

The art of balancing on absence

Luisa Duarte

“Life is not only what one can see / It’s a bit more / What the eyes cannot sense / Hands do not dare touch / And feet refuse to step”.¹

Arms, thighs, backs, shoulders. From her mother, sister, daughter, granddaughter. No, this is not what the eye sees. It is, otherwise, an indiscernible amalgamation of skins, of almost erotically superposed shapes, forming a continuum. Time is here; past present and future. But no, this is not what the photos make clear for the eyes. Time is intertwined, not allowing a more obvious linearity. Chronology has been erased. We are no longer able to accurately identify the beginning, not even parts of the body, and it’s not possible to assert who is the mother, sister, daughter or granddaughter. This series of photographs, but also those of the covered beggars and of the bodies enveloped and underwater, all invalidate objective visuality and clear definitions, in favour of something else, creating permeable zones of difficult classification. Daisy Xavier’s work betrays the very contemporary inclination to catalogue, label, examine and define everything. In times that fiercely advocate precision and efficiency, her works reminds us of the repressed fragility under the voracious wish for control and safety which embraces our days.

The choice for what is indiscernible, for ambiguous forms, for something which cannot be framed, seems to emerge from the refusal to forge a possible order. An order incompatible with the unconscious, which such as water is fluid, and, therefore, does not

¹ Verses from “Sei lá Mangueira”, song written by Paulinho da Viola and Hermínio B. de Carvalho (free translation).

admit exact indications neither final definitions. In a text present in this book, the art critic Paulo Sergio Duarte, when alluding to a painting series, defines, as follows, the field in which roams Daisy's works: "On the contrary, these paintings are a manifestation of the sharp awareness of the always present, incomplete and illusive nature of consciousness itself. However, why must it be offered in forms which evoke fossils, the remains of a past? Because Daisy insists that the vivid memory of the present cannot exist without the condition of in the same moment it takes place, of already referring to an always imperfect preterite, deformed by desire and the repression of that which was not able to return to consciousness."

Such an affirmation indicates a gap, a pause, an incision, an incompleteness. At the moment when something is fulfilled, this same thing escapes. And it is precisely here, in what was denied, in what barely surfaced and already once again submerged, it is exactly in this interval when sand runs through the fingers that rests the motor of the drives which inspire this work. In other words, it is about something unpredictably fluid; something that is simultaneously present and absent.

Writing about Daisy's work means to carefully and continuously examine construction and deconstruction vectors. The dynamics which guide her work reminds me of a passage from Jorge Luis Borges: "Nothing is edified over stone, everything over sand; it is, however, our duty to edify as if sand were stone." Despite knowing that nothing is edified over stone but over sand, that structures are dodgy and grant us no guarantees, "illusive props in this life", even though, here there is no passivity, paralysis, but the regular movement which constructs and deconstructs, which sails, swims, without thus believing that at the end there is a margin on which it may lean. It is about edifying life's fabric as if it were stone but aware that it is sand.

This dynamics inhabits the heart of some of the artist's works and is visible in the video "Passantes" ("Passers-by"), jointly

produced with Célia Freitas. Here we have two simultaneous projections in a game of contradicting mirrors, forming a strange face - the stranger surfaces from the mutation of something that once was to us familiar.² On one hand, the violence of a house (whose nature is familiar) being demolished; on the other, the delicateness of a body that gently passes through copper nets. The mechanical excavator has no eyes, thrashes everything that stands before it not following any type of criterion, brute and impersonal. The house is warm and affection loaded. The body, in contrast, measures each gesture, each footstep, picks the way as it merges into the narrative. The artists create in "Passantes" several duplicities, a kind of symmetry of the unequal, seeking to reach a third thing, a neutral, indifferent place.

The net, as well as the water, does not allow a precise view of what is inside or out. It blurs the frontiers, incites movement, without defining the destination. The act of demolishing also opens, in its own manner, passages, leaving the way free. We slowly become aware that between the violence of the house's demolition and the subtlety of the body that walks through the nets there might be an unsuspected printing imperfection.

Doors drop, stairs fall down, the existing architecture gives out its last sighs and this entire shattering of an affective history is objectively recorded. In the moments in which the house still stands, the camera walks inside it, its parts treated as if they were a skin, made of floors, ceilings, stairs, marble, wood. All seen very closely, suggesting an intimacy which, however, is not converted into a subjective perspective. The camera carries on along straight lines, the edition seeks vectors, arrows, which move in all directions and crash into each other, provoking clashes among all parts. We see patterns of floors and tiles which soon will be a mass contrary to differentiations, a bit gray, a bit blurred, pure dust.

² Ver ensaio "O Estranho". S. Freud. (não descobri este ensaio nem em português nem em inglês. faz parte de qual obra?) EXISTE, ESTA NAS OBRAS COMPLETAS, VOLTO DE VIAGEM DIA 22 DE FEV E ACHO A REFERENCIA, MAS A DAISY CERTAMENTE TEM ISSO EM MAOS.

Violence and delicateness blend into grave and dry sounds and the noise of running water. Would that body survive such brutality? A window falls, a curtain of dust takes over the scene. On the other side the body passes among the net, heading - we might so imagine -, to meet the curtain of dust, which also does not allow that limits be established. What previously seemed discernible, no longer is. Yes, the body and the house may co-inhabit. Mixed, united in one single extension and removed from definitions, partitions. There, at that moment, we are tossed to another place.

Let us not forget that Daisy's other place does not have an arriving point, but is only a passage. In another work, "Mar sem orla" ("Sea with no shoreline"), a small projection exhibits a piece of paper where verses written by the artist catch fire. At the same time that the skin which houses the words is destroyed, a stretch of sea is revealed, at times opaque, at other ones silver, as if mirroring heaven. This continuous movement between appearance and disappearance evokes the *Möbius* strip, where beginning and end, exterior and interior get mixed up. The shoreline would be the margin, the delimitation, the closing. In the artist's sea there is no place for this. Sailing is constant, with no stops, no borders, no shorelines. A never ending investigation which despite this, never reaches its conclusion, for as the artist is well aware of, such a place does not exist.

But notice how this recognition in no way leads to a cynical, nihilist and neither passive attitude. This is about a work whose main *ethos* concerns construction. Were we to evoke Eros and Thanatos, we could say that yes, here they collide. However, it is still the first who "wins" this battle.

Such a delicate balance, such a fine adjustment, where remarkable differences can be found - to remain standing or to fall down - is powerfully present in "Último azul" ("Deep blue"), the artist's most recent series. Tables, chairs, chests of drawers, drawers, all made of wood and clearly aged, form sculptures. Each

piece of furniture leans against the other, seeking a support which reveals itself simultaneously exact and precarious, firm and fragile. Such a subtle balance is highlighted by the fact that blue-glassed bottles act as supporting points for the furniture. Glass is an element originally liquid, then solid, which retains for its entire existence the eminence of being broken. This life cycle silently inhabits these sculptures.

We must be aware that these are pieces made from house furniture, but its presence, the oddness of its shapes, the spatial setting which forms one big installation all subtract the familiar layer in favour of a detachment that suppresses an alleged biographical, subjective content, opening it up to universal issues.

One of these is the precarious balance which the work displays and whose equivalent so many times we experiment in our lives. "These sculptures thus stand, as any individual not foolish enough to live certain of all things. They are made of doubts, material which also builds them. They come and go and carefully rise; that is their will: to stand."

The poetical strength of these works comes precisely from this core, as the entire discourse about fragility and the wish to remain standing, a gesture that demands courage, caution, comings and goings, is totally embodied in the work itself and not in its exterior. Coming into contact with the scene of the sculptures in the space, which demands cautious steps, as at the least distraction they may fall, conveys to us - in one go - this dense and large body of ideas and affections. From each piece seems to emerge in front of our eyes the entire process which preceded it; a process of comings and goings, decisions and indecisions, trials and errors, where they go to and fro but at the end, among a bit of carelessness and much care, they rise, standing up over blue glasses, that appear in the context of Daisy's work as kinds of encapsulated water.

When I first saw "Último azul", still in the artist's studio, I immediately recalled a poem which I here share:

Mais importante que ter uma memória é ter uma mesa
mais importante que já ter amado um dia é ter uma mesa
sólida
uma mesa que é como uma cama diurna
com seu coração de árvore, de floresta
é importante em matéria de amor não meter os pés pelas
mãos
mas mais importante é ter uma mesa
porque uma mesa é uma espécie de chão que apóia
os que ainda não caíram de vez.

More important than having a memory is to have a table
More important than having loved one day is to have a solid
table
a table that is like a diurnal bed
with its tree, forest heart
it is important when the matter is love not to mess up
but more important is having a table
because a table is like a kind of ground which supports
those who have not yet totally fallen.³ (*)

Today I believe that this immediate recollection occurred to me on account of the last three verses. The furniture in “Último azul” brings about this supportive feature. Asymmetrical sculptures, which appear standing, vertical, pointing upwards but on the verge of shocking with the ground; but on the contrary, they are elegant and firm in their pure precarious strength.

Daisy Xavier’s work is thus constituted, as an edified, alive, constructed world; one that allows a glimpse of the blind spots and does not deliver deceitful shorelines, leading us to imagine that conclusions, certainties exist. What we have is a world in which things balance themselves in a sort of absence. Daisy Xavier’s work

³ Poem, “Mesa”, by Ana Martins Marques. “A vida submarina”. Editora Scriptum.
(*) free translation.

moves in the wattage of what flees, runs, transporting us to the experience of the battle with what is missing, is transitory, does not find grounds for its feet... Moving desire... Seeking an end with no end.