

*A Tiger in My Garden*

*“Ils n’ont pas de voix. Ils sont à peu de chose près paralytiques. Ils ne peuvent attirer l’attention que par leurs poses. Ils n’ont pas l’air de connaître les douleurs de la non-justification. Mais ils ne pourraient en aucune façon échapper par la fuite à cette hantise, ou croire y échapper, dans la griserie de vitesse. Il n’y a pas d’autre mouvement en eux que l’extension. Aucun geste, aucune pensée, peut-être aucun désir, aucune intention, qui n’aboutisse à un monstrueux accroissement de leur corps, à une irrémédiable excroissance...”*

*L’on ne peut sortir de l’arbre par des moyens d’arbre...”*

*Francis Ponge, “Faune et Flore”, in Le Parti Pris des Choses.*

The extensive besieging of the exhibition space is visible already at the entrance through its saturating, overlapping, fragmenting or indeed through the emptiness. The specific inscription of a work in the space surrounding it pervades Roxane Borujerdi’s entire oeuvre. Drawings in A4 format are hung everywhere on the walls at every height. On the ground floor there is an expanding forest of coloured sculptures, which resemble the props of a film set, in itself not dense, but for that very voluminous. In contrast, there is scarcely anything upstairs, except for a video projection in reduced format and a couple of framed drawings. Between both levels a giant poster hangs that reproduces and enlarges geometric, black shapes. The artist completed the drawing first, then scanned them and while in the device she placed a feather on one of the forms. Everything is a bit too large or too small in proportion to the available space. The feeling of a slight displacement arises in the relationship to the real arrangement. A Carrollian imagination seems to have structured the space through consciously posited contrastive pairs: between enlargement and diminishment, between abstraction and nature, between control and coincidence, between mathematics and tinkering. At the same time, the whole impression recalls a Memphis scenery with the emphasised features of a pop-up book.

During her last residency in Brazil the artist intentionally spent a lot of time observing birds and their colours, nature and its forms. In the exhibition *A Tiger in My Garden* the lush,

thriving nature is only indirectly present however. The silhouette of the crown of a palm tree, two assembled moons and bushes are perceivable – but they are more guessed than actually glimpsed. An airy and loose array of colour planes on white paper reveal sickles, which join into bicoloured discs and coalesce with other expanses. One of these is black with triangular contours, while the outlines of the others recall leaves: the eye discovers fruits, and perhaps also an ice-cream cone? On black paper an agitated ribbon out of colourful parts/segments crosses the expanse of the paper and escapes it on all sides: here one could project the hallucination of a snake. Three drawings are based on this principle and yet they all trigger different associations, from the organic to the abstract through to technology.

Sometimes the abstractions and hybridisations still reveal the trace of their inspiration. But even more frequently the exhibited works retain only the turgescence, the bushy or spiky character: they are animated through dynamic momentum and vital force. In her last set of drawings the forms vibrate, dazzle in rainbow colours, proliferate, deform or inflate. Thus, a fuchsia-red line produces shadings of colour which flow out into a shell. Or is it rather a coloured variation derived from a mathematical curve? Another series, on fine wooden discs, consists of compositions made of triangular coloured fields. The artist has applied the acrylic paint either directly onto the wood or after adding medical gauze. At specific places the pictorial medium remains “naked” so that the original background comes to light. The frame with the deep edge, the lengthened format and the visibility of the pictorial medium shifts these drawings into the field of the bas-relief or of the object. Suspended, associations and designations hover. Even in their meticulous compositions the qualities are fast moving. The paper curls into waves, the wood expands and shrinks: the autonomic evolution of the materials is part of the game; it is a device with which the artist distances herself from exercising total control over the form. Roxane Borujerdi cultivates a controlled spontaneity and a well worked-out levity.

The stringent rejection of virtuosity does not fail however to prevent her utilising exact precision and subtle intuition. Every sculpture of the series *New Moon* is distinctively accentuated, depending on which forms – either geometric or organic in nature – predominate. With oil crayon, ink or acrylic the artist has highlighted precise areas, sometimes unobtrusively, at times following the edges of these areas, through

monochromatic fields or concentric mandalas. The artist has ornamented specific places with a feather. The pictorial medium, a MDF panel, is otherwise visible everywhere. The surface of each sculpture is treated according to a specific logic. But all sculptures result from nesting two or more MDF panels, slotted together in a slit. The edges are drawn and cut by hand based on geometric patterns. Roxane Borujerdi's art always verges on building and tinkering. She selects modest materials and the sparseness of the employed means is generally obvious in her works: practical necessity and playful logic are their basis. The artist delights in experimenting with simple techniques, which are used sparsely though, like pyrography or drawing with reed pen. Sometimes she lets the forms emerge by removing the paint, applying chlorine water on the coloured paper with the brush. Finally, how she arranges her elements, namely by nesting or stacking, or how she composes or montages her films, evokes again tinkering, which Claude-Lévi Strauss – as *bricoleur* – defines as the means to organise signs and events directly accessible into new structures which are not defined in advance.

Roxane Borujerdi's repertoire of forms stems from nature, from picture books, magazines, children's games, sceneries, conventional symbols and simple geometric figures, i.e. from what we usually characterise as everyday life. It is immediately accessible and lends the works a familiar appearance, but at the same time also something strange. The artistic vocabulary is reduced. Triangles, circles, curves, lines, rectangles, fruits, birds and plants form the main elements of her work. Based on a fundamental corpus of signs and colours, the artist redistributes the forms across different mediums and into different states; she reconfigures them on the level of space and lets them circulate. The sickle moons appear to be sculptures, but also drawings, just like the bushes.

Based on a serial practice, her work represents a sequence of experiences with core modules. For these she has set out simple protocols, such as repetition, declension, overlapping, combination, hybridisation or transference. The change of the scale – real or through the production modus (camera or print) – as well as the transition from three- to two-dimensionality and vice versa are two examples of transference. The artist frequently limits the number of colours, the forms or the compositional principles. In addition, these principles draw on many variants from heteronomous visual worlds like the herbarium, decorative wallpaper art or the picture book. These are playfully elaborated until they reach

the spatial boundaries of a work or a series, but sometimes they are also given up completely or at least displaced.

And indeed it is a game, both for Roxane Borujerdi when she “practices” while creating, as well as for the visitor, who is tossed into a space where there are specific rules which are to be learnt and applied, or even new instructions to be created. Themes such as discrepancy, *détournement* and context displacement are the accompanying phenomena. The work arises out of an accumulation of small things, minor, ridiculous challenges, which defuses the seriousness of an abstract, formalistic genealogy that is also discernible. Thus, a certain poetic absurdity emanates from her works, for example when selected objects are shown, arranged in pairs before the camera, in the setting of a municipal swimming pool – which recalls Lautréamont’s evocation of the chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table (*L’hippocampe*, 2012, in collaboration with C. Dugit-Gros). In *Cubi e libri* the cubes stacked on top of one another play and dance in stop motion in front of a changing background of open, illustrated books. While the comic pages double the childlike effect of the cubes, in an almost absurd manner those of the encyclopaedia or the painting books re-contextualise them into other universes of knowledge. It is enchanting to note that Roxane Borujerdi, who is interested in birds, their feathers and movements, applies the Rousselian literary technique affine to the Surrealist “language of birds” visually. Roussel constructed his texts on the basis of acoustic analogies, plays on words and the (mystic) symbolic of letters themselves. The work becomes its own world, a *natura naturans*.

The artist refuses, perhaps unconsciously, to take a rational approach to art and prefers a more immediate, less academic strategy. The common denominator of her works resides in how she, taking the objects as the starting point, puts forward a phenomenological experience, challenging the semiotic status of the image and the form. The rules inherent to constituting sight and imagination, but so too the use of language to describe reality, are put to the test. What consequences do these protocols have on how we perceive the object, our own body and space? Which new associations, analogies and genealogies emerge? What do they tell us about our ideas, our knowledge, our interpretation?

(Anne Faucheret)