

YOU ARE MY FLOWER

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We absorb all sensations in us like sponges. Petal to petal, a flower is constructed in the same way that the human being inwardly builds the white, black red and brown; colours are the meaning of these absorbing sensations: purity, pain, love always based on those feelings.

If nature is a celebration of life, then this work is also a celebration of human interaction with it. If nature is a mirror of deep human need outside of the material necessities of our existence, we find another desire deep in our relationship with non-human forms. An animal can be taught to obey, not a flower. We go to them like hungry lovers, immerse our emotions, and engage them as beings which might accept our feelings. We want to touch them in ways we have never been touched before.

To make this happen, this work needs the evolution of its own life form in order to be. It is enough for this form to 'be' rather than to be acquisitive, i.e., to 'have'. The work characterises a relationship to nature which is based on sensation and desire but which is conscious that nature as a life form is distinct and unique. Therefore, any apprehension is not based on copying experience, but giving experience in the making of the work, a heartbeat: the heartbeat of the artist who is aware that this work knows the limits of human experience but realises appropriation is a failure of representation.

A flower, like love, "is many splendored things". It is a spectacle in romance and in death. We give it a role and a script and sometimes we think we can control its purpose and function. This work does not have this kind of arrogance. It will not be reduced to ornamental limits. Its creation comes out of the body of the artist: her movement, with arms, hands, fingers feet, hips, legs etc. Therefore, it is a dance of time, as the work appears the movement changes, the value of its production is known by the physical desire to shape, cohere and give space to the imagination and to the body. Why else, does an artist call her output a 'body of work'? Sofia Beça says she writes with clay. What else should she do? Nada. If this is her language form then we cannot impose another and think we grasp the intention and meaning of the work until we know what she desires, what kind of sensations produce the image, creation, work. We need our own feelings and thoughts, of course. A circular shape means we need to move, like the artist, as creators of experience.

A flower forces us to recall many sensations: the touch of a lover, the dead in war, a road accident, refugees caught in the crossfire of racism and hatred. A three-year-old boy from Syria recently changed the world when his dead body was seen by millions on a beach. The flowers that were brought to respect his tragedy meant this was everyone's tragedy. Like the petals of marigold accompanying the candles lit for the Indian dead on the river Ganges, they ebb and flow with the tide, reminding us, in their colour and discoloration, nature, life and death form a unique relationship and powerful memories.

Sometimes art finds an answer, it has a message. It does what the artist wanted to do when she wakes up in the night. In the age of multiple association, we sometimes lose what it means to truly feel. When I look at Beca's flower(s) I want to reach out and almost touch, I want to put my lips to the petal, the absorbent ones, next to its neck, my ear to it shell-like aperture, and listen to the songs of a boy who reminds cynics that they are not always stupid and tough, whose death gave the world so much energy, so much life.

You are my flower

2013 80 × 80 × 80 cm
Grês, técnica do rolo, cozedura a 1200°C.
Stoneware, roller technique, firing at 1200°C



PATHS AND SIGNALS

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Wandering presumes to walk without purpose. Several of Sofia Beça's recent works foreshadow this idea. “Deambulando” (wandering), for example, is the title of the polyptych formed by four squares side by side. In each one of them, the forms keep growing until they take over the entirety of the last square. We can see this piece as some sort of river that widens up, or see it as a claustrophobic tunnel, in a cinematographic sequence of four states in which we are able to see the one travelling as they crash into a wall and come back, but coming back through an alternative path so that, in the end, with their dirty and erratic walk cover the whole surface of their world. A world that is reduced to that square, where their footsteps end up creating some life contained form. In a certain way, all forms of art presume a construction of a world. A world where others are also invited to live on and that preserves a metaphoric relationship with reality. This square of stoneware is a microcosmos. The walk means obtaining knowledge, that is, refers to language. The word determines knowledge. The ceramic parallel slabs that organize themselves as gestures, limited in brush strokes, create a path filled with uncertainty and rectifications.

Artists give meaning to their wanderings without meaning. Walking is an active virtue that opposes the passive activity of looking. The way Van Gogh painted had something to do with this idea, or also with form (that we associate with Pollock) of approaching surfaces flying above them, drawing trails in them. Sean Cubbit once said that “it's up to artists to develop the path of their deep temporality, using sounds and textures from the walk to a negotiation, a dialogue freed from the strict government of grammar due to the need of creating a meaning and making the term ‘meaning’ include all senses”. One of the missions of the artist is to recover the consistency of distances, associating the path to time and promote the growth of meanings and alternative possibilities of resource so that, after all, ends up being a maze. The mentioning of this sense capable of gathering all senses reminds us of this final square, covered in arbitrary forms, the polyptych of Sofia Beça.

We talked about paths and time. That Sofia is a ceramist is no laughing matter. In the case of ceramics, time is as an important factor as clay and heat. In the cataloguing of each work, it is referred the type of clay, the type of kiln and even the temperature. The only thing missing is indicating time. This time installs some uncertainty as well. I look at the pictures Sofia sends, I see her actively waiting, something that can take up to nine hours and requires continuous attention. “I chop some wood”, she tells me, “and control the kiln until it gets to the point where I can't get away from it for one second, to feed it”. The time it takes to cool down is equally as extensive. Then you open it up and find out. The margin of error is what leads to success. Working on her wandering pieces, before putting them

in the kiln, Sofia looks like she's regulating the flow of several water streams, or wind, something strongly dynamic and that seems as if it is able to freeze as you look at it, as it expresses the own movement.

Another one of those works named “Deambulando” (wandering) is limited by small tiles. The drawing that gets made reminds us of maps and their contour lines. The artist transforms herself on a surveyor. Describes or creates a landscape. And within that topographical activity there's also territory marking through boundaries or geodetic points. These modern marks coexist along with others more traditional-like, sometimes connected to a religious cult, as stars or crosses for example. One of the main functions of sculpture was exactly that: the marking of limits. This also means giving the territory some meaning, a primordial function to where Sofia Beça comes back to. One of her most interesting works is named “Delimitação de Território” (limitations of territory), similar to an alienation of menhirs, as the famous megalithic alignment of Carnac, even though there are some similar structures in Portugal. These “limits” mark a symbolic frontier and can be used to separate the profaned from the sacred. That's exactly what happens in this piece. However, in Trás-Os-Montes, where the artist takes care of her kiln, stones are still used to limit lands. You can probably see some sort of territory politics, if you introduce the property titles or the conquest traces. All of these pieces are double sided. They have the shape of a stone mark or goal. The lower half is flat, and the superior is more detailed. The motive that occupies them has a semantics function and can be read as the ancient totems or coat of arms you would see in medieval shields. A geometric drawing that differs on code.

The dualities exuberate in the artistic language of Sofia Beça. When we decide something must be expressed in black and white, we realize that the language also needs a dual code. In “Regresso às Origens” (back to origins) the motive of the checkerboard is reinvented, a common characteristic in Portuguese tiles. The monotonous black board and white turns into a virgin territory where language can be played. In “Marcamos em Par” (marking on pair) two motives cross, the signals that limit the path, and the duality. They are like two colour tabs. On the limit, or the crossroads, sometimes dilemmas come up. We should choose one or another colour, one or another path of the crossroad. Agreeing with her, I believe Sofia Beça tells us in terms of synthesis or agreement. In “És a Minha Sombra” (You're My Shadow), the artist refers to the need of dealing with our past, no matter how good or bad it was. Some sort of overcome through duality. The motive of the path also has to do with this. The origin or destiny wouldn't matter as much as the actual travel itself. The hand-made dimension implies a discipline, a learning path that never ends. This principle seems to be part of Sofia Beça's personal strategy.

However, she also uses it in terms of language, in a way of expressing concepts effective at the same time (or concrete) and poetic (or ambiguous). The Tao assumes walking isn't just marching but also stopping: a dual question: yang as movement, yin as immobility.

The territory can be transformed into objects of sacralization, but also devastation. The fires that occur continuously on the Portuguese (and Galician) are some of the most terrible examples of this destruction of Nature. In 2017 the year was especially tragic. The fire burned a huge part of the forest, it destroyed houses and took a smashing amount of lives. The “Floresta Portuguesa” (Portuguese Forest) installation is an elegy dedicated to these trees and people. It presents us a forest of segmented and petrified branches. Between ghost trees, we can see a picture of Rui Pinheiro that reflects traces of human presence in that desolation. This piece, made out of tragic resonances, shows us once more that Sofia Beça is an artist open to life, that wishes to fix her experiences and her compromises through ceramic, that is open to experiment and collaborate with other methods and disciplines, such as music or photography. The sonorous ambient of Jorge Queijo comes up as a key element in this expository project that also wants to be collective. Sofia Beça doesn't cease from learning or moving. The experience and philosophy from the Orient have been integrated in her work, especially after her recent and intense stay in China. Two important things came back with the artist after this trip: on one hand, the magical experience of the Chinese landscapes, in particular the mountains, on the other hand, the use of porcelain. Under the epigraph “Made in Jingdezhen”, she presents us a series of pieces made with this material, which to that date the artist had never used before. Jingdezhen is the porcelain city. A big part of its population is dedicated to this art. Sofia Beça has recovered knowledge about this tradition, transfusing them over to contemporary language. The artist recognises porcelain has introduced other transparencies, other colours, softer and more abstract, and a bigger femininity on her work. She also confesses that this led to territories closer to painting. In China she made schematic flowers, made with very simple gestures. Sometimes she multiplies them, or, with great subtlety, she isolates them, being a protagonist of the piece a single and small flower. It is also introduced the circle as space and support, an idea that's very connected to Chinese culture. Within the pictures Sofia Beça brought with her from the trip, it's included a collection of round doors – the so called “moon doors”. If big part of her previous work would anchor itself on the Sun, and in a certain roughness of the light and its contrasts on the surface of stoneware, these new “Chinese” pieces seem to have been elaborated under the alternative influence of the Moon.