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“In TIERRA, the idea of nature appears as that of a revitalizing place. We are witnessing the search for an idyllic cozy space, the possibility of rebirth, of redemption/salvation (from the point of view of the individual and specifically of the woman, the very first sinner)”, Ana+Betânia write to me, thus dissociating herself from any ecological reading of a work that, in my opinion, operates exclusively around an elusive and mysterious point determined by a specific pair of coordinates: *love* and *horror*.

But certainly such an assumption/vindication of the archetype of *original sin* seems disturbing at a time when the entire debate has moved to the -artistic- territory of the *political* -and vice versa- and has consequently adopted a technocratic syntax. In all contemporary Portuguese art, from Croft to Almeida, from Sarmiento to Vasconcelos, there is a love for some surviving element, freely chosen, from among the embers of the millennial recycling of culture, tradition, travel, memory and matter, which makes it peculiar and different: tactile, solid, warm, close.

The work of the artist duo formed by Ana Cruz and Maria de Betânia (1983), provokes multiple readings. The direct appeal to technique, that mastery of the art of ceramics in its most *artisan* dimension (the one that underlies the classical *decorative* object as a product of an objective knowledge of the practice, evoked here with an unquestionable *irony*), enables it to be reborn, redeemed in purely perverse works: horror as a flowery centerpiece. Decorative ceramics take on a new meaning, becoming *politically* updated and their connections with *artisan work* -that meticulous modeling of thousands of tiny petals and pistils- traditionally delegated to women, emerge with renewed vigor.

For this reason, secondly, Ana+Betânia's *extremely fragile* pieces are situated in a peculiar and particularly open and suggestive position in relation to the vast field of post-feminism: from her first projects, *Femina* (2015) or *Entre Folhos* (2016) to TIERRA, have been weaving a rich and dreamlike imaginary based on the quality of *metaphors* in which the properties of ceramic and the way of understanding and manipulating it reinforce the fragile, *transitory*, elusive, elusive character of any approach to the female condition. I think of *Flesh Flowers*, the individual they presented at Antonia Puyó in 2017: “an initiatory journey, a kind of alchemy and surrealism in clay, which explores female identity and sexuality, sexual and emotional maturity, sentimental relationships and other solitary flowers in the desert of affection”, wrote Paula Gonzalo Les at the time.

# TIERRA

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Those visions of women as "a cactus that resists in an inhospitable land, in a barren, hostile terrain" thus give way on TIERRA to this fascinating –and disconcerting- mixture of *love* and *horror* in which the assault rifle, the atomic mushroom, the mass of worms, the skeleton, are not transmuted into delicate compositions with porcelain flowers to represent the utopia of triumphant nature, but rather to become allegories of a *loving* -and *redemptive*- approach to horror -caused by man-, an approach that is realized in the feminine and even defines it. But the work of Ana+Betânia, which unfolds in multiple layers, suggests that they are also of a femininity inevitably linked to death as a giver of life; to a suffering that is instinctively clothed in beauty (and vice versa, alluding to the Burkean dialectic); meandering humidity, fears and phobias, pollen and fragrances; and, of course, its never *inoffensive* -nor exempt from *apparent* fragility and seductions- position in front of man... TIERRA is, therefore, a decisive chapter in the discourse of two artists who, after formally and conceptually consolidating their constellation of metaphors, rehearse here, in a disturbing exhibition, the identification and regeneration, through love -and fragility-, both of what the sexes *project* one onto the other and of what is *abject* (in the Kristevian sense) by humanity over Earth.

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