

LUCIA LEUCI

DOROTA GAWĘDA & EGLÈ KULBOKAITĖ

Anonymous Encounters

21/09 – 05/11/2022

Corso Buenos Aires is a key avenue in Milan: it connects Loreto, and the central train station, with the elegant district of Porta Venezia and it is a major commercial artery. According to Wikipedia, with its 350 shops and approximately hundred thousand passerbys every day, this corso features the most numerous concentration of clothing stores in Europe and it has one the the highest daily turnover in the world, making it a quintessential example of capitalist modernity, consumerism and metropolitan life. The frenzy buzzing during the day and the holy void at night are just two of the many facets that this place is able to showcase, maintaining a sense of vague familiarity while presenting perpetual shapeshifting versions of sameness. Ungraspable, maybe even supernatural, Corso Buenos Aires is an example of what Marc Augè defines as "Non-Place": an anthropological space of impermanence which does not reveal much of its own history and identity while being immediate, and where human beings become mere crowd, anonymous and indeterminate. Such is the location, context and starting point for Lucia Leuci and Dorota Gawęda & Eglè Kulbokaitė duo-show at eastcontemporary.

There is a mixed fragrance in the exhibition, developed by Dorota Gawęda & Eglè Kulbokaitė together with perfumer Caroline Dumur. Metallic, musky and warm, it is both the smell of Augè's idea of "Non-Place" mentioned above, and of an individual crossing such space, hypothetically imagined as Tiqqun's anthro-morphosis of Capital: the 'Young-Girl'. Its notes come from common undefined raw materials combined with organic compounds that play important roles in the technological and biological spheres, known as aldehydes. A times woody, a times petrochemical or just non-smellable, when you think you have identified its character this invariably changes again. The ephemeral artwork markedly embodies the non-ness of its sources and its molecular essence diabolically penetrates the body, moving beyond boundaries and slipping consent. It is at the same time a version of consumer society's total product and a model for invisible management, as well as an interface that renders physical things perceived as virtual, like an idea or a concept. Light plays an important role too, and it is partially provided by Lucia Leuci's sculpture *Germinali Post-Liberty*, two lanterns whose light-bulbs are a pair of iridescent hands wearing a delicate organza blouse with adorned cuffs. Mannequins and Madonnas at the same time, these holy remains are preserved in a case coloured with alabaster dust and metallic eye shadows ranging from blue to purple, as the hands themselves. The fossils, shells, pearls and other precious stones that crown the elegant wrists, also appear in the resin and iron series *Bouquet Eterno*: Art Nouveau shop-fronts and cathedrals windows concurrently, with layered geometric patterns that depict girls' body parts such as legs, ponytails and backsides. These could belong both to Siegfried Kracauer's *Tiller Girls* – 1890s non-bodies for capitalist production and abstractness – and to the more contemporary M¥SS KETA's *Ragazze di Porta Venezia*, proud of their marginal place and aware of their surroundings which in the show seem to be captured at twilight, when the day goes to sleep and everything that is left becomes rather creepy.

Many yellow and red laser-eyes emerge from the walls, on a series of canvases which Dorota Gawęda & Eglè Kulbokaitė breded with the aid of Generative Adversarial Networks. Their hybrid nature is hard to grasp. Between image and painting and abstraction and figuration, blurry backdrops reveal layered gestures that complicate everyday objects and images. In the total absence of clear references and fixed forms, teddy bears twist and melt, while piles of clothes become demonic and daisies take on a supernatural look, like a forest at night. The title of these works, *Kratt*, is a clue: it refers both to malevolent household creatures from Baltic tradition and algorithmic-liability,

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channelling a digital folklore that escapes authoriality as we know it. Under the scrutiny of these naughty figures, a crowd of blossoming trolley-sculptures by Lucia Leuci comes to life animating the space. Each of them carries a story which is revealed by their symbiotic companions. There are Argentina e Peru, two innocent ceramic babies – embryos of consumerism – kept in a hospitable cave-womb. There is a couple of cheeky copper tropical parrots whose materiality renders them even more alive and adaptable, reacting to external environmental conditions and ready to conquer the streets of Milan; and a group of succulent Capital-leeches made of bronze, more human than one would think. Also in a distributed group, are the five gracious creatures that recall Donna Haraway's butterfly-girls and evoke the prosthetic-accessories crowding future shops. Finally, there is the tiniest dog with its best friend: a homeless man who lingers daily in Corso Buenos Aires destined, for the eyes of many, to stay anonymous and ghostly until the next twilight. At a better inspection one might notice that the group of trollleys-sculptures not only germinates in the gallery space; these are in transit too, their roots exposed and eradicated curl in a dynamic dance. They unveil a sense of protection and non-human companionship, as well as a colder detachment, non-belonging and alterity.

The works in the show present a highly layered symbolic lexicon, and an abundance of gestures, images and materials of various nature – make-up, trash, rare organic finds, industrial scraps – that generate a rather variegated kitschy environment where the human is absent and the demons of contemporaneity come alive. As their potentials, dangers and contradictions get shuffled and amalgamated, Corso Buenos Aires becomes a haunted and haunting landscape of commodity fetish and other relics of excess, a point of departure for both strategies of production and narratives that describe a changing sense of collectivity, while re-defining the familiar. Corso Buenos Aires has its relevance in Lucia Leuci's practice; the intimate relationship the artist has with this place has been the subject of past shows, and has emerged throughout her career in various forms. Dorota Gawęda & Eglė Kulbokaitė on the other hand – being literally far away – embody a more distant position to the subject. The encounter of their peripheral gaze and Leuci's deep involvement creates an uncanny resemblance with the transient essence of the place. The recurrent theme of negation, of non-ness, is not to be looked at as sole absence, but rather as a condition for otherness. Anonymous Encounters is a nightmare, a psychedelic trip, a holy vision in a lonely field.

Caterina Avataneo

Lucia Leuci (b. 1977, Bisceglie, Italy) lives and works in Milan.

Lucia Leuci is a visual artist based in Milan. Her artistic practice focuses on the use of drawing, painting, sculpture and installation as primary needs and means of expression. She explores reflexive actions that transcend individual choice - primitive performative acts that perpetually scale between intimate manual skill and collective action. Lucia Leuci has exhibited among others at the Fondazione Adolfo Pini and Tile project space in Milan, Like a Little Disaster in Polignano a Mare, Polansky gallery and Berlinskej Model in Prague, Oulu Museum of Art and Titanik gallery in Finland, Museum of Angra do Heroísmo in Portugal, Alta Art Space in Malmö and THE POOL in Istanbul.

Gawęda&Kulbokaitė – Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė (b. 1986 & 1987, Poland and Lithuania) live and work in Basel.

Dorota Gawęda and Eglė Kulbokaitė are an artist duo established in 2013 and based in Basel. Both are 2012 graduates of the Royal College of Art in London. Their work spans performance, sculpture, painting, photography, fragrance and video. Creating sensory environments that directly involve the audience, using both screen technology and organic elements, they generate fragmented narratives that echo our contemporary anxieties. Gawęda and Kulbokaitė are the recipients of the Swiss Performance Art Award 2021 and the Collide Residency Award. In 2022 they are on residency at CERN in Geneva/Hangar in Barcelona and EPFL, Lausanne. They are also the founders of YOUNG GIRL READING GROUP (2013– 2021).