

MARIANA BARROTE
16.09.2023 | 04.11.2023

TAIL OF THE EYE

The expression *tail of the eye* has a double meaning, alluding both to a specific anatomical zone and a particular way of looking – a sideways glance: sometimes mistrustful, sometimes languid and seductive.

However, in this **Tail of the Eye** – the name of Mariana Barrote's first exhibition at Galeria Lehmann + Silva – we can extend this title even further semantically via a curious homophony, transforming this *tail* [in this specific case, the extremity, the final and elongated part] into a less corporeal *tale* [a story; a fictional or true narrative passed down through generations].

Having made this twist, we are now in a position to find a first clue about what is going on here. For it is tales, narratives and myths – plus all the seductiveness, but also suspiciousness and astonishment, which these contain – that Mariana Barrote seemingly wishes to talk about. It is in fact stories – stories told around the fire¹ – that we see – and, if we make an effort, perhaps even hear – in the images recounted through Mariana Barrote's hands and gestures. Although these are stories that carry within themselves the principle of a multifaceted otherness.

When we make our way down to the gallery's lower floor, we therefore find shelter in a kind of clearing in the midst of a dense forest, where an imaginary bonfire is still projecting its heat and light, causing these to emanate from the walls, drawings and paintings that *appear* on them. Like a storyteller and witchdoctor, Mariana Barrote does not allow the flame of this bonfire to be extinguished, bringing us together here – in this place that is simultaneously intimate and protective, as well as wild, free and unexpected – in order to invoke legends, memories and rumours, which are not only aimed at her personal mythographies – signs, symbols, movements and plasticities that are peculiar to her artistic work and career – but also

¹ José A. Bragança de Miranda, *Envios: Uma Experimentação Filosófica na Internet*, Nova Vega, Lisbon, 2008. "Diz-se que o mito é uma narrativa, uma história que se contava em redor do fogo", p.95.

invoke excerpts and traces of a symbolic and vaguely stabilised backdrop, where (western) History and some Art History have been continuously and formally produced.

We can find these fragments in various references, ghostly sinews that bind together the drawings and paintings presented (of exuberant and enigmatic quality, halfway between surrealism and expressionism) and heighten their tension. These connections originate both from popular territories and from classical and supposedly erudite universes. Let us look, for example, at the clear relationship with La Fontaine's fable about the frog and the ox, in "Sonhei que era sapo, boi, trote e galope" [I dreamed I was a frog, ox, trot and gallop]; or the summoning up of the myth of Peleus and Thetis in "Como se doma a forma" [How form is tamed]. There is also the memory of the legendary burning bush, the bearer of the divine and seminal presence in the Jewish-Christian tradition, in "De olhos na sarça ardente" [Looking at the burning bush]; the evident challenge to the pictorial *mannerisms* of Pontormo, in "Pontorma-te!" [Pontormate thyself!]; or even, and less declarative in nature, the proximity to a voluptuous elasticity of the equally mannerist painter Parmegianino, in "Pela corrente líquida do caule vegetal" [Through the liquid stream of the plant stem].

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Even so, all of these knowing winks – or rather sideways glances, through the *tail* of her eyes – while still being important for Mariana Barrote as complex narrative and formal resonances, are of far more interest to her as mechanisms which suggest and transduce the uninterrupted paths of a material dimension and energy that lie beneath them as an absolute radicality, but also as a speculative power. In a desire that, for the artist, is directed towards a liquid horizon, passionate, visceral and transmutable, resulting in her work thus being capable of countering and exploding closed identity grids, fixed taxonomies and physiologies, domesticating rationalisms, stabilised forms and images.

This is why the frog dreams of being another and is transfigured into an ox, horse, trotting, movement. This is why the bush is not divine here, but is instead carnal, emanating sexual impulses, libidinous and luxuriant. This is why many of the objects that we find here are represented according to an animistic principle, endowed with a life that manifestly resides within them. And this is why many of the figures that populate these drawings and paintings

exist in undecided states: between the human, animal and plant form, between the organic and the inorganic. After all, this is also why this *tail of the eye* can be concrete and, very simply, what this expression immediately draws in our minds: a tail that effectively comes out of the eyes (human or non-human, it doesn't matter), meandering and lascivious.

Mariana Barrote's work is thus a kind of hallucinatory weapon of all History, profaning it, opening it up, redistributing it and bringing it closer to the ground, to the Earth, to its free and unconscious paths (at least, for us), its impulses and contingencies. And if, to quote the artist, "all these paintings and drawings may be regarded as individual threads of a plot", they perform this function insofar as they invoke that story, that *tale*, which is, in fact, the capturing of the general and transindividual principle of transformation, of metamorphosis; both virtual and actual. A *tail*, which swishes and drags everything in its wake, bringing to itself the whole world, all the bodies, all the images, symbioses, changeabilities, latencies and shades. To pull this tail — as Mariana Barrote does — is to understand that nothing remains immovable and inaccessible, but is instead always to be found, whether this is wanted or not, in an inexhaustible "Dança ciciante" [Whispering dance].

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David Revés

Translated by John Elliott

WWW.LEHMANNSILVA.COM
GALLERY@LEHMANNSILVA.COM
+ 351 - 220167341

LEHMANN + SILVA

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