

REGINA DE MIGUEL, ANNA DOT Y SOL PRADO

“MASTERING THE ART OF LIVING”

CURATED PROJECT BY ROSA PERA

23 JAN 2021/ 11 APR 2021

Gilles Clément says in *A Brief History of the Garden* that the first garden in History is a fence whose function is to protect the most precious asset of the garden: vegetables, fruits; then the flowers, the animals; and he adds "the art of living"... "everything that, over time, will always be presented as the 'best'". Although the notion of 'best', very precious, does not stop evolving, says Clément, the principle of the garden remains constant: getting as close as possible to Paradise.¹

Born out of survival, the garden, enclosed space, is surely the primordial architecture of humanity and its purpose is to get as close as possible to Paradise, to the space of cultivated and guarded abundance for the nourishment of the body, and for the recreation and enjoyment of the spirit.

The cliché of paradise is an island; like the garden it is also a bounded space, in this case by no person but by the forces of nature and its laws which exercise control over the living beings there. However, do islands, like the garden, cultivate the spirit? Can islands be architectures of identity, mirrors of feeling in the world, states of knowing oneself... island? What are islands icons of when the whole planet is in survival key?

The whole planet is in survival key because it has been overexploited by a humanity that has not taken into account that its resources are finite, unleashing chain imbalances with unpredictable behaviour. With them, islands, disarranged icons of a misplaced Paradise, can be reserve and condemnation, a trap and an evocation: of errors, fears and lost desires.

The Argentinian writer Adolfo Bioy Casares situated the scientist Morel on the island of Villingen in the Pacific Ocean, between Australia and Hawaii, one of the most remote enclaves in the world. There, in what is now the archipelago of Tuvalu, a condemned man takes refuge in solitude for years to suddenly discover that there is a group of tourists enjoying the swimming pool, the museum and the sunshine. The escapee is a writer and chronicles his life on the island in a diary. He falls in love with Faustine, the woman who watches the sunset every day, but finds he cannot interact. The reason is that Faustine and her friends are images projected by a device invented by one of them, Morel. With his invention, the scientist has managed to recreate reality on a scale of 1-100 so that he can live forever with his beloved Faustine, as his images are being projected forever more, day after day. Once the chronicler, who is also in love, discovers this, allows himself to be engulfed by Morel's invention in order to live his desire for love through his image. Immortal.

Alberto Manguel says in his *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* that "It is not known whether the spectacle is still being projected on the island or whether it is dangerous to visit it".² The current reality is that Tuvalu is one of the least visited 'paradise' tourist destinations - there are no hotels left - as its beaches are succumbing underwater due to global warming and it is foreseeable that the

¹Clément, Gilles: *A brief history of the garden*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2012. P. 15.

²Mangel, Alberto; Guadalupi, Gianni: *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places*. Madrid: Alianza Ed. 2014. Pg. 643.

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whole archipelago will be washed away in the coming years. When this happens, the story of *The Invention of Morel* will be even more terrifying with the coda explaining the disappearance of the islands that inspired it.

In the meantime, experts warn that these islands are already disappearing centimetre by centimetre, under the salty waters that flood the fields and leave the natives without a livelihood. What existed up until recently only in science fiction known as Climate Fiction is now becoming a reality through climate migrants, who today must urgently leave their homelands in search of land to live on.

Rising Anxiety/Islario by **Regina de Miguel** is situated precisely in this interval. It does so by reproducing the archipelago of Tuvalu in a golden metallic engraving reminiscent of trophies where the artist adds concepts such as 'annihilation', 'persecution' or 'domination', forming a sort of constellation of the threat of extinction. Below, as an explanatory legend, there are references to *The Drowned World*, the novel by J.G. Ballard which is one of the main precursors of the Climate Fiction genre. Ballard recounts the daily life of some survivors of a flooded London under the unbearable solar radiation for humans. Surrounded by lush swampy vegetation and fauna with mosquitoes and huge crocodiles watching them from the rooftops, the protagonists take scientific samples of the climate and the waters while trying to escape the mercenaries, hunters of works of art abandoned in museums and headquarters of large corporations.

"A second Eve searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun" here replaces the Adam that Ballard situates as the last anti-hero of an exhausted world that has regressed to the times when reptiles dominated the planet. In a gesture of subtle irony, De Miguel makes the Anthropocene disappear from the narrative of humanity's future disaster.

Halfway between a documentary and a commercial, *Κλεισάμε / Closed* by **Sol Prado** takes us to the Greek island of Leros, a powerful tourist destination in the Aegean Sea, with luxury yachts anchored in its crystal-clear waters. These are the same waters that have lapped the island's shores for as long as the world has existed, though have remained out of sight of many of its inhabitants, both past and present. Leros is home to an imposing construction: a former leper colony, former military barracks which became a prison for political prisoners during the Italian occupation between wars, and during the dictatorship that followed the civil war the island was known for its sinister psychiatric asylum. It was active from the 1970s until well into the 2000s, when the 260-hectare complex was finally vacated.

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Taking as a guide the chronicle made by the philosopher and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari forty years ago when he spent some time there, Sol Prado goes through the abandoned architecture evoking the daily life of the people who were confined and medicated without any clinical, hygienic or social care. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Guattari's friend, recounts this in a text and speaks in astonishment of the abandoned in confinement, comparing them to what the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick defined as Kipple in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the short novel that in turn inspired Ridley Scott's dystopian film *Blade Runner*.

Kipple is a word invented by K. Dick to designate discarded objects that nobody takes into consideration but which have a life of their own: "Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, Kipple reproduces itself [...] There's more and more of them [...] No one can win against Kipple, except maybe temporarily and in one spot, like in my apartment [...] But eventually I'll die or go away, and then the Kipple will again take over. It's a universal principle operating throughout the universe; the entire universe is moving towards a final state of total, absolute Kippleization". And Berardi adds: "Sooner rather than later, everything and everyone will become Kipple. You will. I will. Don't panic"³.

Trapped in the abandoned asylum, from Prado's video we can see outside through the window bars. We realise that the ghosts of the past have been kippleized - as K. Dick predicted - in blister packs of anxiolytics and drawings forgotten between layers of dust on the floor of the ruined psychiatric-prison. They are the closest neighbours of the new inhabitants, also forgotten and secluded in the 21st century. Thousands of political and climate migrants are living in the adjoining refugee camp, which we can see better when the camera rises to allow us to capture the island of Leros in a terrible wide-angle shot. We enter the barracks of the camp led by a velvety ASMR voice, which promises us wellbeing and kisses. The gap between the sound and the images of the camp, and between these and those of the tourists enjoying the swimming and the sunshine just a few metres away is as abysmal as the contemporary viewers of *Blade Runner* must have experienced in comparison to their reality in 1982. The island leads us to experience the world as if we were trapped in a perverse Morel machine, an unhinged world twisting between terrible realities that are the reverse of annihilated images of desire, a devouring Moebius strip.

One of the most enigmatic and bizarre islands on Earth is **Deception Island** in Antarctica. It is an open circle with one of the most dangerous channels in existence called Neptune's Funnel because of the strong winds that blow in all directions, sucking in and ejecting vessels attempting to pass. "Decepción" in Spanish is a mistranslation of its original English name "Deception", and it is an island curled up in the flooded caldera of a volcano. Before introducing us to it, **Regina de Miguel** warns us

³ Franco "Bifo" Berardi: "don't panic watching ΚΛΕΙΣΑΜΕ by Sol Prado, and listening to the voices and to the silence".

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that Antarctica "is as big as America and Europe combined and has ice sheets more than 5 kilometres deep" [...] "It is inhabited by primordial horrors", she says. It is a place with no escape, "an island of deception, an island of appearances, an island of lies, an island of traps that deep down contains a horror that should never be disturbed".

An extreme and little-known place, Antarctica has been described by Verne, Poe or Lovecraft through stories that present monstrosities and ancestral forces in the reserve, latent dangers that treasure the secrets of life and death. Now, when the world is being stressed to its extremes, what science fiction writers had imagined when that great corner of the world had only been probed, as De Miguel says, its silent depths seem to treasure some answers. For there remain extremophile creatures, capable of living among volcanic vents and perennial ash-covered glaciers, a place where "nature belongs to cosmic space and the future [...] and harbours the inconceivable".

The ontological question of "Who are we?" has been transfigured into "Among who are we?", and it is in places like Deception that there are beings who live on the margins of our instruments and our existence; remote redoubts where perhaps humanity could rediscover itself?

"I was always alive", says the omniscient voice that guides us through Deception Island. These are words that De Miguel takes from Clarice Lispector when in *The Passion According to G.H.* the protagonist, G.H. (who here we could imagine as "Great Humanity"), confronts a cockroach ("miniature of a gigantic animal [...] As old as a fossilised fish [...] like salamanders, chimeras, griffins and leviathans [...] as ancient as a legend⁴"), which looks over her from the darkness of a wardrobe. It is an empty piece of furniture in an empty room where there are only a couple of empty suitcases with her initials, G.H.

The room is a kind of island which the protagonist does not recognise inside her house, and it is there, in front of the wardrobe with the door ajar and the cockroach inside mortally wounded where she offers a poignant soliloquy on existence: "But if its eyes didn't see me, its existence existed in me; in the primary world that I had entered, beings exist other beings as a way of seeing one another. And in that world that I was coming to know, there are various modes that mean to see: one being looking at the other without seeing it, one possessing the other, one eating the other, one simply being in a corner and the other being there too: all that also means to see. The cockroach didn't see me directly, it was with me. The cockroach saw me not with its eyes but with its body [...] There was no way to deny it any longer. I don't know what I was that I could no longer deny, but I could no longer. Nor could I any longer save myself, like before, with a whole culture that would help me to deny what I was seeing"⁵.

⁴ Clarice Lispector: *The Passion According to G.H.* Barcelona: Siruela, 2020. Pg. 43 i 50

⁵ Clarice Lispector. *Op cit.* Pg. 66.

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And it may well be that it is not a question of seeing, that it is not the capacity to see and to replicate in images the way of knowing oneself or of situating oneself in the world. Nor there is any civilisation that protects our back. And this is the sensation conveyed by the journey that Regina de Miguel offers in *Deception*.

That of being disoriented bodies in a decaying world that needs to be reconfigured.

In *No cal la llum, Anna Dot* confronts us with the words of a group of twelve blind people who are lost on an island, out in the open. They do not know whether it is night or day, nor can they tell if they are very far from the asylum where they live. While there is an old woman who claims feeling the stars, a young man asserts that he feels the coldness of the moon in his hands. One relates that he feels the flutter of wings around him and another explains that doesn't quite know if they are under the sky; some of the group, blind from birth, don't even raise their heads to check. "Thunder!"⁶: the cry of one of them is contradicted by the old woman who asserts that what is felt is the sound of the sea. They are contradictory sensations that would not serve to reproduce a single landscape, but which provide a polyhedral experience of the world. A world that has to be perceived and constructed collectively from an unknown place, learning and if necessary, inventing new languages and establishing other relations between bodies and environment. To begin with, from the very spaces established to feel and experience art, in this case through a series of phrases that the artist has extracted from the play *The Blind* by Maurice Maeterlinck, which we can read in Braille on the walls of the gallery.

In a sound version of these texts, in *The Island of Maeterlinck* Anna Dot inserts us in the darkness, in a room that we can feel as an island, alienated from us but perhaps as the only possible world where we can transform the question of 'who we are' to 'with who we are' and begin to think about re-establishing the art of living. To exercise it as it was done in the immemorial times of the primordial gardens, when Paradise was an enclosure that protected the assets of nature and among them, the art of living. At some point Paradise fled from itself and the art of living was lost in a mirage.

Mastering it in a desert when it gets dark will not be easy.

⁶ Maurice Maeterlinck: *Intruder / The Blind / Interior / The Death of Tintagiles*.

Translation by Jordi Coca. Barcelona: Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona / Biblioteca Teatral, Edicions del Mall, 1984. Pg. 60.

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REGINA DE MIGUEL (MÁLAGA, 1977)

Her interdisciplinary artistic practice is characterized by research and development of processes aimed at the production of knowledge and hybrid objects. The critical analysis of the supposed objectivity of the devices of representation of science, as well as of the conditions of production of scientific knowledge is one of the main discursive threads of her work. From a methodical approach, she establishes complex networks of connections that are also nourished by the philosophy of science, the ecofeminism, speculative fiction and terror, to give rise to theoretical, existential and poetic displacements that operate from the fragility as a form of resistance.

ANNA DOT (VIC, 1991)

Artist and teacher at the University of Vic and EINA. Her artistic practice focuses on the study of the processes of translation and communication, paying special attention to the acts of reading and writing beyond linguistic limits. The formalisation of her projects is not restricted to working with a single technique or material. Rather, it adapts to the conceptual particularities of the process usually motivated by an initial question that she tries to explore through artistic practice.

Her work is represented by Bombon Projects (Barcelona) and has been shown at Galerie Bernhard Bischoff (Bern 2020), SCAN Projects (London 2019), La Capella (Barcelona 2019 and 2016), Charsoo Honar (Teheran 2019), Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine (Serbia 2018), Bombon Projects (Barcelona 2020 and 2018), among others. She has received the Art Nou (Barcelona 2018) and BIAM (Amposta 2014) awards.

SOL PRADO (BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, 1985)

is a film director and artist. She currently lives in Barcelona where she is working in the Feminist Documentary Film Laboratory in The Francesca Bonnemaison Women's Culture Centre. She released her first short film in 2019, participating in 7 festivals in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Spain and Germany. During 2018-19 he was resident artist at Hangar, Barcelona. In 2017 she participated in an artistic research team invited by Documenta 14 for 9 months in Athens, Greece. She completed a Master's degree in the Independent Studies Programme at MACBA, directed by Paul B. Preciado, specialising in gender studies, political art and critical theory. She actively collaborates with the network La Internacional Errorista and is a member of ActivaMent Catalunya, a self-managed association of people with psychosocial diversity.