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ART & CULTURE

Astray (Prologue), by Caroline Mesquita

👤 José Pardal Pina

After an extensive period dedicated to the studying of contemporary art, one may think that there are a certain gesture and formula that might turn the works and exhibitions into something repetitive and obvious. The same subjects, the same forms of spatial occupation, the same words and jargon; the references known beforehand, the names uttered once more; the supports that repeat themselves with subtle variations...

Although this is a superficial perspective, the feeling is quite real. The surprise element is lost.

The origin of this issue is not particularly discernible: perhaps, it has to do with the current cultural context, where images are relentlessly shown one after the other, emptying themselves of any content and wonder; perhaps the fault lies in the artists, who stopped looking for originality, or at least novelty; or it has to do with the institutions, which often fail to respond to the artist's aim, preferring instead to go for easy solutions, along with the sector's chronic lack of funding.

Astray (Prologue), by Caroline Mesquita at the [Kunsthalle Lissabon](#), reverses this trend and is probably one of the most surprising and radical exhibitions and installations that has appeared in Lisbon in recent times. Not only for the work itself, but for the institution's bold attitude to welcome it and do everything to make it happen.

The steady descent to Kunsthalle's basement does not prepare the visitor for the upcoming work. The last step is where we can finally understand the installation's violence: a crater excavated in the basement of the exhibition area, the exposed earth, the broken and collapsed marble floor. It resembles something that should not be there, as if a secret excavation had been protected from the outer world, and now it is finally exposed, under the white, incandescent light of the interior. There is a giant tube in the centre, rusted by time, apparently one of those vast ducts that carry the city faeces. But the circumference of the perimeter does not pinpoint where the duct ends or begins, and we don't know if the bones there were excreted or scattered around for a journey towards the city's visceral interior.

The environment is that of an archaeological find. The fiction is that of an archaeological find and the narration is focused on what is concealed in the more subcutaneous layers of the act of inhabiting, of the city. It is a sarcophagus, an artefact, an object with a time-laden, chronological load, which surpasses and reduces us throughout the different scales gathered by it. And since, in archaeology, there is always a level of mystery, of wonder, of touching what had been considered dead, the work retrieves that whole odd and mystical atmosphere of what belongs to this extremely fertile field - always so fertile - which is archaeology.

Astray (Prologue) takes us back to the city's complacent reality, which encloses in itself different eras, memories, skeletons and stories/narratives. It gives us back the astonishment found in art and time.

Naturally, a gesture like this, which demands the partial destruction of the hosting institution, requires a commitment and the participation of the institution itself. In part, it is also a bold decision, even if one does not know the almost ten-year history of Kunsthalle Lissabon and a large portfolio of challenging and daring exhibitions and projects.

Astray (Prologue) is the last exhibition until 2020. In the meantime, the space will be occupied by other institutions and international platforms (Pivô, Basement Roma, Kadist and ICA Philadelphia) to exhibit projects and works by different artists. A rather curious and interesting stance - and brave - to summon to Lisbon other geographies and ways of operating and seeing, a transitional platform for contemporary art that maybe will establish its roots and raise interest from third parties. There will also be the opportunity to rehearse relocations, new ways of operating and, of course, to meditate on the institutional role in cities.

Concomitantly, this is the first moment of a larger set that Caroline Mesquita will exhibit at the Galeria Municipal do Porto - the introduction to a more developed and detailed research on the archaeological imagery and construction, curated by Sofia Lemos.

Open until February 8, at Kunsthalle Lissabon.

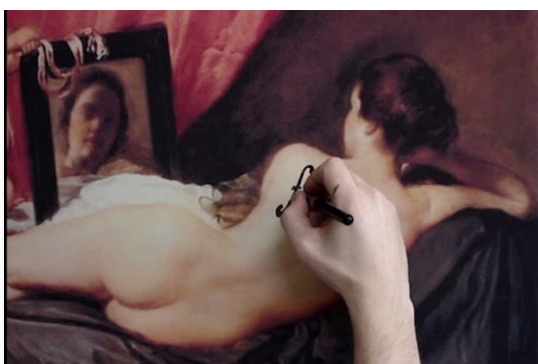
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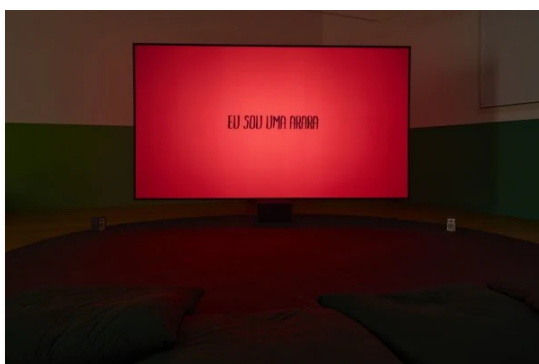
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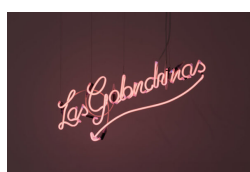


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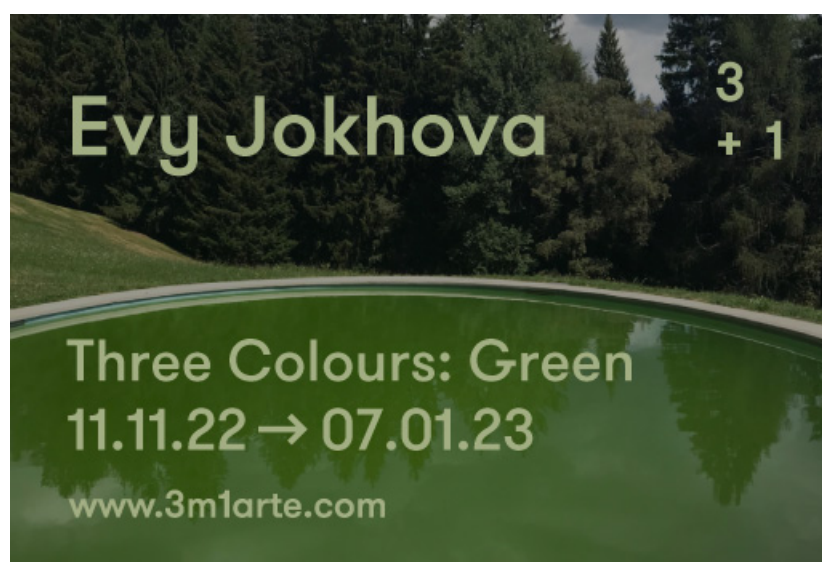
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JOSÉ PARDAL PINA

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