

Ayelén Coccoz and Nancy Rojas* on the conception of "Still"

Note: The "Still" series comprises a group of sculptures that were shown in the exhibition "**What matters?, What account?, Was zählt?**" / **Contemporary Art from Argentina**, at the Okogon of the HfBK Dresden, in October 2016. This interview took part during the exhibition.

NR: Your works are linked to the paradigm of fiction. At the same time you work with metalanguage. In other words, your piece is a sculpture of a sculpture. I would like you to tell us about the decisions that go through your work from this perspective.

AC: There is something that appears in my works in general and in this one in particular, which is the need to explore the border between reality and fiction. My works are ambiguous in that sense because, although they display great realism, at the same time they offer clues that cast doubt onto that reality. What interests me, is that the viewer transits a moment of doubt in front of the work, and that gradually is involved, almost subsumed, in the fiction.

In this series (Still) I wanted to capture insignificant moments in the production process of my works. To draw attention to the often invisible time of the process of creation and production of a work, and to denote the tedium, frustration and uncertainty that usually accompany that process as vital elements in creation.

Returning to what you said about the paradigm of fiction: I could have left my clay sculptures half done, covered by a real wet fabric; but what interested me, was to create a fiction about the process of making a fiction. I did not want a real sculpture with a real wet fabric rotting in plain sight; my aim was to stop time in some way, retaining an instant and detaching it from the temporal flow.

One of the most interesting comments I had about this work, was that the sculptures seemed to be both in a state of decomposition and in an embryonic state. Not knowing if one is before the beginning or the end of something is the very idea of the loop, of circular time, which appears a lot in my work.

NR: On the other hand, how does the conception of a scene operate in your works, in relation to space and time and with respect to that path you chose, where your works are strictly a fiction of a fiction?

AC: I think of these sculptures as one would think of a photo: as a spatio-temporal capture. I am interested in generating a temporality intrinsic to the work, independent of the time that the spectator inhabits; but I want the viewer *to step into* that temporality, that the work proposes. The scene repeats itself indefinitely, and remains in some kind of limbo. I think this is present in my work in general, but perhaps the novelty for me when I faced this series was the need to work on a scale of 1:1, to include the viewer *within* the scene. These works demand an approach in order to reveal them (not only the image, but its materiality) and that approach is not only visual but physical, through touch, and even smell (the smell of wax is unmistakable). I believe that the estrangement of the apparently real is one of my strategies to attract and include the spectator within my own scene.

NR: *Finally, in several pieces in this exhibition a conception of work appears, either with reference to labour and its economic and social value, or in relation to monumental construction. In your production, work is associated with manual labor and trade, with a way of producing. Tell us about the importance of this in your projects.*

AC: I think that this work is an answer to a question I was asked while participating in the artist program of the Di Tella University in Buenos Aires. That question had to do with the importance I give to manual work, and to the amount of time I usually dedicate to research the techniques I use for each different work. The question was a bit of a call for a more conceptual position *a priori*, that is, to work departing from a specific idea, and to do it as simple as possible, rather than in the most complicated way. In order to think about this questioning, it is necessary to bear in mind that in Argentina there is no sculptural tradition comparable to the one that exists in Germany, and that art making is also limited and therefore influenced by the unavailability of materials and the lack of infrastructure necessary to work certain types of techniques. In that context, the number of steps required, and the cost of this type of production, may seem eccentric.

But this questioning helped me assume that my creative process was effectively activated through manual labor, and that this space for experimentation is completely necessary for my ideas and intuitions to take shape. In my work, the conceptualization of the work is always constructed *a posteriori*; as if my hands were sharper and more intuitive than my thinking to translate that which lays in the unconscious. Through experimenting, building, destroying, testing and failing, a gap between intention and result appears; and this gap is a sort of passageway for things to come to the surface, things that my conscious thought ignores and represses, and which constitute the heart of the work. I like the idea of the heart: *something that cannot be seen but beats, is there*. It is an idea present in Gothic literature, that I also find in my work.

So, although I try to work neatly from a concrete idea or image, the result is always something unexpected and much richer than the original aim. That's why I tend to work with a slow rhythm of production, in many layers which lead to unforeseen "accidents" and opportunities impossible to calculate beforehand. In my actual practice, these unforeseen "failures" (in regard to the original idea I start from) which arise during the long production process, constitute the axis of my work.

Regarding my way of producing, I believe my interest in exploring and learning different techniques, and in assuming the realization of my works in its entirety, is closely related to the fact that I studied in Germany, and in particular in the HfBK, which has the tradition and the resources to develop this type of production. In that sense, my studies were very significant for the development of my own language.

*Nancy Rojas (Rosario, Argentina, 1978) is an art historian, essayist and curator based in Rosario and Buenos Aires.