

Mimosa Echard
iDEATH
19.03 - 30.04.2016

“There is a delicate balance in iDEATH. It suits us”

Long before Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning*, the 17th century Dutch painter Otto Marseus van Schrieck was making still lifes that were considerably more alive than still. He is known for his luxuriant and detailed compositions portraying insects, serpents, amphibia, mushrooms and wild plants. Marseus van Schrieck collected and kept small animals in terrariums, allowing for lengthy periods of observation; it was this practice that earned him the somewhat derisive nickname of “The Sniffer”. He delighted in the pleasures of *trompe l'oeil* and in a pioneering act of appropriation even pasted real butterflies onto some of his works.

For *iDEATH*, Mimosa Echard has appropriated dead and living matter, following a mannerist formula which plays on both an illusion of the living and a skilful dosage of poisons and their remedies (she explains that epoxy resin tends to wake lichens up from their hibernation period). Just as with mannerist art, our vision of the works evolves as we near their proliferant surfaces.

At first, one enters the exhibition to see a visually coherent corpus whose interplay of colours and shapes radiate a calm picturality. The novel *In Watermelon Sugar* by Richard Brautigan comes to mind; it is from here that the exhibition title, *iDEATH*, originates. The story relates the trippy life of an imaginary commune who build most of their environment and objects from watermelon sugar. Here too, Echard seems to have employed unvarying materials to produce the entirety of the works.

An overarching gaze allows one to apprehend each work in its totality. Their composition exudes softness and balance. It is delicate. Upon the very gentle and pale pink background small, shiny shapes are scattered alongside large, dark orange circular stains and green drips. The works emanate a visual and chromatic harmony. All gestuality is controlled.

A third way of viewing the exhibition would be to get as close to the works as possible so as to observe the components one by one and - as if reading a text - follow the twists and turns of an imaginary line running from one element to the next. This study could be extended *ad infinitum* as each individual item within the overall composition is identified: mushrooms, marbles, pills, packaging, insects, dried plants, coloured wax. Our first impression fades to allow the works' fundamentally composite nature to surface: we are not dealing with paintings but with sculptures, assemblages or even micro-assemblages. Indeed the title *A/B* is owed to this sculptural dimension. The perfectly smooth, visible side encased in Plexiglas has a reverse; a B-side swarming with little elements trapped in resin like creatures frozen in ice. The surprise that occurs when observing the pieces at close range is similar to the experience had when looking at works by Michel Blazy, with whom Echard shares a studio in Ile-Saint-Denis. What at first glance appears to be traditional fine art supplies is revealed as a peculiar mix of all things organic and synthetic.

The last way to contemplate this series would be to consider the list of the elements as a work in its own right, like a strange conceptual poem: algae, lichen, kombucha, phallus indusiatus mushroom, ginseng, clitoria, verbena, summer savory, St John's wort, camomile, brambles, achillea, helichrysum, heather, egg shells, flies, dried bees and butterflies, Diet Coke, marbles, wrapping, false nails, car body debris, *Leelo Gé* contraceptive pills, Echinacea pills, brewer's yeast, dietary supplements for skin, fertility, lactation or tranquillity from Boots and Schaebens, hair removal wax, epoxy resin.

If one happens to possess the rudiments of botanical and medical knowledge (in my case to compile this list arduous research was required on herbal medicine websites whose content was totally unfamiliar to me until now), it is possible to notice that the works contain myriad active elements whose purposes are opposed: sedatives and stimulants, fertility increasers and contraceptives, living things and dead things, phallus mushrooms and clitoria flowers, hair removal wax and dietary supplements to promote hair growth, intact fake nails and chewed up real ones, yeast to offset the harmful side effects of car body debris ingestion, Echinacea to fight off colds and the packaging whose fabrication pollutes our atmosphere with irritants.

Each plant is collected in the artist's native village in the Cévennes mountain range for its pharmacological properties as well as for its visual appearance. Despite this underlying botanical knowledge, the act of collecting and composing is not solely linked to a fascination for appropriated matter (and a possibility of being infected by it). Staged here are the effects which are actually also characteristic of all works of art: the products whose ultra-contradictory side effects are impossible to control, simultaneously provoking ecstasy, anxiety, annoyance, feverishness, irritation, rejection, love or desire. There is no aspiration to wellness here and no possible therapy. Only the tumultuous experience of sensations, emotions and contradictory thoughts persists. While we await the commercialisation of stimulant sleeping pills, excitatory tranquilizers, fertility-multiplying contraceptive pills and hair removal wax boosting regrowth we can take time to think about the perfectly opposed ideas of composition or formal gesture on the one hand and conceptual practice on the other.

It is keeping this in mind that we can better understand the exhibition title. In Brautigan's novel the commune organises itself around a place named iDEATH. Had the book not been written in 1968, one would immediately take this as a parody of a new Apple product. Instead, as it is so often the case in Brautigan's writings, we are invited to contemplate the way in which humans, animals, artworks and technological objects could possibly live together. In his renowned poem *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*, the writer imagines a "cybernetic meadow" where all species coexist. Mimosa Echard offers up the surface of her works as a communitarian model, a delicate balance with death ever visible on the horizon. "There is a delicate balance in iDEATH. It suits us."

Jill Gasparina