

Lito Kattou

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Veronica Gisondi, Lito Kattou (interview), Mar 26, 2020

LITO KATTOU

ART

Interviewed by **VERONICA GISONDI**

Questioning traditional sculpture and volume through the flatness of her surfaces, Lito Kattou's work expands on the industrial and technological complexities of our present. Based in Athens, she develops a complex artistic practice that articulates our relationship with futurity by severing its ties with dominant narratives. Throughout her work, memories of another nature are scattered across a multitude of non-human bodies from an unknown time and location. On their cold, flat skin they carry traces of a biodiversity they could either belong or tend to. Lito's use of vocabularies and alphabets is a way to symbolically refer to the language of the otherworldly, to recognize the fluidity and power of words, as well as to acknowledge the distance that separates the known from the unsayable. Resonating with speculative fiction's parables of care and political awareness, her work embraces the failings and arbitrariness of words while looking for alternative means to expand on the possibilities of understanding otherness, and faces metamorphosis as the ultimate question.

You make an extensive use of aluminium throughout your work. You also include tangible cues and traces that hint at the man-made essence of each piece and mirror the way we experience the world. However, this withdrawal from nature at surface level is the means through which the observer comes in close contact with the non-human beings who inhabit your work. There seems to arise a realm yet unknown, or long-forgotten, populated by loosely organic and mythic figures, in which material flatness clashes with a sense of holiness. Can you speak about your interest in this divergence?

Flatness has interested me since a while now in relation to how traditional sculpture and volume could be questioned. The creatures dematerialize into shadows getting rid of the heavy and burdening responsibility of a material fleshy body. The non-human or less anthropomorphic bodies that inhabit my work carry with them their personal characteristics, skills, objects, tools, wounds and memories traced and "tattooed" on their aluminum epidermis which refers to the highly industrial and technological aspects of contemporaneity. Its true

that the mythic is interwoven with the possibly technological. Time, gender and location that they come from are fluid and unprecedented. They seem able to structure communities and also continue wandering as individuals. It is not clear either if they have just arrived from a long walk or they are departing in the pursuit of a desired geographical spot. Nature and time are present as memories they cherish and have, drew on their cold metal flat skin. They are carrying images from the places and biodiversities once being part of or the ones they seek to integrate into.

There are several allusions to the solar system and celestial bodies weaved within your narrative, as well as references to the limits of time and space and our understanding of them. Science fiction also elaborates ideas about outside realities and speculates on forms of existence unknown to us. Do you have a personal bond with the genre?

I rather feel that I am closer to speculative fiction. I believe that those genres are highly political and deeply caring of our times in contrary to the escapism that many accuse them for. They are constructed around metaphors and parables and there are many literature writers which have inspired me as Ursula Le Guin for example. When post feminist thinkers as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti talk about the posthuman or of cyborgs, it is not about humanity blindly converting to a post apocalyptic, technologically extravagant world. Of course these thoughts are part of any discussion dealing with futurity but in the very core of them those practices and ideas speculate of conditions which could broaden our understanding of otherness. When we think of fiction in general or science fiction specifically, it should not be only of brave humans colonising space. The importance of this forms of narratives lie in the power they have to make us understand and cut away from dominant stereotypical types of narrative.

Writing and language manifest across your work in different forms. In relation to the otherness of bodies, I feel like the apparent stillness and silence of your sculptures means the dialogue they engage in doesn't necessarily require human presence, nor it presupposes our participation in it. Your work makes me think about the many ways humans self-elect themselves as interlocutors. How do you imagine the act of going beyond words?

And what's the function of language when facing the unsaid?

Exactly! I have always thought that those bodies, either they structure communities or not, they possibly have strong communication abilities. The question is inevitably present. How to grasp the unsayable... I think the only way to get closer to an answer is by using different vehicles of communication, of practicing storytelling and open up to the possibilities of failing to reach what is ultimately desired to be said in words. Thinking about failure, the reason I use vocabularies, languages and alphabets that I am personally knowledgeable of is because it seems to me the only way to symbolically refer and imply the language of the otherworldly, being aware of course of the distance. This issue of different, otherworldly forms of language reminds me an aspects in the novel "Embassytown" from British writer China Mieville. Within the narrative people of Arieka speak of a language which requires the orator to speak two words at one. Languages are living organism, ongoing archives, fluid and powerful, exactly as bodies are. I have a great respect of dialects, creole and vernacular languages, self linguistic arbitrary constructions and silence.

Your work speaks of the complexities that tie technology and nature. Each of your sculptures could be seen as a mediator – in touch with past and future, refusing to reconcile with a definitive resolution, and bearing the wisdom of adaptability. What does adaptation mean to you?

I do also myself see the subjectivities proposed in my work as mediators, hovering between different time, cultural, environmental, geographical and social contexts. Metamorphose is in the core of the question which mainly problematizes me, the relationship between humans, animals, environment and technology. Adaptation is understood as an open wired question which derives as an outcome from transformation. And the question around adaptation should not come with a fatalistic acceptance. Climate change is an example of how radically new environmental conditions will change our bodies and our societies in the coming years. We have huge clues that the situation seems to be irreversible but there are still groundbreaking battles, which we could collectively and individually give. If and how we are adapting in this new environmental era is at the present time unanswered.