

The Talismanic Feminism of Artemis Potamianou

The Fence Always Has Two Sides - Which Side Are You On?

The recent quarantine highlighted the big issue of physical confinement. People came face to face with the loss of their freedom, and that too in time of peace. This awareness of the fragility and precariousness of the right to free movement and access to basic human goods and rights, brought to human memory moments from the painful past and prompted the realization that confinements and exclusions are constantly around us, visible and invisible, creating conditions that make it very easy to be on the 'other side of the fence'.

Artemis Potamianou creates canvases from wire mesh on which she weaves with red thread verses from the most important poems of Emily Dickinson and her inspiration, Charlotte Bronte. What she essentially creates is a three-dimensional study of the nexus of values, social projections, and emotional choices that surround the essence of human self-awareness and self-action. The deep existential presence of the wire mesh, a hard, unyielding and inescapable canvas, which could symbolize the whole condition of a life surrounded and defined by musts and don'ts, by narratives and preconceptions about openness, by natural, imaginary and digital borders, so this cold materiality of hers, is now run through by shrill, almost bloody phrases like screams that express the unfathomable need of human nature to scrape away the outer layers of the acquired limitations of the superego, and to declare herself present as an autonomous existence.

In Artemis Potamianou's woven webs, existence is expressed as an independent female entity, embodying the quest to reexamine and revise the misinterpretations of feminist claims and body politics within Western culture, providing an important way of expressing female bodily subjectivities, which place women not as the object, but as the essential subject and primary viewer of art.

The process of weaving is of the utmost importance as it fleshes out the gender dialogue and at the same time, like hot magma, liquefies it to break through even the most stubborn prejudices. The act of embroidery and the art of weaving has always been a female occupation. Its use as an autonomous sign-signal simulates the dynamics of the writing of an urban graffiti, which at its edges "pours out" from the intensity and passion of its writer, when she delivers it to the public space directly and imperatively, like a harsh mirror of society, without any desire for embellishment or didacticism.

The poems of the two great poets from the rich spectrum of Romanticism, run through the rare osmosis of delicacy and categoricalness. Each word embodies a stamp of absolute existence, each phrase is a lonely buoy in a sea of uncertain directions. It is the moment when the grid gives way, the threads come together and compose the pulsating cardiovascular system of humanity's natural heat conductor, that of the proud and non-negotiable female soul. But also of mother-Earth who cannot stand fences and barriers around her neck.

Where is the Ring, look, look../ Silent Revolt

If we enter the compartments of female memory, the open space becomes immediately familiar. Boxed still lives of archetypal and everyday memento mori take the viewer on a trip down memory lane. In the past of art history there have been some penetrative artists

who developed a creative obsession with probing the wunderkammer of the personal female space, bit by bit. Vermeer carefully observed the limited flexibility of female movement within strict interiors. The Nabis painted every inch of their tapestry ornated canvases in a manner as suffocating as the pressure and loneliness faced by the women who starred in these silent dramas. Klimt, in his female portraits, at the time when Freud, his successor, was developing the theory of hysteria, decorated the clothes and the surroundings with furious arabesques, leaving only the female head to project pale and pensive. All this has been experienced by the present artist, who however translates them through the female perspective. She collects little sensory activators from loved ones and immerses them in the fluid collective unconscious.

The diversity in the reactions of viewing, for Potamianou, includes the polymorphic understanding of femininity. Each small, and familiar to many, object such as the mirror, the fan, the pearl necklace, contains fragments of stories that act as punctuation points in whispers of snapshots of the lives lived by the protagonists. Somewhere among them is the personal deposit of the visual arts, with the family polaroids, and the first skits of artistic creation. On the one hand, an analog camera might even urge us to photograph our own history of sacred everyday life, as part of a heraldic coat of arms or a puzzle of small personal miracles.

May it!/ MAY

In the painting practice of Artemis Potamianou, she often adopts the role of "creative appropriator". Painting still dominates as an entirely creative process, but the visual artist consciously chooses to borrow elements from archetypal works of the past, where each of these re-compositions is the culmination of a multi-level process of creating a new work. The past and present of art history function as repositories of infinite images, titles, and techniques that can be combined, deconstructed, and painted over just as the artistic imagination operates in the face of any source of external or internal inspiration, with a peculiar dexterity in the use of color, content and form. The idea of the 'sacred singularity' of art is subverted by the construction of a copy, a repetition of the act of painting, through the act of imitating greatness and perfection, as a Platonic duplicate of the space of Ideas and in this way unexpectedly converses with Kant and the position he takes on the absence of a priori laws that determine the aesthetic appreciation that attributes uniqueness to a work.

With the choice of artistic appropriation, synthesizing the past and the present, the works by great artists together with personal elements, like the reservoir of her visual material, in this idiosyncratic way Potamianou triumphantly revives painting today, while overturning the views of disfavor which is supposed to have happened in painting. She also works subversively with the sources that inspire her, turning them into something familiar but at the same time haunted, but also completely new, thus structuring works openly, which urge the viewer to construct their own version of the meaning of a different reality. The post-reading of a legendary female past, with the aim not of demolishing its mythical forms but of strengthening their emotional weight and at the same time their ability to be independent from it, prompts her to choose May Morris as her "muse".

May Morris, designer and weaver, founder of the Women's Guild of Arts and well-known British Socialist, was a major figure in the Arts and Crafts movement, daughter of the father of the Pre-Raphaelites, designer William Morris. Her father's shadow was to haunt her throughout her life, despite the fact that many of the famous motifs attributed to her

father were her own.

Artemis Potamianou penetrates the viridian vegetation of Morris with the focus of a botanist and enjoys representing the fin de siècle creative decoration that was never separated from the so-called Fine Arts, as the spirit that prevailed in the Morris workshop was "art for all". A collective kind of art but its appraisers kept its female creator in obscurity until today.

Potamianou restores May Morris to the artistic pantheon she deserves. She "co-creates" with Morris a series of bouquets of fluid watercolors of incomparable delicacy, on a monochromatic ornate background, of birds and forget-me-not flowers, where their innards run through the endearing mood for a visual subversion of the visual arts. Mounted on a wooden canvas, they are projected into the viewer's space as a peculiar forest that reverses the expectations of who is inside and who is outside of it. At the same time, the viewer realizes that this is not a faithful representation of a sacred garden-hortus conclusus by Morris but a transfer on paper of her personality as projected through the creative work of the contemporary visual artist, which, under the floral motifs, she draws with a pen the psychological profile of those artists whose existence was absorbed and faded by time and the discredit of the male establishment. "Reading" through the images, as crafted as Japanese calligraphy, cages with birds outside them, as if they are trying to escape towards the viewer's space, leave their cut trail on the border of the paper. Potamianou with this cornucopia of bright watercolors, opens the doors of the cages and lets the nature of Morris bloom on our skin, in our eyes, in our soul.

Divine Quorum/ The Supper

Elizabeth Southerden Butler, Mary Delany, Elisabeth Nourse, Anna Bilińska, Elin Danielson-Gambogi, Angelica Kauffmann, Artemisia Gentileschi, Sofonisba Anguissola, Gwen John, Marie-Denise Villers, Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot, Romaine Brooks. They are all here. The ones you've probably never heard of.

Artemis Potamianou creates a digital collage with the "Salon of the Rejected", before the advent of the 20th century, through the self-portraits of the artists themselves. Among the companions are female painters who captured the battles of the British cavalry in the Napoleonic wars, inspirations of decoupage, portraitists, mistresses of Realism, a fan of important creators who were ingloriously condemned to oblivion. It is not just the physical abuse of Artemisia, it is the generalized devaluing of the artistic work due to gender that has deprived world culture of an important part of it, and of course this issue has deeply occupied the feminist dialogue of the 20th and 21st centuries, with pioneering voices of, among others, the Guerilla Girls.

Potamianou's commitment to Art History, written from her feminine side, retrieves these significant names and places them in a row like a secret dinner/Last Supper, staring the viewer in the eye, this time not as muses but as artists themselves, on scaffolding, "rebuilding" the history of painting shortly before the moment of betrayal. The flood of male art is held back by jute sacks, which carry the dangerous seed of female creation. With the figures emerging from the black background, the work takes on an eerie, immersive aspect and initiates a direct silent dialogue between artists and viewers.

And suddenly we realize that we are the object of the viewing, which breaks down our own prejudices that we tend to project onto the artwork. At Potamianou's Supper we feel like we

are starring in Winterberg's Festen - the art reveals our true selves.

Gilt Cage

Gilt Cage is Artemis Potamianou's most personal project to date and includes elements from her entire body of work. At the same time it is also the most occult, like a spectral trail. It screams in silence, throbbing like a burial shroud. It seems to consist of an armchair, a table, a couple photo frame, a jewelry box with a pearl necklace, a porcelain chandelier, which are covered in cotton translucent fabric and are inside an iron mesh cage. Of course, it may not be any of these things. It can be a pure memory, a rustling of the leaves of the soul, a slice of the collective unconscious that has recorded in its books what the feeling of home, protection, intimacy, companionship could look like. Which may have been lost forever, which may never have happened, but which may be the projection of a wish.

Walter Benjamin wrote about memory that it is not a tool to investigate the past, but its theater. It is a means of retrieving the dead cities within us. But a good show always needs an archaeologist of emotions. Artemis Potamianou takes on this role here. She creates a total sculpture from material she mines from her guts, which encapsulates the visceral feeling we all have when we recall things we love, in a desperate struggle to save them from decay. Potamianou goes one step further. The tight, barbed-wire embrace, that offers the memories, those born and unfolded within the domestic confines, and at the same time, holding only their talismans, rips them open and frees from them May's white migratory birds and Emily's halcyon letters, the symbols of all those unruly spirits, beyond genders, borders, and times.

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