

In the studio with Rebecca Ackroyd

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by MATILDE CERRUTI QUARA | FOLLOW MATILDE



A couple of years have passed since when I first encountered Rebecca Ackroyd's body of work. At the time, I visually associated it with clean shapes and lines, palecoloured fabrics, white plaster organic sculptures and blocks of concrete occasionally disrupted by thrownon or clinging synthetic materials, as if such elements meant to interrupt the predictability of a scene in order to prompt a new vision, and a different rhythm.

More recently, the English artist has been developing an incredible new stream of imagery, exploring leit motifs of yellow, green and red bricks, giant human limbs, coloured organic elements, heart shaped padlocks and seemingly naive keyholes inviting one to spy into an uncertain, yet alluring, dimension. This latter fantastic realm gets instantaneously transposed into drawings, within which the viewer might find him or herself becoming the creepy character represented in the act of spying fluid couples and triplets having sex an imagery sourced from Medieval collections of erotic and esoteric representations. Eventually, one is thrown again on, or rather kicked back to 'reality' by ceilinghigh hands and feet, belonging to what could be a (relatively) good-spirited giant.

Walking into Rebecca's studio I almost expect some huge limb to suddenly break into throughout the building's floors, creating a bridge between the heights of her metaphysical dimension and the place where the artist works and thinks about reallife issues, from politics of domestic authority to suburban management of spaces.

The works themselves are bonded together by an authoritarian feeling, a willingness to find a place within a determined space while continuing to solidly stand on one's own feet. No matter what size these might be.

Matilde Cerruti Quara: Some recent works of yours, specifically 'Too Tight, Creepers Descent' and 'Moss Trap Make Believe', made me rethink about the fairy tale of Bluebeard. They are domestic and very organic but also, I'm not sure, maybe it's about the burnt bricks and the fireplace and those empty dishes put together with tongues and lips. I'm instinctively drawn to them yet they evoke a sense of awe, almost alarm. And I was definitely alarmed after reading Bluebeard as a child... Are you interested in exploring such a duality?

Rebecca Ackroyd: I think my work has always had this duality between an alluring façade and perhaps a more sinister or creepy undertone. It's not something I overtly try to provoke, it just seems to resonate spontaneously.

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MCQ: Do you have a preexisting interest in fantastic dimensions, or is it more a matter of exploring different scales?

RA: Initially I started to think about the reach of works across a space, how works fill a room or where they reach in relation to the body. I wanted to use scale to create moments of gargantuan confrontation and then create intimate pauses amongst them. More recently, I've been thinking about the works becoming more architectural in their scale, like the arms that crash through the ceiling in one of my latest shows. What's happening beyond what you're given to see is becoming of more interest, dissecting the body and then using it to articulate or direct space.

MCQ: Do you start from a material which is technically more adequate and then see the conceptual fit within it or rather pick a material according to its symbolic potential? Here I'm thinking of the chicken wire that is the basis for your most recent, giantsized sculptures of legs and hands covered in plaster bandage... The juxtaposition of the materials made me think of those limbs as if they belonged to a mythological creature with a more downtoEarth, rustic twist.

RA: For the large scale figurative works, the process of making them has become integral to their structure. The chicken wire and plaster bandage is a rudimental and fast way to construct them, akin to a drawing process, with that same immediacy. Initially they weren't supposed to be so raw, but the more I make them the more it becomes increasingly more important, as there is an urgency in their scale and their speed as I want them to have sense of a cast off or a ruin.

MCQ: Your artistic practice intermingles sculpture and installations with drawing does this choice of media just come natural to you or is it the consequence of a thinking process?

RA: When working predominantly with sculpture there's a level of commitment in time, material and energy to make the objects that is often rooted in the studio. The drawings began as a way to open up new spaces for narrative in my practice, as a method for working through ideas and freeing up my imagination beyond the physicality of a material process. Although my work might sprawl across different languages of making it feels very much within its own space and so I suppose it comes naturally and isn't something I try to force.

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MCQ: Which artistic figures have fundamentally inspired you?

RA: I suppose perhaps more obviously artists like Franz West, Louise Bourgeois, Rosemarie Trockel, Philip Guston. More recently I've been looking at a lot of Bruegel the Elder paintings and Kay Sage.

MCQ: Where do the titles of your artworks come from?

RA: I don't usually title works until they're finished. I suppose the titles I use are quite open ended, as I try to steer clear of anything too literal or explanatory. Usually I want them to give a sense of a feeling or hint to a possible narrative or encounter.

MCQ: What does going to the studio mean for you?

RA: Shutting out the rest of the world.

Rebecca Ackroyd graduated in 2015 from the Royal Academy and her works have been exhibited in London and internationally.

Photography by Mariell Lind Hansen

Image courtesy the artist

Art direction: Matilde Cerruti Quara