

Lito Kattou

Salive Live

Interview Lito Kattou "Productivity is not something settled and stable", 30 May 2020

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"Productivity is not something settled and stable"



LITO KATTOU IS A VISUAL ARTIST BORN IN NICOSIA, CYPRUS. SHE IS A GRADUATE OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART IN LONDON WITH AN MA IN SCULPTURE AND THE ATHENS SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS. KATTOU IS THE RECIPIENT OF THE DUCATO PRIZE 2019 AND THE NEW POSITIONS AWARD FOR ART COLOGNE 2018 AND SHE WAS THE INVITED ARTIST FOR THE 89PLUS GOOGLE RESIDENCY 2017. RECENT SOLO SHOWS HAVE BEEN PRESENTED AT T293 GALLERY, ROME; ARTOTHEK, COLOGNE; TILE PROJECTS, MILAN; POLANSKY GALLERY, PRAGUE; BENAKI MUSEUM, ATHENS; POINT CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, NICOSIA. KATTOU IS REPRESENTED BY T293, ROME.

Why did you become an artist? Do you remember the exact moment of your decision?

I have never thought of the reason why I became an artist. I guess I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the concept of creativity, because the decision was an intuitive one.

It is not easy to recall the moment of making it. I think the desire was always there as a need to connect myself to creativity. Since my childhood I remember always getting fascinated when I was dealing with creating stuff by myself, with my own hands.

My family doesn't have a background in art, but my parents always encouraged me to develop my skills further. I was good at drawing, I was writing fairy tales and illustrating them myself; I was also crafting models of historical buildings that I was learning about in history classes (ziggurats, Neolithic era houses, the Parthenon). At the same time I was getting an academic education in music from 6 years to my late adolescence. I was playing the piano and flute but I never felt that this was the domain that was fascinating me the most, and I also wasn't feeling good enough to pursue it afterwards. The discipline that came with it was totally suffocating for me, although very useful as a remnant tool later. So, in my mid-adolescence, classical music courses functioned as a way to bridge me to other artistic terrains, and so visual arts somehow arose as a path.

Moreover, looking back at it, I think there was also this strange feeling of not desiring to become a boss, neither an employee, but remaining in this in-between zone of self employment, which gives great freedoms and a lot of anxiety, I guess! At the moment I can't say that it's just a profession for me, as I perceive creating art as a way of living, as something very immersive, with which the self is not absolutely segregated.



Erratics, 2019. Aluminum, steel, permanent ink, digital print on textile. Styrofoam, dimensions variable, detail from installation. Courtesy the artist and T293, Rome.

What is the most important thing for you in sculpture? Could you say that you are definitely a kinaesthetic person?

I would like to perceive sculpture as something fluid and ever changing, and I think the way artistic production and art history have developed after modernism have left the domain free from any constraints and responsibilities of following the norms. It is vital that we keep on dealing and examining potencies of form and content articulations. My works at certain moments could hover in-between sculpture and drawing, and I really enjoy this openness, as it permits boundaries to mingle and regenerate.

Kinesthesia is deeply related to the feelings of the body, and I think the way my practice is related to materials and structures, it has to do a lot with processing physical information. In these processes I have learned a lot by listening and seeing, but at the same time by doing, so, yes, a part of myself is also kinaesthetic.

People's hands feel mostly glass and aluminum nowadays, because our smartphones have become the one thing which we all touch most often. The material you employ in your sculpture is also aluminum... is it just a coincidence?

The decision of using aluminium in my works is very much related to our post-industrial present. Technological and industrial advancements have changed the materialities that are mostly present in our everyday lives. My works are perceived as bodies in transcendence and being realized mostly from aluminium surfaces indicates that those beings with their cold metal epidermis are structured by an element commonly used in our time. The usage of flat sheets refers to the processing of the mineral in primary industrial production, and flatness in general is connected to the 2d and 3d dimensionality shift we experience through the interfaces we hold and are exposed to.



Crystal Tears, 2019. Installation view at T293, Rome. Photo: Roberto Apa

Now, in the time of covid-19, people wear medical gloves and almost every surface can be contaminated with the virus. Don't you think that sculpture now plays a new role in the process of its borders, in the same way that, as you have mentioned, it was after modernism?

Of course, our everyday life has changed due to the spreading of the virus, along with the tactile ways we deal with our body, the bodies of others and all the surfaces that surround us. I do not feel that the way we deal with art production will change that much, practicalities and logistics might get more difficult, but I do not think that a work of art will be disliked or not chosen to be acquired, exhibited or circulated because it could play some part in an outbreak of contamination. The situation with the virus is affecting our lives deeply not only health wise, but mainly in social and economical ways. The difficulties that this crisis or recession will bring will not affect the medium chosen to develop artworks, but questions and issues of how easily, under what circumstances, with what kind of support and possibilities art is produced in general. It is quite significant how demands about the establishment of the civil status of the artist have arisen in this period. I believe that it is impossible to completely stop art production, as it has never stopped, not even in historical moments more difficult than this one, and I am hopeful that it will find a way to adjust to these new temporary or permanent conditions.



Unknown Synergy, 2019. Installation view at Tile Project Space, Milan. *Body I & II*, 2019. Photo: Elena Radice. Courtesy the artist and T293, Rome.

How would you describe the conceptual development of your art practice?

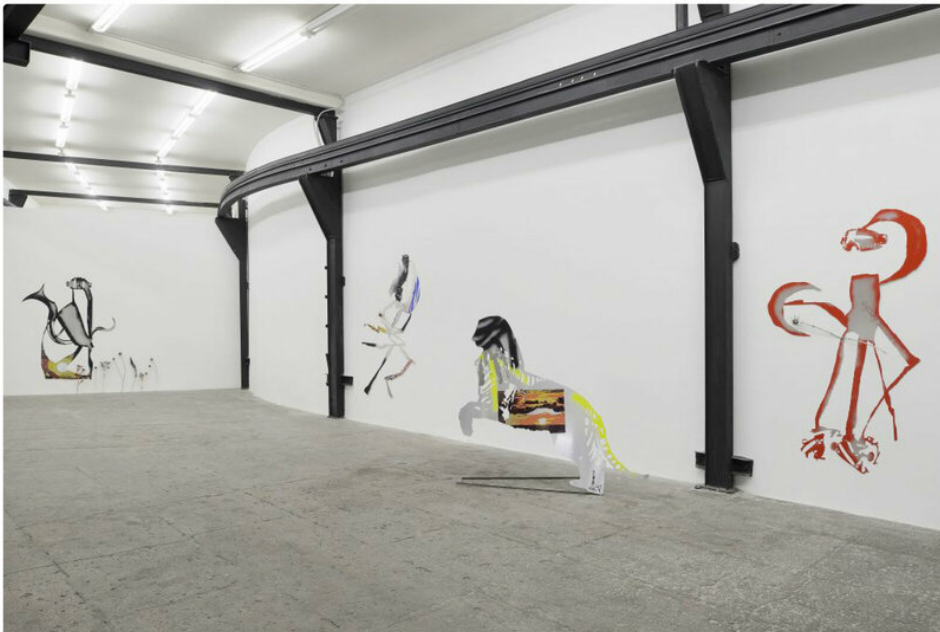
At its core, it deals with the issues of transformation and otherness, and the relationship between humans, animals, environment, and technology. Visually it translates mostly to posthuman bodies, natural elements and mechanistic references.

Let's speak about your projects. Which is your favourite?

I can't really say which is my favourite. At certain times I have felt that things I was assuming wouldn't go that well went surprisingly well, and also things that seemed perfect took a different turn at the last moment. As soon as a work is communicated to the public, its reception mechanism brings it to life in a different way than when it's in the studio. All of the projects played an important role in the continuation of my practice. I would say that for 2019 I have two favourite pieces and one installation. They are the works "*Body I*" exhibited at Tile Project Space in Milan almost a year ago, then the installation "*Erratics*", which was installed in one of the buildings of an abandoned army base on the outskirts of Brussels and was presented in the framework of Horst music festival, and finally the work "*Night Queen*", which was a part of the show "*Crystal Tears*" at T293 in Rome in the autumn.

What topics are you interested in now, and why?

I am still researching the same topics that have been interesting to me for a long time. Different angles and points of view enhance the narratives that I would like to deal with. I am focusing more on the relationship between myths and the environment, on traces of history and archaeology in relation to the human or non-human body and landscape. At the moment, I am going through a collection of texts that reveal the significance of women scientists from the past, as they have foreseen many of the issues that we are dealing with now, but were never given the appropriate credit. There are several examples, including physicist women from the Victorian era who first talked about climate change, but were dismissed in dominant historiography. For the coming period, I am working on the development of a new series of wall and sculpture pieces, a video work and a potential performative element to be added to the installations.



Crystal Tears, 2019. Installation view at T293, Rome. Photo: Roberto Apa

I really like your projects “Them” and “Solar Love for the Rapid Felines”, maybe because there is a human presence that can be felt in them through the clothes... Your latest projects are referring more to other, more-than-just-a-human-body topics. Can we say that sculpture is trying to focus more on content rather than the form nowadays?

I wouldn't like to make conclusions in aphorisms on what sculpture and art do or do not. I think we are fortunate enough to live in an era where the art system is accepting of any kind of orientation of expression. Boundaries are more permeable than ever, and I do not believe that a dichotomy between content and form is applicable here. I have never perceived art in that way. Obviously, form oriented works are full of content, while content focused vocabularies can be applied to a form in order to communicate some meaning. It has always been about the way artists choose to “tell stories” and the specific narratives constructing those stories can be structured by strokes, colour, composition, volume, hidden or revealed data, algorithms, or archival material.

You usually work on more than four projects a year. What helps you to be productive? What is your source of inspiration?

I obtain a lot of energy from the ongoing flow of keeping my works in an open dialogue with their spectators and audience. I get a feeling of synchronicity from the evaluation and understanding of previous works of mine. It creates an urge to repeat procedures that worked well, to avoid previously made mistakes, to repeat forms and check their durability in physical space, as well as how they go along with certain ideas and concepts. I also get inspired by dialogues I might have with friends, by other historical or contemporary works of art, by the shows and exhibitions I might visit physically or online, by literature and poetry, by nature, organic or inorganic matter, landscapes, technics which are used in other domains and could be applied to the processing of an artwork; by various objects of design, forms and composition in garments, the way the body is perceived in architecture, in performances or even fashion runways. Productivity is not something settled and stable. I feel good to have it questioned and resettled from time to time.

You are partially based in Athens. Do you feel comfortable there? What can you say about the art community there and its specificity?

I had lived in Athens before. I initially moved here when I was seventeen in order to start my studies. It felt quite organic having the city as my base, in between travelling, when I decided to move out from London in 2017. Yes, it feels good to live here. I do love the city with all the odds and difficulties it has. It has also played a significant role in bridging me to my adulthood, which makes it impossible not to be positively biased towards it. There is a sense of solidarity between people which you hardly encounter in big art communities, like the one in London. Of course, exposure and the potency of the art market is limited, but the rest of the conditions offered here, I believe, can help a lot artists to develop their practice. The city could create a simultaneous impression that is messy and, at the same time, shockingly beautiful and noble. I find it very important for my practice to stay connected to this part of Europe which is also closer to my birthplace, as it gives an awareness of social, economical, systemic and structural issues, which in big, harshly neoliberal cities gets camouflaged. One can also get significant input by observing non-positive things going on. If not filtered through exoticism and essentialization, these observations of locality could function as reality checks and augmentation of awareness towards the various complexities which also have a universal impact. Moreover, the layered presence of time very much present in the city has been inspirational. Antiquity is entwined within contemporaneity and issues of late capitalism.

The art scene in Athens has flourished all around in the recent years. New art projects were initiated around the city, non-profit spaces and interesting endeavours have developed that have also managed to attract a number of international artists to make the city their home. This has made the environment and dialogues even more fruitful and interesting.

All photos were kindly provided: Lito Kattou and gallery T293 (Rome, Italy). Title photo: Lito Kattou in her studio, 2020.

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