ALMINE RECH

Ana Mazzei
Ghost Studies

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT FROM THE SOUTH, WITH LOVE

Almine Rech Gallery New York is pleased to announce Ghost Studies, an exhibition of new paintings on linen and sculptures by Brazilian artist Ana Mazzei.

Mazzei's paintings are in the same spirit as the radical and harmonious sculptures she is known for that are presented alone or in groups with a quiet, slightly anthropomorphic presence. Sometimes painted or varnished, and made primarily out of wood – a flexible and generic material that appeals to an artist who likes to “make” things by herself in the studio – Mazzei’s standing arrangements of angles, curves and straight lines quote the vocabulary of the avant-garde with a distinctive twist.

In Mazzei's practice, the viewer is never incidental, on the contrary, they are taken into account from the beginning, like a friendly ghost that is always present with the artist while she conceives her work. This spectator is used by Mazzei as a way to materialize her thoughts about space and its relationship to the artwork, “Whenever I start a new project I find myself involved with a repetitive thought that has something to do with my surroundings; I mean the space around me, or around someone else (the spectator)[1]”.
Of course, this viewer-centric way of thinking is also reminiscent of minimalist processes; Donald Judd described the austere characteristics of the minimal work as a way to materialize the external world, or, that what is “not” the work. In Mazzei's case, however, one might do better to look to the Brazilian vanguard and its empathy towards the object, a craving for a direct feeling. “I remember as a child going to a São Paulo biennial and touching an object from Lygia Clark. So to me, these processes are part of us, of Brazilian art history! I like to touch things” said the artist recently in an interview[2].
In both cases, it is the artwork that suddenly creates a consciousness of the context, and therefore the body, in a vital back and forth for the viewer. In Mazzei's work, specific attention is paid to the dimensions of the sculpture, whether through the works' similarity to the scale of the body or playing on perceptions of the minuscule or the gigantic. Speaking on her work Nova Knossos (2013), the artist says, “I was looking to create a relationship where the spectator felt very big, as if she were growing like a giant, and could see cities as small objects[3]”.
Similar dynamics are at play within Mazzei's most recent body of work, which is surprisingly close to resembling traditional painting. Discussing this stylistic shift with the artist, I argued that the trend to call anything that is presented flat on a wall a ‘painting’ is pretty recent. In the 1970s, her graphic marks on fine linen, simply hung on a wooden bar or frame and left to their own atmospheric movement, would probably have been labeled as something else. We agree on the fact that above all, painting alludes to a representative space, whether in an attempt to mimic reality or build an imaginary fiction. Thus, for Mazzei, starting to make these two-dimensional works was instinctive, a simple extension of what she has been doing in her sculptures and preparatory drawings.
Mazzei has created plans for a number of works that have never been produced - for the most part ambitious public sculptures - that simply locate herself and the viewer, in the world, the architecture, and the spaces around us. Here, thin lines demarcate what seem to be floor plans or flattened buildings, while dark, violently applied surfaces of color, that almost seem to mistreat the delicate fabric they are applied to, flash more concrete objects and forms, their sensuality both appealing and crude, almost vulgar, at the same time. There is an immediacy to these works that is striking and uncompromising, and also political. As I was asking her about the need, or possibility, for art to be political within the framework of the extreme current political situation in her country, she elegantly replied, “I am thinking of art as a space of experience, not as a way to use political terms as a trampoline[4]”. Reflecting on recent debates in New York City about what painting can and can't do, what it should and shouldn't represent, and who can or can't paint and for whom: there is food for thought from the South, with love.

Dorothée Dupuis

1. Extract from a note of intention of the artist about the show sent the the author
2. “An act of construction”, interview between myself and the artist, in Terremoto Magazine, Issue 8, February 2017 http://terremoto.mx/article/an-act-of-construction/
3. Ibid.
4. “An act of construction”, interview between myself and the artist, in Terremoto Magazine, Issue 8, February 2017 http://terremoto.mx/article/an-act-of-construction/