ago, and how you can find marine fossils even at its highest altitudes. Cyprus used to be one of the most prized territories in the ancient world. It was the birthplace of the Gods Aphrodite and Adonis, and also an important trade node that united Europe with Africa and the Middle East. Lito describes contemporary Cyprus as a "traumatized place," but seems to appreciate its sunsets and the ways in which it defined her thinking. Knowing this makes it easy to understand the depth and the aesthetic of her practice, as well as her ongoing concern with deep time, coexistence, death, and ecology.

Lito makes sculptures as self-standing flat cut-outs, balancing between abstraction and figuration. Sometimes, they incorporate, through form or drawing, multiple recognizable silhouettes, including a mix of insects, animals, and landscapes. Other times, they appear as abstract stencils. Made from aluminum, these characters have an unusual hologram-like presence. Their reflective quality and formal composition, makes them appear as glitches, puncturing our space-time continuum with their presence. Often, two or three elements like milk thistles and handmade baskets surround the sculptures. At a closer look, these are electroformed in copper, as if conserved to prolong their life.

Milk thistles are easy to recognize through their purple, thorn-protected flowers. They are a resilient species that adapts to any kind of soil, which allows them to thrive all around the world. Although categorized as weeds, they have important medicinal properties known to support the body's ability to detoxify and remove pollutants. In Antiquity, it was believed that the thistle provided protection from evil spirits and was considered a symbol of long life. In Christian cultures, it symbolized human suffering after the expulsion from Eden. Living in an increasingly polluted world, humans—like any other living beings—must adapt to some pretty radical and terrifying changes. Lito's work makes space for reflecting on how

these adaptations might occur. How behaviors and bodies (of humans and nonhumans) will transform through extreme conditions. In this context, the milk thistle is an allegory of expulsion and of resilience, highlighting a necessity to heal.

Resilience and adaptation must come with new and alternative patterns of thinking. With this awareness, Lito weaves into her work ideas from anthropology, posthumanism, and science fiction. The baskets accompanying the aluminum creatures take inspiration from Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, where Le Guin describes the heritage of basketry as one of the oldest technologies we have. The "container" is by far more significant for our collective evolution than the invention of weapons. It highlights a technology that focuses on gathering energy "in" rather than pushing it "outwards." We know that the survival of ancient humans was much more reliant on gathering than it was on hunting. Yet, highlighting this undermines the ancient (and modern) myths of the singular "hero" that kills, conquers, and subdues. This is a shift that Lito highlights through her practice as a necessary adaptation. The ancient technology of basketry is generally associated with women's work. For the Guayaki Indians of eastern Paraguay, when a woman dies, her basket is ritually buried with her. But, in a more fascinating way, basketry is the base of many creation myths. Ancient Mesopotamians believed that the world started with a wicker raft placed on the oceans, and covered with dust. The Dogon, in West Africa, believe that the world was erected starting from the circular base of a basket, representing the sun. Thus, the baskets that accompany the creatures in Lito's practice, function as signifiers of new beginnings. Gatherers of energy. They serve as models to help us envision a different relationship with our current and future technology: from a weapon of control, suppression, and destruction, to a vessel of culture and civilization.

The omens of the climate crisis are everywhere around these figures. They are adorned with fragmented landscapes and often scribbled with dates, times, words, and graffiti. The artist tells me that the scribbles, which evoke cave drawings, reveal clues into the creatures' origins and memories. Drawings or prints of fire, signal memories of wildfire incidents from tempestuous locations. The artist sees the creatures as protectors of sorts. These environmental beings eschew anthropocentric categorizations but seek to find their own communities through barren environments.

Lito's work highlights an internal logic in which the coexistence of both visible and invisible elements pierces through our present. Successful through the adaptation of flatness as a conceptual approach, and through exciting experimentation with technology, Lito's work cuts beneath the surface and lends itself to the same legacy and formal concerns outlined by artists such as Katja Novitskova and Ian Cheng. Yet, her forthright approach to environmental issues through her own background, posthumanism, anthropology, and nonlinear narratives makes her stand out from many other peers of her generation. In many ways, Lito's work is a portal that raises questions on coexistence and adaptation. *How many worlds can we grasp at once? How do we ensure that these worlds coexist side by side peacefully? How do we react to things we don't understand? And why?* These questions raised by Lito's practice are an exercise in empathy. And looking for the answers can lead to weakening our anthropocentric point of view. For, as the Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield says: "The question is not the future of humanity. The question is the presence of eternity."







Anniversaries II, 2021 (detail) (p. 144) Night Queen, 2019 Photo: Roberto Apa (p. 145) Courtesy: the artist and T293, Rome

