

MARIANA CASTILLO DEBALL
PALAVRA E PEDRA SOLTA NÃO TÊM VOLTA

NOVEMBER 21 – DECEMBER 21, 2013
OPENING: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 6PM – 11PM



Mendes Wood DM is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of the artist Mariana Castillo Deball at the gallery.

In this exhibition, Castillo Deball touches a series of questions related to printing, drawing, and sculpture; attempts to make a perceptual experience last as a trace, a memory, an image or an object. For this purpose, Castillo Deball follows the way archaeological objects have been described and reproduced throughout the centuries.

She follows the history of Alfred Maudslay, a British explorer who travelled extensively in the Maya region in Mexico and Guatemala between 1880-1920. Maudslay played a crucial role in the understanding of Maya hieroglyphic writing. He recorded the monument's inscriptions with drawings, photographs and plaster casts. He also developed the technique known as paper squeezes, moulds made out of papier-mâché.

Castillo Deball is interested in the trajectory of these objects, which depart from a direct contact with the original monuments and end up as negatives, positives, photographs and drawings. This immense amount of physical information travelled first as raw materials from England to the Maya region in the form of wrapping paper and plaster from London to Guatemala, returning to London as a precise and diverse record of the ancient Maya monuments.

Maybe So Maybe No

A conversation between Mariana Castillo Deball and Raimundas Malasauskas that started in the middle of the alphabet, continued on radio waves, and reached conclusions around midnight.

RM: Do you know what *Mimolette* means?

MCD: *Mimolette* is a process of the fermentation of ideas. The process consists in holding one's breath, especially in those moments when you have so many thoughts and ideas that your head is about to explode. It is that moment of "almost explosion" when the *Mimolette* effect has its best results.

The Yanomamis are not allowed to pronounce their own names. If someone gets ill, for example, and goes to the doctor, he needs to be accompanied by a relative, so when the doctor asks, "What's your name?" the other person can answer the question for him.

Secret names are stronger than spoken names; some people believe there is a limited amount of names in the universe, and if something or someone stays nameless, it is a tragedy.

Ideas, in this process of fermentation, start to have strange shapes and patterns, marble, crystals, blue, red, purple, yellow, white. Are there no colors starting with *M*?

RM: *Melyna* is *blue* in Lithuanian. *Mimolette* is also a password to get inside the Parc des Buttes Chaumont in Paris when the park closes at midnight but the café Rosa Bonheur stays open. Of course the password is obsolete already. Actually, if one were to try to think what *Mimolette* might mean in Russian, it would be *instantaneous* or *missed*. But since *Mimolette* is not a Russian word, this probably does not serve the argument.

MCD: *Mimolette* is a game where, in order to talk about something, you should not pronounce its name.

RM: It brings us to the theme of encoding. Or shall we not go there? How do you deal with the pressure exerted by museums and public institutions for an artist's work to be open and accessible?

MCD: Reciprocity and the lack thereof. Asymmetric reciprocity: we transform the world and the world transforms us in ways which are many times unpredictable. The desire and urgency to understand, capture, and transform the world often make the way the energy comes back invisible or not easily discernible. In the field of art, it is a movement that has to do with exhibition and display strategies and, very importantly, with the role of the viewer, which is underestimated and forgotten.

RM: Do you create work with a viewer in mind or at hand?

MCD: Minefield.

RM: Have you ever done a work in Morse code?

MCD: Memory as an encoding tool. I once met a person who had an amazing memory. He remembered everything, including the complete repertoire of background tunes in the supermarket. He remembered things I could not remember about myself. But I thought forgetting and the process of doing so are more important than the constant accumulation of memories. So I left.

Then I met someone else who had no memory at all; he forgot everything very quickly, he could not watch a film from the beginning to the end, and reading a book was almost an impossible task, as it implied too great an effort of connection between facts and characters in time.

I could tell him the same story several times, he would not remember. I started to experiment, make variations; it was a narrative expanding field. This imaginary space was crowded with doubles, triples, and erased beings. He could distinguish some characters being repeated, he could recognize some patterns. At one point he started to be paranoid. So he left.

RM: Where?

MCD: Möbius strip.

RM: What is your take on the self-declared mission of contemporary art to create a specific type of knowledge and to be legitimized in this pursuit by anthropology or epistemology (rather than art history, for example)?

MCD: I think in a positive and creative way it has to do with estrangement.

As a rhetorical tool, it has to do with using words which come from another field in order to sound more intelligent.

I talk about estrangement, as I have been thinking about it a lot lately. The notion of the stranger refers to an individual that has experienced a process of exclusion and is different from or alien to a particular circumstance. On the other hand, the notion of estrangement recalls a gaze that becomes diluted in an undifferentiated territory, immersed in a moment in which the cohesion of the individual disappears.

Estrangement is therefore the result of a meticulous gaze cast onto things, discovering aspects never before seen. In this sense, estrangement does not imply a distanced attitude, but rather a continual and active observation of the surroundings.

In his essay on estrangement, Carlo Ginzburg writes:

Tolstoy viewed human conventions and institutions with the gaze of a horse or a child: as strange, opaque phenomena, emptied of the meanings generally attributed to them. In his eyes, simultaneously impassioned and distanced, things revealed themselves *as they really are*.¹

Isn't it true, though, that everything is connected with everything else? I'm convinced that it is. That's not as ridiculous as you are trying to make out. But we must remember not to formulate this idea as an *answer*. As an answer, it is totally trivial, a complete dead end. If we turn it into a *question*, on the other hand, then it's just a matter of getting started.²

RM: How did we start?

MCD: The construction of identity is not a simple linear process; it is an epileptic process in which the membranes of the individual and the transit of indigenous and alien elements are continually negotiated. Italo Calvino refers to this movement when he speaks of the author as a "spasmodic machine" that attempts to reconcile chance and determinism in a single mechanism. This "spasmodic machine" is formed of a system of relationships among things that aspire to become a map—a catalogue or encyclopedia of the possible—which harkens back to a genealogy of causes and further causes and which aspires to link all histories in one, heroically attempting to liberate itself from the density of facts and to construct in opposition to them a cognitive tangle, a *personal equation*.

Estrangement thus becomes a tool that is part of the creative process, implying an oscillation between understanding and not understanding.

Making us conscious of the way we create narratives, discourses, and histories, it alerts us to the opposition between the fragmentary nature of knowledge and its inherent tendency toward completion.

In the interview previously cited, Ginzburg recounts:

I came across this way of setting out material when, as a young man, I read an essay by Luigi Einaudi, a distinguished economist and economic historian who eventually became president of Italy. He was the father of Giulio, the well-known publisher. The essay was constructed as a series of numbered paragraphs—a device that appealed to my own fascination with cinema and montage. Montage corresponds to what I consider to be the constructive element in historical studies: it makes it clear that our knowledge is fragmentary and that it derives from an open process. It has always been my ambition that the uncertainty of the research process should come through in what I write—I try to portray my own hesitation, so to speak, to enable the reader to make his own judgment. Historical writing should aspire to be *democratic*, by which I mean that it should

be possible to check our statements from without, and that the reader be a party not only to the conclusions arrived at but also to the process that led to them.³

RM: “I think that’s very nice,” Augusto Boal once said. “But I would like to have a mirror with some magic properties in which we could—if we don’t like the image that we have in front of us to allow us to penetrate into that mirror and then transform our image and then come back with our image transformed.”⁴ So when you once combined a mirror and a doorbell in your work, wasn’t it based on a similar intention? A mirror becomes a door to a transformation.

MCD: A friend told me she went to the market and was about to buy a bar of soap. It was late and the woman who made the soap had already packed everything in her car. She asked, “Why so late?” On the table there was just one object lying, not a bar of soap, but a sort of colored paper chart. The soap woman told her it was the Mayan horoscope and asked if she wanted to know her sign; my friend said yes. The soap woman asked for her birth date and started to spin and fold the colored chart in different directions; she was constantly confused and asked again and again for her birth date, while explaining that something like that had never, ever happened before. At one point, she stopped playing with the toy and exclaimed, “Of course! That’s why it was so confusing; your sign is the ‘self-reflecting mirror.’” She said to her, “You need to be very careful because as a mirror, you reflect what people want to be, and they want to be perfect, so they don’t let you fail, they force you to look and be perfect all the time to confirm their own image. Nevertheless, that can be very painful for you, and you need to learn how to play with it, you need to know that every transformation of yourself will result in a transformation of the world surrounding you.”

She took her soap and walked back home.

RM: Tell me more about your current interest in madness.

MCD:

Listen carefully. There are no spaces between words as people speak them, no pauses or lapses between one word and another in a complete statement. There is only a flow of sound that has to be imagined as talk. There would be no ‘language’ at all without the imagining of intervals to give it a structural or segmental form. Certainly the artifice of writing has something to do with the way this must be presented, for those of us who have the habit of reading and writing often talk (‘in prose’) as though we were composing something. But listen again; there are no spaces between the words when we speak, either.⁵

A schizophrenic has lost or considers unimportant those points of contact that translate his statements and ideas into viable cultural meaning and power.

RM: You mean mask or mirror? The mask is a mirror?

MCD: The film *Onibaba* (Demon Woman) by Kaneto Shindo (1964) is set in rural Japan and features a woman and her daughter-in-law who attack and kill passing samurai, strip them of their valuable armor and possessions, and dispose of the bodies in a deep pit.

Fields of grass, running, fields of grass, wind, fields of grass, armor, weapons, masks.

Everyday, fields of grass, hiding, fields of grass, fight, fields of grass, killing, knives, masks.

A neighbor seduces the daughter-in-law. Every night she sneaks out of her hut to have sex with him. The mother-in-law is angry, as she is not helping her to kill samurai.

She pretends to be sleeping when the daughter-in-law escapes at night, runs after her, faster, faster, and terrifies the girl with a mask.

Every night, terrifies the girl with a mask.

It is not a ghost, it is not a demon appearing while she is running through the rice fields in order to see her lover, it is not a demon, it is not a ghost, it is the mother-in-law wearing a mask.

The mask is stuck to her face and is impossible to remove.

Help, take off the mask.

Take off the mask, with a stick, with a knife, with a hammer.

Mask destroyed, face disfigured.

The two women jump over the pit housing their dead samurai, their fate left unclear as the film ends.

RM: But it is also about the specific morphology of masks, isn't it?

MCD: Macaronic.

RM: Are you more fascinated in leaps of thought and miracles than in methodical development? Can we speak about "your method," if such a category applies to your mind?

MCD: Within my practice, I constantly adopt tactics from other worlds. My approach to knowledge is playful. If I were to choose a particular discipline, the charm would be gone, because choosing this one would mean dismissing the other ones. Most of all, I respect my ignorance; otherwise it would be impossible to maintain a sense of humor. In order to solve this dilemma, I tried to find an activity in which I could keep the amusement, the pleasure, but within certain rules. As an artist, I can play this intermediate game between science, storytelling, fiction, and visual arts.

RM: I remember that notebook you once did for John Fare: it was done methodically, aging it page by page, so that each of them was one year older than the previous one—thus reaching one hundred years in total.

MCD: Mythic narratives are historical objects, albeit of a curious kind: they are historical objects whose purpose is to deny history. Myths, like music, are instruments for the obliteration of time. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, mankind has constantly opposed himself to universal decay. He appears as a machine, maybe more perfected than others, working on disaggregating an original order to precipitate organized matter into inertia. From the time he started to breathe and feed himself until the invention of the first thermonuclear and atomic instruments, man has done nothing but happily dissociate millions of structures to reduce them to a state in which they are not susceptible to integration.

Without doubt he has built cities and cultivated fields; but if you think about it, these achievements are machines destined to produce inertia with a rhythm and proportion infinitely more elevated than the organization they imply. So civilization, taken as a whole, can be described as a very complex mechanism, busy in fabricating what scientists call *entropy*, which means inertia. If every word is exchanged, every printed line, then communication is established between the two words, terms, people, objects, etc., equaling a level that was previously characterized by a more complex organization. For Lévi-Strauss, instead of *anthropology* we should write *entropology*, a name for a discipline dedicated to study this process of disintegration in its more complex manifestations.

RM: What is your favorite number?

MCD: Three.

RM: Have you experienced any miracles lately?

MCD: I wonder if miracles are a matter of collective hallucination. Or if a miracle is a perceptual disagreement between shape and background. Maybe a miracle is a moment when today stops matching with tomorrow. If that's the case, I am immersed in a number of miracles arranged in a particular order or connected in some way, or a number of actions or events that happen one after another.

RM: How did you create it? From memory?

MCD: No, just events, total discrepancy between the past and the future.

Mariana Castillo Deball (born 1975, Mexico City) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include CCA Glasgow (2013); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2013); Zurich Art Prize, Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2012); Wien Lukatsch, Berlin (2011); Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach (2010); Kunsthalle St. Gallen (2009). Group exhibitions include ILLUMInations, the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); Migros Museum, Zurich (2010); Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2010); The Athens Biennial (2009); Manifesta 7 (2008). Most recently, Castillo Deball participated in dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (2012). She was awarded the Berlin Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst 2013.

Notes

1 - Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York, 2001).

2 - Carlo Ginzburg and Trygve Riiser Gundersen, *On the dark side of history: Carlo Ginzburg Talks to Trygve Riiser Gundersen* (Oslo, 2003). This author accessed the online version: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-07-11-ginzburg-en.html> (accessed July 14, 2009).

3 - *Ibid.*

4 - Juan Gonzalez, *Famed Brazilian Artist Augusto Boal on the "Theater of the Oppressed,"* (New York, June 3, 2005). This author accessed the online version: http://www.democracynow.org/2005/6/3/famed_brazilian_artist_augusto_boal_on (accessed July 13, 2009).

5 - Roy Wagner, *An Anthropology of the Subject* (Berkeley, 2001).