

Isabel Cordovil

Dos cosas tan desiguales

January 11 – February 24, 2024

Madrid

Pedro Cera is pleased to present the first exhibition of Isabel Cordovil at the gallery.

With its title inspired by a poem of Saint Teresa of Ávila (*Dos cosas tan desiguales*), a prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, and writer of the Counter-Reformation period in the Catholic Church, the exhibition, like the poem, reflects on the stark disparity or inequality between two things that fate forces to come together. Remembering Bernini's sculpture, *The Extasy of Saint Teresa* at Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, depicting the encounter of Saint Teresa of Ávila with an angel, we are confronted with a surprising sensual expression and (earthly) surrender to pleasure, an image only rarely associated with Christian iconography. Introducing a group of new works produced for the exhibition, *Dos cosas tan desiguales* takes the archetypal nature of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and looks at the ways these archetypes continue to structure our perception of the world despite the increasing secularization of European culture and the constructed and fluid nature of identity, shaping today our understanding of the self.

Raised in a rigorous Catholic environment involving adherence to the teachings, doctrines, and traditions of the Catholic Church, where the understanding of the self and identity is subject to major hierarchization, the work of Isabel Cordovil can be understood as a quest for new ways of belonging and a celebration of otherness. Despite highlighting how power structures, language, and discourse shape our understanding of the contemporary self, Cordovil recognizes the power of the collective unconsciousness and the traces left after centuries of Judaeo-Christian tradition as the main doctrine. Through references to art history, moral and ethical frameworks, or even the European legal system that works with concepts such as justice or equality, Cordovil points to the inevitable relation between knowledge and religion when we relate to the world.

Using the language of symbolism, may it be numerical - where seven benches insinuate the seven days of creation and fourteen arches echo the fourteen stops of Christ on the *Via Dolorosa* - ,or visual symbolism - like a bronze stretcher with creased bedsheets, a materialization of absence and resurrection - Cordovil merges the universality of such symbols with themes that are deeply personal (after all, it was Isabel Cordovil whose body rested in those sheets). In fact, most of the works in the exhibition bear proximity to the artist's body, a mediator between the self and the external world. We move between ambiguous objects and benches that, after closer inspection, reveal the worn surfaces of a butcher's chopping board; a bronze slab keeping forever track of time and a record of death and destruction. The weight of the absent body is reflected in the depth of each mark. We witness the passage of time as we pass through the arches. Our gaze rests on decomposing fruits, witnesses of the past locked in images whose relation to the present moment is unspoken. A lack of referentiality is pertinent here. We are trapped in an ongoing negotiation between the familiar and the estranged. We are surrounded by familiar symbols and patterns, the recognition of which gives us comfort, yet simultaneously creates feelings of alienation. It is a negotiation between the past and the present, a fear but also a quest for a certain sense of universality in a time defined by an increased sense of fragmentation, alienation, and uncertainty.

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Isabel Cordovil has completed her studies at Central Saint Martins, University of Arts, London and HEAD Geneva University of Art and Design, Geneva, Switzerland. Exhibitions of her work include *Culturgest*, Porto, Portugal; *MACE*, Elvas, Portugal; *Lievre*, Basel, Switzerland, and *Appleton Box*, Lisbon. Her films have been screened at *Doclisboa* and *Queer Lisboa* and are included in the *Coleção de Arte Contemporânea do Estado*, Lisbon; *Coleção António Cachola*, Elvas; *Coleção Norlinda e José Lima*, S. João da Madeira, Portugal and *Coleção Santander Artistas Emergentes*, Lisbon. In 2024, Isabel Cordovil will participate in a residency at *Residency Unlimited*, New York.

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