

Woman according to Charlotte Beaudry

By Monika Kozioł

In 2011, MOCAC bought for its Collection two paintings by Charlotte Beaudry, showing men's underwear. The works had been shown earlier at the artist's individual exhibition entitled *Get Drunk* at the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels. Charlotte Beaudry's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow is a part of the exhibition programme in Gallery Alfa and Gallery Beta, which covers individual exhibitions of artists in the Museum Collection. We wish to provide a broader artistic context for the works that visitors can see at the permanent exhibition of the MOCAC Collection.

Charlotte Beaudry was trained in traditional fresco and illusionist painting techniques; she was a comparative late-comer to the art world. From the start, painting dominated her work. In her paintings, she often depicts elements of reality not set in a context, creating a painterly inventory of people and things. She paints individual objects and figures, placing them against a neutral background. The starting points for her works are photographs or videos. She confronts the viewer with the pure object, untainted by any narrative. In individual series Beaudry frequently explores topics connected with the world of women, such as their image and seduction techniques or the teenage girls' rite of passage into adulthood.

The exhibition at Beta Gallery at MOCAC is an attempt to take on board the behaviours and props associated with seduction, to present woman as temptress, to demonstrate that a pretty front often can be a trap. The conversation that I had with Charlotte shortly before the opening of the exhibition mainly concerned her works exhibited at MOCAC, but also the wider context of her individual work and her involvement in the TALE collective.

Representations of women and their world with its rituals and props dominate your art. However, some references to the masculine world also appear in the form of paintings of men's underwear. What made you think of this motif, which, unlike for instance women's handbags, cannot be associated with vaginas, and yet is very straightforward and erotic? Do you think that certain mechanisms connected with the female world are more subtle than the male ones?

These representations evoke the respective characteristics of man and woman in the field of seduction as a symbolic mastery of forms. The man- -conqueror is often clumsy; his lust diminishes his subtlety. Women are much more complex in their sophistication; their sense of nuance is more finely tuned. The point is, I like to be able to represent man or woman as an object of painting, or at least to depict this objectification. A man-object becomes vulnerable; there is something pathetic about him. A woman- -object retains her sovereignty. Whatever happens, she will always prove herself greatly adept in the rules of the seduction game. Up to a point, the painting of the crown evokes this sovereignty.

Your exhibition at MOCAC presents 16 paintings, a sculpture and a video. They are representations of hair, wedding gowns, diadems, flower bouquets and brightly painted nails. These are all indispensable accessories of the feminine universe. On one hand, these are standalone objects, painted against a neutral background, on the other, in juxtaposition they combine into a narrative. They release a series of associations that drive us towards a sketch idea of what these 'tools' of seduction used by women look like. The painting of a Venus flytrap is a clincher: with its bright colours and sweet secretions, this flower lures insects to their death.

These various representations obviously work as a whole, but I am not aiming to have them tell a story. The ties that unite those images result from the logic of a series, from symbolic relations. I do not suggest any dramaturgy. Venus Flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*), due to its characteristics, epitomises a trap. The objects that surround us are defined by their function, their usage. In this respect, they carry in them little buds of potential stories, but I am not altogether interested in their development. For me, the potential of objects is enough. The game goes on.

You previously explored portraits or figures of young girls, for instance in the Juliette series or in your video production *Mademoiselle Nineteen*. Can your new works be regarded as expansion of your reflections on the female world and its rituals, not limited to a certain age and of a more universal nature?

Yes, probably. This transition from the representation of the female form towards objects symbolically linked to femininity is a manner of further exploration of the theme. At a certain point, I discovered female rituals as an iconographic source. They are a magnificent subject. I am seduced both by their metaphoric nature and their imagery. These objects also have connotations of the history of painting, especially the Renaissance – still lifes and portraits – by expressing the symbolic power of appearances and their associated strategies.

In the video *Anne*, we see a woman throwing objects from her handbag, one by one, towards the camera. These objects all come back to her like boomerangs. Could we interpret this as a sad

realisation that it is impossible for us to escape the objects that flood our lives? Are we predestined to live forever with certain female accessories?

Exactly. It is simply impossible to be free of this array of objects; what's more, they also constitute our mandatory, indispensable attributes, without which there would be no point trying to exist. The mobile phone has become a substitute for our identity, the number allocated to us, like a vocal and aural prosthesis that allows us to be heard to express ourselves, even from a distance. We love mobile phones so much that we fondle them. The telephone has become like sex in our communication with the world.

Could you also comment on your sculpture? What inspired you to employ this medium in your work, in which it is painting that is usually the dominant form of expression?

For me sculpture, just like video, is a field of experimentation, somewhere at the peripheries of painting. I am a painter, first of all. Other media provide a counterpoint, which confirms my painterly intuitions. Last year I started working on a series of paintings of objects suspended in the air. And then I hit on the idea of creating this animated sculpture, a hybrid, even kitsch, which in an obvious way makes a break from the two-dimensionality of painting. The wagging finger seems to be beckoning to the spectator. I called the sculpture *Pleasure*, suggesting a gesture that invites you to succumb to pleasure. Ironically, from a female point of view, I also see it as a phallic object and an intimate caress.

You are also a member of the art experiment TALE (The After Lucy Experiment), which concentrates, for the most part, on the common expression of emancipated femininity. Do you perceive this collaboration as a continuation of your personal work, or is it an activity that you consider to be separate?

TALE is a collective adventure, completely different from my personal endeavours. We are six girls. Each of us has her own private work, her individual path. However, as TALE, we work together to explore hybridised, unusual forms in a more multidisciplinary fashion, especially in the fields of performance, sound and installation. This group practice makes us venture far beyond our individual preferences. And this is precisely the object of our collaboration: experimenting with new forms, together, with a fairly reactive mindset.

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