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DAIGA GRANTINA

→ Selected Press

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Amy Jones, ‘Amy Jones on Daiga Grantina’
Art Forum, 01 June 2021

Emalin’s new sun-filled space in London’s Shoreditch is a natural home for the wall-based assemblages of Paris-based artist Daiga Grantina. She has long been preooccupied with light and its sculptural qualities, having developed her practice from an interest in experimental filmmaking. Her recent exhibition “Temples” continued these inquiries, with light from two walls of windows providing an ideal setting for her sculptural investigations.

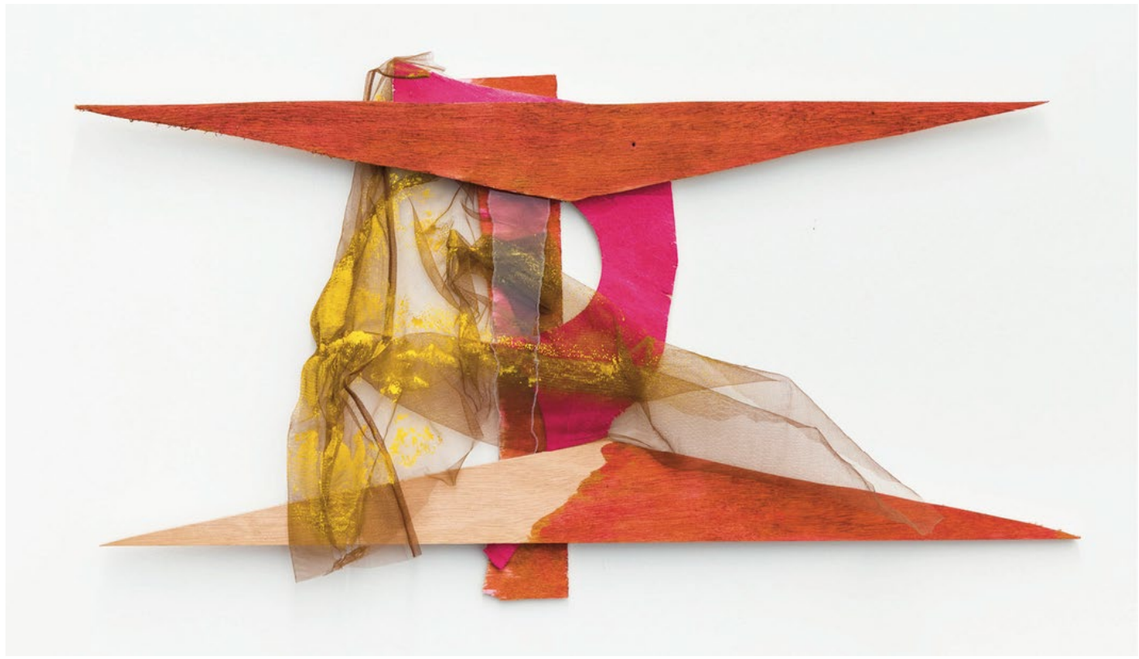
The work here contrasted starkly with Grantina’s solo exhibition at New York’s New Museum in 2020–21, where a riot of color, texture, and sculptural gesture swept across the gallery space. At Emalin, Grantina’s approach to color—central to her ongoing inquiry into material, absorption, and hyper-reflection—was precise and muted. This shift was most apparent in the “Temples” series, 2020–, consisting of seven small wall-based works constructed largely on plywood triangles. Their palette, featuring passages of untreated wood, is dominated by subdued beiges and browns.

The initial impression of restraint soon gave way to a sense of distilled energy. Small instances of intense color permeate the muted planes. A wedge of hot pink pierced through two shards of wood; sunlight bouncing off crumpled, crimson-dappled aluminum foil revealed flashes of brilliant white. Color was scattered across a range of materials, from clear plastic to various fabrics, reflecting or absorbing the sunlight at different moments as you moved through the gallery. Almost maquette-like, each Temple felt like a study of the process through which color, texture, and composition coalesce.

Rather than holding meaning together, Grantina’s constructions actively work to pry it apart. This fraying of signification is most evident at the works’ very edges. The wooden edges are coarse and splintered, such that the uniform geometry of the triangles from which each Temple is constructed begins to unravel. Lines that appeared clean from a distance show themselves to be uneven and jagged, while others betray themselves as simple pencil strokes dividing a diamond shape in two.

Shapes that once seemed fixed and foundational reveal an unexpected fluidity. At the edges, where the works met the pristine walls of the gallery, the malleability of each triangle threw the logic of Grantina’s compositions back into question.

Viewing the exhibition at Emalin, I was immersed in a series of ongoing conversations taking place within Grantina’s practice. The “Temples,” when considered in relation to the artist’s previous work, bring new questions to her ongoing study of scale and gesture. The dialogue between color, light, material, and composition creates a unique chromatic experience, one that shifts and evolves with each glance and evinces the artist’s ongoing interest in color theory. Grantina’s “Temples” follow their own interior, associative logic, inviting us into a new, if disorienting, way of thinking. Each assemblage works to collapse meaning into its constituent parts, transforming itself and slipping away from you with every step. These temples are willfully built on shaky ground. The moment you feel you’ve grasped the intricate layout, you stumble across a corridor that leads nowhere, or a small door that opens into a new world.



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Julia Zakharova, ‘The Cosmological Process’
Directional Forces, May 2019

Daiga Grantina’s Saules Suns at the Latvian Pavilion of the 2019 Venice Bienale confronts a number of challenges concerning materiality and process. This is an exhibition that functions more like an experience in its positioning and processing of materials ranging from faux fur and cotton to steel conduits and paper. At play here in this cosmology is the notion of world-building and world-destruction.

Descending upon the installation I had the sensation that I came upon a strangely magical structure, a studio or playroom perhaps, where people are making mysterious things out of even more mysterious materials. In this playroom, one imagines children from another planet, another species and another intelligence...

Looking up the term “saules” I read two interesting definitions. The first, defines “saules” as the plural form of “soul” in a now obsolete Scottish terminology. In the other definition, perhaps the artist’s intended usage, “Saule” is the solar goddess found in numerous Latvian and Lithuanian mythological tales.

Perhaps it is more accurate to describe Saules Suns as the atelier of this secret Solar Goddes who has descended on the Earth in the year 2019, to find the planet apoplectic with its contradictions and the wars within its spirit.

Venice may be the perfect city for this descent.
I have read many critics describe this installation as a series of suns. I’m not sure this is the pathway I would take in explaining my experience. Saules Suns defies structure in the way Grantina has utilized space, light and shadow to counter predictability and predication. It is this total exploration of every corner, structural element, wall and floor that makes Grantina’s work so very memorable and somehow so appealing. There is a strong commitment to taking things to a level of excess in a way that never strays from the elegant and the provocative.

Saules Suns may be considered a test of wills at war: the war between sensuality and rationality, the conflict between the soul and the brain (assuming there is even a distinction, and the cataclysm between the creation of a thing and its extinction, or more accurately its violent disappearance.

Indeed Ms. Grantina’s work here appears to speak to many central phenomenon of our age: the process of industry and the cost it heaps upon our natural world. The Latvian sculptress poses questions about origins and destinations concerning the relationship between handcraft and production.

This question, on how things are made, may be the foremost inquiry of our time.

This relationship is one with many forebears in contemporary art, be it Joseph Beuys or Carl Andre, One can even explore the Latvian Pavillion within the framework of Arte Povera and view Saules Suns as the grandchild of work by such figures as Eva Hesse and Allan Kaprow by way of Lucian Fabro. That the materials at play here vary from they synthetic to the naturalistic is only one of the most prominent features but it is a phenomenon that rewards further study.

This distinction may be viewed as a product of this trajectory.

This is a work, an environment and a phenomenon beyond logic and beyond classification, thought it does offer traces, or perhaps more appropriately, tracks from prior teachers and inspirations. One sees Sara Sze’s scatterings and the frightful fetishisms of Isa Genzken.

There are moments of desperation and traces of optimism found in the nascent gathering of the materials that can either be viewed as one large sculptural installation or individual pieces, each with an identity its own. Ms. Grantina’s offering here appears to come as propulsive event, as if she blew up a pile of mysterious materials, things out of which one might build a spacecraft or a giant stuffed panda bear. It doesn’t really matter.
It’s the “thingness” that provokes. It’s the meditation on confluence and meeting points between fiber and metal, between linearity and metamorphosis that makes this a memorable work of sculpture, a phenomenological experience best apprehended perhaps with a fewcritical faculties studying the blue skies and labyrinths of Venice and the rest contemplating the architecture of fantasy and apocalypse.

On the Precipice of Anti-Art

Saules Suns offers visitors perhaps the most immersive experience at this Bienale. By “immersive” I don’t mean anything like a literal step into a pool of images or sound. I am suggesting rather, that Saules Suns seduces you into a state of vision and thought that travels beyond the pre-determined borders of most contemporary sculpture today.
Ms. Grantina is building a cosmos with this work.

The immersion takes place emotionally as much as visually and this is the strength of the work, particularly within the context of other sculptures in the Bienale, many of which flirt so ferociously with irony and cynicism of the visual kind, or, in other words, anti-art.

Judging by this Bienale the garish and the kitsch appear to be the new borders of style among many younger artists across the world, as if they all adopted the ideology or language of contemporary art from the same textbook, each with his or her own foreign conceptual accent. Kitsch has become so pervasive in art today that its very presence is no longer a shock but a stylistic utterance as casual and mindless as artificially-torn designer jeans.

What distinguishes Saules Suns from kitsch and hence anti-art, is its commitment to material discovery and its openness to multidimensional exposition from the point of view of length, width and height. This is a very phenomenologically geometric work of art, one that defies measurement and survey.
Ms. Grantina’s work it is not a discourse on negative theology and hence, carefully evades the allure of trends and the comfort of conformism found among so many artists these days.

This is a work of affirmation, perhaps even outright proclamation, the type of utterance one speaks after a traumatic experience in the sub-tropics of the careworn spirit. There is hope here. There is serious meditation. There is a positive approach to re-imagining aesthetics here that does not necessitate a decadent relationship to art history. Curated (how one can curate this piece I have no idea!) by Valentinas Klimašauskas and Inga Lāce, Saules Suns beckoned passersby and curious art tourists to remain and reflect.

During my visit I saw women and men of all ages stay longer than usual in their course of travel through and within the Arsenale. I was able to view many pauses and many little discussions among the travelers.

Considering the scale of the buildings at the Bienale and the number of works to encounter, this is perhaps the greatest praise one can bestow on an artist: the energy for careful contemplation.

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Alex Bennett, 'Daiga Grantina Discusses "What Eats Around Itself" at the New Museum, New York'
Flash Art, 22 June 2020

Alex Bennett: Though your work involves sculptural assemblages of extremely diverse material, it's curious to know that film was your initial interest. You even created your own Super 8 films. You've mentioned Tony Conrad's "Yellow Movies" as a significant influence for you; to start, can we talk about this interest and the migration of particular principles/effects of film in your sculptural work?

Daiga Grantina: During my time at the art school in Hamburg I lived in a small attic flat. I worked in my living room, which was a little extension of the kitchen. I liked the concealment of this space, its density. And there was an idea of a composite between the filmed and the filmic material. I made a space encompassing assemblage that existed only on and for the film. Like making a mold for the time-material-entity of the film. In Paris I worked in an even smaller attic room. It was here that the turning point between projection and sculpture happened. I stopped using a camera and projected snippets of existing films to layer it with sculptural elements in the space. The projected light cones defined the entire order of forms. Maybe it was a way to achieve more distance from my surroundings and to use the tiny rooms for a process of pupation into a space of imagination. Somehow film was part of the small room; the attic room was an extension into an inside world. The "Yellow Movies" can be a metaphor for an augmented sensing and a jocular phenomenological approach to projection. Seeing that work shifted the way I perceived the idea of the medium. I wanted to make something more bare medium-wise.

AB: Conrad created a border, within which a temporality emerged — the tension of staging and mobility is useful when considering your work. I'm interested in your approach to light as a possible connective tissue or immaterial spine through larger, deconstructed assemblages. How do you perceive and handle light as a structure as well as a symbol? I'm thinking of the light cone, for instance, and its capacity to behave as a suspended space...
DG: Light is part and parcel of how I understand sculpture. As something that completes form and can be form itself. In Venice I followed both of these strings in parallel. I uncovered a large palladian window to have direct sunlight instigate and complete the process of laying out the pieces. And I made light shapes that existed in relation to the sunlight and also by themselves, depending on the hour of the day. Rotation and a constant sliding of the ground were part of handling the light and inherent to the sculptures. So light is not exactly a symbol or a through-and-through symbol. I like light to be its own dimension and embody all of matter.

AB: Your manipulation of organic and synthetic material undoes the fixity of its material to prioritize a generative, morphing system. "For What Eats Around Itself," your new institutional show at the New Museum, you refer to the properties of lichen and the organism's duality: the fungus as protective layer, the algae as photosynthesis generator. Their coexistence and self-replication develops its own organic surface across all kinds of terrain. How did you choose to allude to the characteristics of lichen, both in the construction of and materials used, in "What Eats Around Itself"?

DG: My friend Athena gave me a dry branch with lichen, and it was decorating the kitchen cupboard for a while until my cats started gnawing it and I had to pick up the pieces from all over the floor. The lichen was sometimes leafy and sometimes more bush-like. I found out that these kinds of growths were macrolichen. Meaning that scale in lichen is a question of form. Which I think is true for sculpture too. How is size determined by shape? I often felt that a work makes itself, a swirl that seems inherent in its line, like a frequency. So that self-replication is not adding or joining pieces but it is a question of matter as such. The matter is the joining.

I had in mind an underlying organometric structure. A structure that would not necessarily hold things physically together but still transmit my ideas of symbiosis and continuity. I used the overlock seam to carve large pieces of fabric into shapes. It is a very strong seam that works more like book binding because it joins the edges from one side. I didn't assemble pieces of fabric but used one single piece so the seams are fixing a fold. The unity of the piece is visible with the interruptions of the seam. The seam is a marker of space. And it is pulling open another space. I chose a very dense fabric so that there would be no draping with the weight when hung. The seam takes the sole responsibility for how the piece will take shape. The pieces work as glyphs in the larger picture and carry elements on the inside that extend inward out of the seams. They are floating hinges. I am interested in lichen for they are the hinges between our soil and the atmosphere. They make the atmosphere.

AB: I wonder if language is one way of coordinating the interplay of material; you seem to engage with language for its influence upon form as well as its own malleability of meaning. For "What Eats Around Itself" you reference Rainer Maria Rilke's relation of roses to eyelids: "Rose, oh pure contradiction, desire / to be no one's sleep under so many / lids." While in the much earlier exhibition, "Legal Beast Language" (2014) at Galerie Joseph Tang, the title references a glossary in Ben Marcus's The Age of Wire and String (1995), which collects redefinitions and invents new terms (such as CLOTH-EATERS). Following Rilke, the dynamism provoked by both sleep and vitality, weariness and excess, is interesting; how do you like to use language? Is there an impulse to decenter or interrogate figuration and the anthropomorphic?

DG: At this moment I am experiencing very closely the becoming of language in the early stages with my daughter. It is imbedded in gesture and action of the body. It is sound and song, gesture and dance. If gesture and figuration extend from the same line, then maybe cadence is what links language and figuration, so figuration can bring resonance into being as much as a sound line. I would like to connect this thought back to lichen. Can we speak of a musical scale in lichen? Is scale the connecting element in sign systems? The sign system of lichen would then be a possible category of languages, a language of transfiguration maybe. I am interested in Ben Marcus and Rainer Maria Rilke for how they exceed the identity of language. Through their work I can read language as part of a larger sign system to unlock expressions of the heart.

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Kay Whitney, ‘Daiga Grantina’
Sculpture, 07 May 2020

Despite the expectation that artworks serve to implement a pragmatic social agenda, many artists still privilege the work of the imagination over the demand for function. In rejecting the requirement of such utility, they produce objects that do a different kind of work—an associative, poetic labor that spells nothing out but resonates in the mind, like a tuning fork, activating an unprogrammed response.

Daiga Grantina, a Latvian-born artist working in Paris, has produced a rare thing: a series of sculptural moments that together evoke certain structures of the natural world. Her strategically spaced, sequential pieces are effectively about their own materiality, enclosed and defined by how and from what they are fabricated. Draped, gathered, mounted on the wall, and suspended, these objects are sui generis—what they imply to the eye of the beholder is left to the beholder to resolve. Slung across the long, narrow, high-ceilinged Lobby Gallery of the New Museum, Grantina’s interrelated fabric-based objects create a wavering panorama. They animate and occupy the space in an oddly non-aggressive, inviting fashion, like the decorative elements inside an aquarium. In the hierarchies of perception, the materials, in combination with everything that’s been done to them, make the first hit.

The exhibition title, “What Eats Around Itself,” along with its literary and artistic sources, amplifies the lack of aggression and the sci-fi, biomorphic feel of the objects. Grantina is interested in the evolution of plants and, for this piece, drew inspiration from Tim Wheeler’s photographs of lichen. Lichen consist of a fungus living with an alga or cyanobacterium—the fungus feeding off of and protecting its partner organism. Grantina has arranged her suspended and wall-hung objects in a way that ties them into an implied cycle of growth and decline, mirroring lichen’s adaptive qualities. She was also inspired by Rilke’s comparison between roses and eyelids: “Like a rose, life unfolds with each blink.”

In a recorded statement made for the exhibition, Grantina states that she works almost entirely intuitively. Her relationship with her materials, what they are (cast silicon, paint, latex, various fabrics), and what she does to them (gathering, tying, draping, plasticizing, suspending) are her first considerations and her relational platform. She makes her objects for specific spaces, which in turn determine the final form and outcome, because the work is first and foremost site-specific in nature. Though she does make models, ultimately the work bridges intention, fabrication, shifted scale, and the challenges of architecture and light.

Grantina’s materials are strung along a spectrum of sensation constructed from very basic sets of oppositions: natural/synthetic, hard/soft, dark/light, opaque/transparent, hotly chromatic/indifferently colored. She uses color and light not so much as aspects of a particular surface but as characteristics of materiality. Color is used as a spatially differentiating element and point of exclamation. The work consumes the space and creates a cool, otherworldly, wholly artificial environment that oddly mirrors our own distance from the natural world.

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Shraddha Nair, ‘Daiga Grantina makes her solo debut in America at the New Museum’
Stir, 21 January 2020

The Latvian artist is presenting her first solo exhibition in the US - What Eats Around Itself -a series of playful installations for viewers to walk through.

New York City, known as the art capital of the world, is home to many greats. What is exceptional about the city, however, is that it is also the rich soil that helps growing artists bloom. Many remarkable artists first made their bones in a New York City museum before going on to create waves in the industry. Manhattan’s New Museum is one such institution. The director, Massimiliano Gioni, says, “It’s not by accident that some of the greatest artists of today, ranging from Jeff Koons to David Hammons to Adrian Piper, or more recently, artists like Wu Tsang, Urs Fischer, and Chris Ofili, had their very first New York museum exposure at the New Museum. That’s what we have been doing at the Museum for more than 40 years: we show the art of tomorrow, today”.

In a continuation of this tradition, New Museum is presenting Daiga Grantina: What Eats Around Itself. Daiga Grantina is an emerging artist of Latvian origin, who lives and works in Paris and is showcasing a range of adventurous and exciting art installations at the New Museum, in a first ever solo in America. The exhibition is a display of past works as well as one large scale site-specific installation, curated by Helga Christoffersen.

Grantina’s recent works are inspired by lichen, referenced directly in the exhibition title, and she draws inspiration from its aesthetic and natural qualities.

Grantina employs silicon, textile and plastics to create amorphous installations that read as an organic sculpture but are, in fact, entirely artificial. Her work in the past has played with these derived dichotomies in its materiality, creating a sense of curious confusion in the viewers’ eyes. This show will be no different. Although lichen is a natural composite, its structure is repetitive and as Christofferson puts it, “mechanically produced, systematic, grid-like”.
Grantina explores this duality in the series, bringing into question the true nature of a material and the real materials in nature. Grantina calls on her audience to leave behind any preconceived notions, inviting us to question our perception of the boundaries between natural and artificial.

Christofferson comments on the relevance of this tension between organic and synthetic materials in Grantina’s work, “We are living in a world where we are surrounded by new substitutes and surrogates for everything around us. Whether it is the food that we eat or the clothes we wear, or the houses that we live in, there is an incredible shift happening in the composition of materials. Natural materials are artificially engineered, and something that can feel like a familiar object or feel like a familiar texture, is often not what it appears to be. In Grantina’s work I see an obsession with testing the limits of materials and exploring this middle ground between the natural and the artificial”.

In the site-specific installation by Grantina, she creates an environment for viewers to literally step into the work and get a micro and macro perspective on this installation. Christofferson tells us what excites her about this curatorial process, “It is always an incredible process to work with an artist who creates new work for a specific space or context. In this case Grantina really considered the nature of the New Museum’s lobby gallery, a very transparent space that can be encountered from multiple angles due to its long glass wall. In addition, the space has a skylight, and Grantina uses the space almost like a glasshouse for the growth of organic matter, with her sculptural installation taking the form of many separate elements that form one larger and connected whole”.

Grantina represented Latvia at the 2019 Venice Biennale with her solo presentation Saules Suns. She has had solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018), Kunstverein Hamburg (2017), and others apart from a number of group exhibitions as well. The solo at New Museum opens on January 21, 2020 and runs till May 17, 2020.

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Laura Pitcher, ‘Industrial Materials Morph Into an Organic World in the New Museum’s Lobby’
Observer, 21 January 2020

Daiga Grantina’s sculptures consume a room. Voluptuous and flowing, it’s obvious that they’re influenced by the natural world, and yet they offer a fresh perspective that can often seem otherworldly. Born in Riga in Latvia in 1985, the artist studied sculpture and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg. Initially captivated by experimental film, her sculptural work plays with lighting to create an organic feel.

Now based in Paris, and with an impressive list of European institutions that have hosted her work, Grantina is about to open her first ever solo museum show in the U.S. “Daiga Grantina: What Eats Around Itself,” will run from January 21 to May 10 at the New Museum (on view in the Museum’s Lobby Gallery), and has been curated by Helga Christoffersen, the executive director of Art Hub Copenhagen and former curator at the New Museum.

The exhibition showcases what Grantina does best: large-scale sculptural assemblages that evoke the natural world. Here, she has been inspired by photographer Tim Wheeler’s images of lichen and the Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s comparison between roses and eyelids. “Like a rose, life unfolds with each blink,” the artist explains. Using cast silicone, paint, latex, fabric and felt. Grantina contrasts industrial and synthetic materials to create an installation that mimics the amorphous, leafy figure of lichen climbing the gallery walls. The plant-like being, which is comprised of a fungus living in symbiosis with an alga or cyanobacterium, is remarkable in the way that the two materials support each other—with the fungus both feeding off of and protecting the organism that has become its partner. In Grantina’s work, this give and take is experienced through forms that seem as if they’re both growing and decomposing at the same time.

When creating the exhibition, Grantina constructed a scaled-down model of the Lobby Gallery to mock up the work. Experimenting with materials, soft and hard, transparent and opaque, mobile and static, she drew inspiration from lichen’s many adaptive qualities (like coexistence and self-replication) to create a space that is fluid and intriguing. The amorphous structures are suspended from the ceiling and make their way down the gallery walls and floor, encompassing the entire room. Each piece on its own is complex, and yet together they fit effortlessly.

When asked if she’s always considered herself an artist, Grantina told Observer that she’s unsure that such decisions can be made in childhood, and that there’s a clear difference in being aware of art and experiencing making something that could be art. But in her work, she has found that new projects often find their genesis in the one that came before. “Like a bookmark,” the artist describes how she often uses the thought-process of her previous work as a jumping off point to approach something new. With this in mind, we can no doubt expect more beautifully strange organic matters in whatever follows her solo American-debut.

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Alex Bennett, ‘Paris Roundup 2019’
Flash Art, 03 December 2019

Saturation occurs once again, the city drenched in expos, events, and itinerant first-timers. Given the slight period in which to encounter the vast array on offer, I’ll start with the broad rubric of time itself. While some things deteriorate, others resist time’s effects by way of relationality, reconciliation, or the favoring of capricious notions of community. Such is the modus for Palais de Tokyo’s “Future, Former, Fugitive,” which pools together forty-four intergenerational artists and collectives as a marker of “a French scene” — nearly ten years since its similarly monumental show “Dynasty.” In Oliver Cadiot’s 1993 novel Future, Former, Fugitive, he sets an inventory of tactics in the event of exile. In this same story, Cadiot invents Robinson, a vehicular character through which sensations and perceptions are processed at accelerated rates. Evolving from Cadiot’s early cut-up poetry, Robinson’s narrative “I” becomes an empty site for the heterogeneous language of the contemporary world, provoking a hallucinatory proliferation of linguistic excess. Though a marker of a scene (one of many we shall see), Palais de Tokyo’s approach is in a similar vein, reconstituting a place for games of language, excess, and doubt.

Contagion seeps through even the most solitary expressions: Nils Alix-Tabeling’s wooden reptilian hybrids queer mythological narratives to confront the apocalyptic present in sculptures featuring, among many crossbreeds, a two-faced arachnid vase and a nimble throne adorned with carved dragonfly wings, a lolling cock, and clawing hand. Corentin Grossmann’s crayon, pastel, and graphite drawings perk the attention with their woozy vistas, untroubled nudes, and rolling landscapes. The marzipan-smooth scenery is populated with de-stoned avocados, hovering planets, botanical phalluses ejaculating foamy toothpaste, and sushi traveling downstream while yellow tang fish float above. Renaud Jerez presents burlesque characters inspired in part by Orwell’s 1984 and the recurring sex workers throughout Otto Dix’s oeuvre. Industrial pipes create interconnected exoskeletons as a figure guards a mirrored tomb; the room is bookended by two canvases featuring a dissolving grim-reaper and a bewitched ode to John Everett Millais’s Ophelia.

To the volcanic center of it all and with no thematic spine in mind, I stumble into booths weeping in white light under the Grand Palais, gunning for more fine flakes of excess. In a queasy head rush, best to start with decapitation. Picture: slurry of verdant greens; picture: an abattoir-picnic of Cicero’s rotting head strung to a tree; picture: eyes, whole abscesses, pustular and galactic in sparkling putrefaction; picture: a snake twirling into the fleshy envelope, feasting on its contents inside out. Kye Christensen-Knowles’s The Silence of Cicero (2019), on show with LOMEX at this year’s Lafayette Sector in FIAC, was a welcome contusion in the system.

Thirsty for more hot proclivities, masochistic practice, or profuse materiality I reach Galerie Joseph Tang’s presentation of work by Daiga Grantina: magnificent quenelles rolled into craquelure-like hardened caramel in tones of toffee, peach, and blood orange, the latter’s lower curve dipped in a smattering of feathers. A central assemblage composed of hulking shards of foam and silicone in licorice-red and rosewater reads disarticulated nest, while the discrete wall clusters are neatly gelled, feeling like more assertive endnotes for a faintly folkloric and rich plastic lexicon.

Making up a small portion of works at Anton Kern Gallery are paintings by David Byrd (1926–2013), who formerly worked for thirty years in the Veterans Administration facility in Montrose, New York, before retiring to paint. In his bleached pastel palette, figures, landscapes, and at times the softening unity of the two, are sensitive renderings of his time spent working in the VA where the most distressing forces are often invisible. In Man In Bed (1973) a figure appears awash in liquid flurries of cotton, the body scarcely distinct from the mattress. In another, Byrd traces the medicalized mind in solitary extremis via a male figure holding only a string.

Other stroboscopic notices came in quick succession: a painting of one luminescent citron cocktail served like a lambent candle by Dike Blair at Karma; equally radiant were the extreme cropped talismans of Alexandra Noel’s paintings at Freedman Fitzpatrick, including an injured horse, and retro American houses — their roofs illuminated like razor blades. For a bigger splash I ogled Louisa Gagliardi’s silky paintings of metallic phantasms and oily reflections at David Radziszewski: black symbolist felines, hollow bodies, and golden globes where faces slip and slide onto other bodies, onto cherries, or bust into pure steam.

Pivoting from diaphanous cacophony to infatuated authorial mark, I visit Hans Hartung. At Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, his gestural and abstract style, so promiscuous with scrawl, is more radiant and scathing than I anticipated. Almost libidinal with tricks of something machinic in his handling of sprays and aerosols, Hartung’s paintings, pastels, and lithographs are hatch marked close to oblivion, swirled and lyrically erased in great unctuous waves. His swathes of black, bronze, and navy evoke the graphic fluster of ruffled plumage. Representations of hallucinogenic wind, a cockatoo’s shock, or bizarre weaponry: Hartung could suggest them all.

More transient and site-specific was the program for the inaugural Salon de Normandy, housed at Le Grand Hotel de Normandie in the shadow of the Louvre. Curated by multidisciplinary collective The Community, the project is a playful destabilizing satire on the conservative nineteenth-century salon. Given its context, participating galleries and nomadic collectives embed display within setting, leaving objects, commodities, and atmospheric installations interpenetrating hotel facilities. Orgiastic and bacterial in scope, the hotel summons a portalist methodology with each room a peephole. However, precarious form and rudimentary application is its connective tissue, clear in Nick Sethi’s live, site-specific ode to India; Alison Lloyd’s introspective sequence of photographic self-documentation; or Michael Iveson’s manipulation of space through painted bubble-wrap vestibules.

Of less wild and more discrete fashion continues Paris Internationale. Enjoyments include Autumn Ramsey’s interspecies bacchanalia at Crèvecœur, including an eagle with overinflated talons and a runaway satyr. Similarly, silhouettes of smooching heads by Robert Brambora at Sans titre show trans-species relations both animal and botanical; or Koppe Astner’s presentation of New Realist works by the late Miguel Cardenas, displaying psychedelic sentient cacti razed like modernist sculptural icons. At Paris Internationale, the Performance Agency’s live TV studio, orchestrating events, tours, talks, and performance, is a dizzying feat in itself.

At Sultana, botanical bodies sit behind glass cabinets dripping in condensation for Jesse Darling’s “Selva Oscura.” In partial reference to Dante’s dark forest, the plants are desynchronized from seasonal time, stripped from the period of dormancy for further root entanglement. Bookbinders and toilet brushes adorn a forest of crutches, the binder of elaborate ideas become undone. I capture Louis Fratino’s new ceramics and sculptures at Antoine Levi, his intimate paintings rendered in three dimensions. I crop them further at a forearm’s shelter or a twisting embrace, inventing their subliminal passion and pulse.

For calm, I stop by “Speed of Life” by Peter Hujar at Jeu de Paume. Consistent documenter of the downtown New York avant-garde, Hujar recorded a multitude of queer subjects including Candy Darling and Quentin Crisp. “Speed of Life” is also sheltered, lonely, and gentle. Hujar crops a leg to linger on the veins touring down the fundamental foundation of the foot. In others: a lone road is made suede by rain, its surface supple with the pressure of petrichor; Skippy the python creates curlicues in a labyrinth atop a varnished chair; lipping the wind, the Hudson river is frozen as a sheet of slate; Stephen Varble sports Christmas-tree netting, festooned with faux dollar bills. Pausing for the act of looking itself, I’ll close this heady walkthrough of the many constructions of value.

EMA⁄ ⁄LIN

Benjamin Sutton, ‘The 10 Best Booths at FIAC’
Artsy, 17 October 2019 [extract]

A little rain couldn’t dampen the mood at Wednesday’s preview of the Foire Internationale d’Art Contemporain (FIAC), Paris’s marquee art fair. Throngs of VIPs poured into the Grand Palais to see what the 199 galleries participating in the fair’s 46th edition have to offer. The works on offer skew distinctly European, though some of the most arresting presentations are those devoted to artists from other continents—namely Africa and North America. Plus, the booths in the fair’s Lafayette Sector for emerging galleries are unanimously strong. Here, we offer a guide to FIAC’s must-see hits.

Otherworldly assemblages of foam, silicone, and other materials fill the booth of Paris’s Galerie Joseph Tang; many pieces beckon visitors with their saturated shades of red and purple. The works are by the sculptor Daiga Grantina, who continues to draw upon her longstanding interest in light—how it either passes through the startling cuts and scrims in her work, or bounces off the thickly applied coats of resin that make them glow. The artist, who is currently featured in the Latvian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, is also in the midst of preparing for a solo show early next year at the New Museum in New York. Her works at FIAC, which range from freestanding sculptures to wall-mounted works, are priced between €9,000 ($9,900) and €15,000 ($16,500).

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Ingrid Luquet–Gad, ‘Daiga Grantina’
CURA, March 2019

Born in Riga in Latvia in 1985, Daiga Grantina studied sculpture and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and the University of Fine Arts Hamburg. It was experimental film, however, that first caught her interest and defined the features of her sculptural work to come. “I started by doing Super 8 films. They were abstract films, centered around energies and light effects. Discovering Tony Conrad’s Yellow Movies was a big inspiration to me.” Gradually, she started to extract elements from the videos that she would materialize in physical space. The light cone, however, stayed a fixture in her practice, enabling her to delineate a suspended space where the mind could project itself. Not quite real, not quite imaginary either, this was a space where linear time as well as terrestrial gravity seemed to have waned, enabling a collection of potentialities to unfold in several, non-exclusive spatio-temporal dimensions. Somewhere in the process of going from 2D to 3D, a fourth dimension had appeared.

One of her first solo shows, Legal Beast Language (2014) at Galerie Joseph Tang in Paris, built on this tension. Hung from the ceiling or stranded on the floor, silvery sculptural elements mixed with translucent shapeless masses, radiating with intensities manifesting themselves via a diffuse, magenta hue. Melted plastic, crumpled aluminum, tangled wires as well as various plastic trinkets were combined, giving birth to nomadic singularities resembling post-nuclear organs without bodies. At that time, a generation of artists that she has frequently been shown alongside were inventing a renewed way of approaching science fiction, conceived not so much as a narrative as an abstract texture infused with a speculative transformation potential. Feeding on dystopian tales of dark glamour, they merge polluted particles with glimmering post-nuclear waste to produce eerie concretions, chrysalides or microcosms.

Daiga Grantina’s work acknowledges the changes happening in our ecosystem. Science fiction, however, if applied to describe her work, should not so much be understood as an impulse towards the future than as a confrontation with something radically unknown. As she puts it herself: “Ursula K. Le Guin once said that people use science fiction when they can’t come up with another term. This would be the modality I am working towards.” In her last shows, Pillars Sliding off Coat-ee (2017) at Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany, or Toll (2018) at Palais de Tokyo in Paris, her palette has taken on a more subdued quality. The hard, metallic tones have developed into eggshell beige, burnt orange or withered greens. The shimmering surfaces now coexist with plaster, knobbly wood or coarse fabrics. The contrast between various moments of production, organic spontaneity and meticulously built structures, have become more visible. “I start with a sketch or a model and I restart with a work which is more spatial. It stays a sketch somehow,” explains Daiga Grantina.

When we meet in her studio at DOC, a former school turned into self-administered artist ateliers in the neighborhood of Belleville in Paris, she is preparing for the Venice Art Biennale where she has been chosen to represent Latvia. Several parts lie scattered on the floor, waiting to enter into a larger composition. Like the smaller pieces, the bigger installations also derive from finding a satisfying connection—the unexpected, intuitive one—between two parts. She then moves on segment by segment to gradually solidify an initial, defining intensity or rhythm. In Venice, projected light will once again play a central role. Its spectrum, however, does not conjure up other worlds as much as it induces an exercise in expanded vision. From her early experiments with film, Daiga Grantina has kept a time-based practice that favors an exploration of the here-and-now. What appears in the light cone is a non-linear pluriverse, where microscopic and macroscopic scale overlap and intersect. Everyday material, shapes, objects become alien to us. Walking around Daiga Grantina’s sculptures, we experience how our daily environment might look through a non-human perception system.

EMA⁄ ⁄LIN

Valentinas Klimašauskas, ‘The detail is potential for a scope.
An interview with Latvian artist Daiga Grantina’
Art Territory, 27 July 2018

Latvian artist Daiga Grantina (b. 1985 in Riga, lives and works in Paris) is renowned for her site-adapted sculptural installations made from a range of materials with varying qualities, merging plastic and organic elements within an extensive color palette.

Still on view until September 9, 2018, is Daiga Grantina’s solo show “Toll” at one of the most important contemporary art institutions in Europe - Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Moreover, on June 21st, Grantina took part, alongside other younger generation artists from the Baltic countries - Pakui Hardware and Young Girl Reading Group, in the exhibition titled “Solar Bodies” coinciding with one of the biggest projects of the Latvian Centenary “Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Baltic States” at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. On this occasion curators Valentinas Klimašauskas and Inga Lāce interviewed Daiga Grantina about the exhibition and her work in general.

Daiga Grantina has also recently participated at the Baltic Triennial 13 in Vilnius and Tallinn (2018), curated by Vincent Honoré, as well as exhibitions at Villa Vassilieff, Paris, and La Panacée, Montpellier (2018). She has also been taking part in the Bergen Assembly (2016) in Norway. Her recent monographic exhibitions have taken place in Kunstverein Hamburg (Germany, 2017) and Kunsthaus Bregenz (Austria, 2016). Her work has also been shown in Latvia at the solo exhibition at kim? Contemporary Art Centre in 2016 and in a group show “Portable Landscapes” at the Latvian National Museum of Art, organized by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Grantina is also a part of the artists’ collective in Paris called DOC which actively participates in the life and dynamics of the neighbourhood and art ecosystem of Paris. Daiga Grantina is represented by Galerie Joseph Tang in Paris.

Daiga Grantina will represent Latvia at the next year’s Venice Biennial with a project which is called “Lighthouse”. The richly charged metaphor was previously used as a symbol for metaphysics and religion, however, in our times of wars, immigration, climate change and technological acceleration the connotations of the ‘lighthouse’ might vary from a safe harbour to a symbol of changes. It may also refer to ever-changing borders between the sea and land and accelerating technology, as now the GPS and other digital technologies are used for navigation purposes instead of old-fashioned lighthouses.

VK: Historically there is a relationship between the discovery of materials and their history and development of art history as when certain colours are discovered and allow certain painterly developments. How do those material histories intertwine with your work?

DG: I am reading Michel Pastoureau that every French art student has read. He wrote a series of books, each on the history of a colour. As for red it starts with the cave paintings, done in the very first colour available, obtained from the iron oxide in the earth. I am very interested how colour is entwined with matter, light included. I mean the palette of the screen is also specific, just as paper, foam or textiles. Joseph Albers would recommend colour tests with paper for example. A palette is its own parallel human and non-human, a sort of non-categorical, history.

VK: I’m very much interested in the relation of your work to art history and specifically to realism and symbolism as in the context of your new work at “Solar Bodies” exhibition at Musée d’Orsay. As it is mentioned in the exhibition text, your new work may be read as a reference to “The Étretat Cliffs after the Storm” by Gustave Courbet or may be associated with “The Past” by Lithuanian symbolist, pre-abstractionist Konstantinas Čiurlionis. I‘m pretty sure some other references may also be mentioned. However, to systemise the question in the background of those two works, one may say that, firstly, what really stands out in your work is the attention to a detail, which is an attribute of realism. Secondly, what is also very noticeable is the relation of detail to the totality of your installation, to landscape, to larger world, cosmology, which is part of the symbolist thinking. Thus to continue this line of thought I’m very interested how your work combines a few different thinking schools and styles as inspirations. Could you tell us more why you specifically mentioned “The Étretat Cliffs after the Storm” and “The Past” and not other works? Is it because of the materiality of the depicted objects, landscapes, painterly situations?

DG: There are some encounters that are especially sticky. With this painting it’s like you could smell the freshness of the air after the storm, Courbet catches the aftermath, the relief which might be a pun on painting the cliffs and his way of doing it with a knife. Looking back it actually marks a moment in his life before a storm. During the preparation for the show in Musée d’Orsay I inspected the painting more closely, and only with technical means, by zooming into the high-definition pictures where the water meets the pebbles, a group of figures appears, like a secret announcement. So, yes, I can relate to what you say about the detail. The detail is potential for a scope. And it seems to me that it is what Čiurlionis has painted in “The Past”. Somehow he is depicting the opposite of Courbet with this radiating flat stone face but the feeling that comes along is similar and the titles are suggestive of that. What I am trying to do is relate detail and landscape. The subject is what I receive from these paintings, that moment of appearance in a sense of a personal reality effect and the work puts that into a perspective, a scope.

VK: One may also add that your work may be also described as a sculptural installation. Having that in mind, what historical sculptures or installations influenced your oeuvre?

DG: The year I immigrated to Germany Jessica Stockholder made a work called “Growing Rock Candy Mountain Grasses in Canned Sand” and one of my favourite fashion items was these pink leggings made of lycra which was also the main material for that installation in Münster the same year. Much later I discovered that work in a catalogue at Sautter and Lackmann bookstore. That made me want to wear my leggings again which had not happened yet and at around the same time I was introduced to the work of Eva Hesse by my theory teacher Hanne Loreck in Hamburg, and I was sketching around with film stuff and montage which is still how I think of installing. It’s like laying out the film and moving inside and around.

VK: As your work is very spatial and even may be called operatic because of its richness of colours and shapes, is there also some connection to music, which you find interesting?

DG: I realized that colour became interesting to me through texture first. So the change or movement of colour and that colour acts like a sensual interface. It includes all dimensions we want to think of. I visited the lighthouse cathedral of Auguste Perret in Le Havre recently for which Kandinsky was a major influence. The windows are composed in relation to the sunset. It felt like watching an Agnes Martin “Blade Runner” version with a soundtrack by Klaus Schulze. It’s like the architecture was not out there but inside me.

VK: Have you ever experienced synaesthesia, for example, hearing words as colours or colours as music?

DG: As part of a workshop, that was an experiment in making a collective show that addressed the process of ‘installing’ as a collective creative act, we underwent a session of hypnosis. It was led by Magda Kachouche, a member of the DOC association in Paris. The task was to focus on all our senses and fold them into one feeling: the sound of the street and body functions, the feel of the feet touching the concrete ground, the taste in the mouth and the focus on breath in order to see with the eyes closed. Somehow these few minutes of being all together and sharing something so non spectacular worked as sort of sublimation, from which we could rethink our encounter and the individual agenda. From automatic writing to automatic installation so to say.

VK: Colour is a very important and distinctive part of your work. How have you made the choice of your palette?

DG: If we talk about the “Toll” exhibition then what I tried is to slide on a scale between red and blue, sometimes slightly beyond and playing with the lights. The red was used as baseline which is also the large red wave in the space, right at the left front. Out of this the magenta, pink and deep purple shades are emerging. The red wave flows out in a heart-like structure. It was important for me to have a general warm or heated feeling about the show so it works with the greenhouse like architecture of the roof. We can see the sky through it. There is also a cooler corner behind the big blanket hanging in the back of the space. With each colour comes a texture to the feel so the shades can be really varied — sliding between red and blue.

MATERIALIZER OF LIGHT

An interview with Latvian-born artist Daiga Grantiņa in Riga by Odrija Fišere

Daiga Grantiņa was born in Latvia in 1985, at age seven her family moved to Hamburg, Germany. Grantiņa studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg (HFBK Hamburg), and at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. She then lived and worked in Berlin for several years, but for a while now she has chosen Paris as her home base. There she works with Joseph Tang gallery, but she still keeps close ties with Berlin, where she is represented by Matthew Gallery.

In January 2017, Kunstverein Hamburg presented a solo exhibition by Grantiņa (on view through April 2, 2017), whereas during the past year Grantiņa has had shows at Galerie Joseph Tang in Paris, Stefan Lundgren gallery in Majorca, kim? Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, and at 83 Pitt Street in New York. Some of her latest group shows include *Adhesive Products* at Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; *Les Levres Nues* – DOC, in Paris; and *The Pleasure of the Text*, at Campoli Presti gallery in London. Grantiņa's work has been covered in such publications as Les Inrockuptibles, Kaleidoscope, Artforum, Artagenda.com, and Frieze International, among others.

When asked about her relationships with galleries, Grantiņa answers that

Daiga Grantiņa, 2015 © Photo: Toan Vu-Huu

she likes relationships in which you don't know where they will take you, and where nothing is predictable. It seems that Grantiņa follows a similar principle when creating her works – the creative process itself is important, as is randomness – as the foundation for the work. Also, it's important that in the artwork there is something that the artist herself does not yet know.

You studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg, and at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Those institutions are linked to many famous names in the history of contemporary art. Why did you choose to study art, and why at these schools specifically?
I didn't choose Hamburg; that's just where I woke up (*laughs*). In 1992 my parents decided to move to Hamburg, and that's where I received my general schooling. My art teacher in high school inspired me to continue my education in the arts. He himself had studied at the Hamburg Academy when Joseph Beuys was an instructor there. At that age, the decision itself to study art was more important than where.

Who did you learn under?
Various artists, and also guest professors. I studied under a very conceptual artist, and then under another one I studied painting. In Vienna I was in the sculpture group, but at that time I was most interested in experimental film. I mostly worked with Super 8 film. Slowly my interests developed further; after my studies, I began to work with the projection space itself – the space between the projector and the surface of the wall or screen on which the light lands. In this space, I began to introduce objects that reflect light, and in that way, they materialize the projection space itself. Over time, the ever-increasing number of objects that began entering this light space took over. Basically, the objects ate up the light (*laughs*). Now the ray of light is slowly returning. At the kim? exhibition, there's great emphasis on that – starting with how natural light is "framed", or materialized (I'm always talking about "tunnels of light") in the way that architecture embraces light – how it accommodates it. The rays enter the space through the tunnel and become physical; they become a part of the sculpture – that's the main idea.

Was this – what you are describing as tunnels of lights – on view at your solo show at Joseph Tang gallery in Paris?
The name of the Paris show was *Grotto from Glammar* – I wanted to transfer the idea of a grotto into a standardized space – make the space into a grotto. I used drywall to make

Daiga Grantiņa. Grotto from Glammar, exhibition at Galerie Joseph Tang (2016). Photo: Aurélien Mole

a smaller space within the larger room – like the Russian nesting doll principle. I cut holes in the drywall which related to both the silhouettes of the sculptures and the perception perspective from within the "grotto" itself. In this way, the holes also became sculptural material – just like in the case with the tunnels of light. There were sculptures both within and outside of the "grotto". This sculptural place was more like a permeable frame – similar to an arcade.
In a sense, it's a way for me to format the work – like a jpg or tif. A work can have various formats – it can have greater resolution, or less. Just like a picture, except in three dimensions. I'm slowly understanding that in this way, through objects, I have arrived at sculptural space. I believe it's a retrospective process: to step back and notice that things aren't going only in one direction – they're jumping backwards.

Like crochet…
Exactly: mental crochet! I'm crocheting with the help of time; I lay down one layer, then a second one, then I take a deeper layer, and then – the surface. It's not as if I begin with an idea or a theme. There's the material aspect – colors, textures, scale and form, how the material reacts with light – and I try to communicate with the process; sometimes I even suspend it, in order to understand in which direction it can go. Perhaps that which goes on between me and the material could be called psychoanalysis.

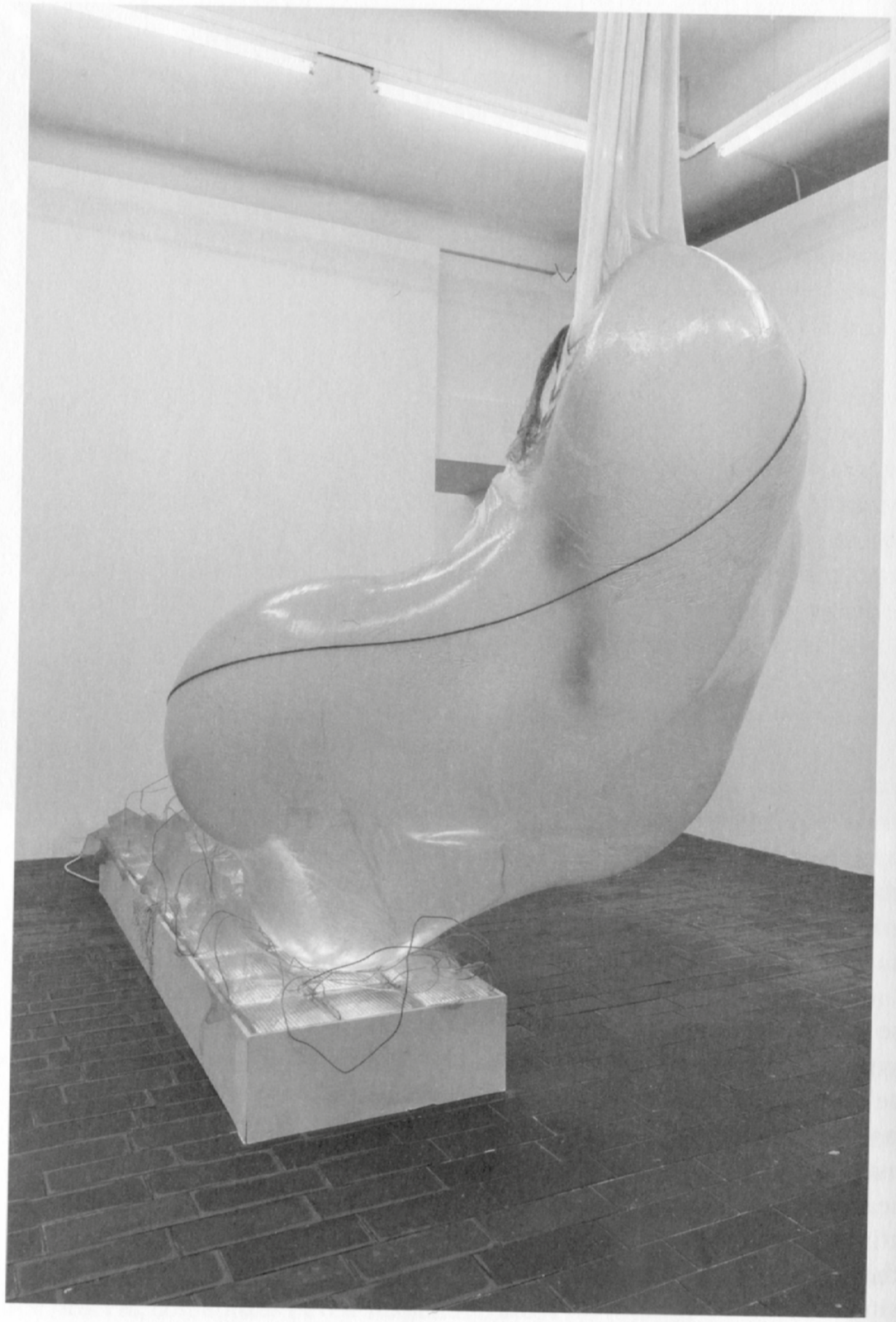
So, what is important to you is an interest in the space, an interest in light, and then the process itself. How important is the end result to you?
If I have a concrete idea, if I know what it should look like – what the end result should be, then there is nowhere for me to take the next step. In that case, the idea becomes a product, or a fetish of mine. I try to pierce through this. That means overcoming myself and looking at: how I can move forward; what are the work's prospects; and what kind of scene, tunnel or window this work will open. That is much more important then the end result in itself. Probably the most crucial thing is – what sort of effect does the work have on me; the sense that I realize that it is somehow affecting me (either positively or negatively), and that lets me continue working on it.

Does that mean that none of your works are finished?
It's important to me that they remain open. That there's something there that I still don't know myself.

How do you know at what point to stop?

Daiga Grantiņa. Grotto from Glammar, exhibition at Galerie Joseph Tang (2016). Photo: Aurélien Mole

I sense that the work isn't letting me do anything; it's resisting. You sense that he or she is… There are also works which I've divided into parts, but just like with a hydra – you cut off one head, and five grow in its place… Sometimes there are practical reasons, e.g., the piece has been created in an exhibition room, and it's become so large that it can't get through the door, etc. That's when you understand that the work is like an organism that has its own place. The process was there, but now it simply does not exist physically anymore, and it transforms into something else. Moreover, works have different natures – some have a heart, and nothing more can be done



Daiga Grantiņa. Pharmakon and Being Pool (Buff).
Exhibition Heap-core,,, at kim? Contemporary Art Centre (2016). Photo: Toan Vu-Huu

to them; others are like octopuses – you cut off one arm, but it keeps on living nevertheless. But I don't want to say that an octopus doesn't have a heart…

You talk about works as if they were living things. Is that how you perceive them?
Yes, and I hope that that is how they perceive me (*laughs*).

When you talk, it sounds a bit like it's coming from the pages of a science-fiction novel or a movie. Are you interested in this genre?
I'm very interested! Actually, it's very difficult to avoid any subject – you go on the internet and they jump out at you themselves. You just have to keep your eyes open. This intensity is important to me – so many things are going on at the same time! All of these different worlds are happening in one window. I'm interested in the latest information of all kinds, and music has always been especially important. It's like nourishment. Everything is nourishment.

What do you listen to? Do you compose music yourself?
No, I have yet to compose anything, but I'm interested. Right now I'm listening to the latest albums by Kaytlin Aurelia, Solange, and Christian Naujoks.

Do you create your works yourself? Do you have assistants?
I do it myself, although I've reached the point where I need four hands because, in terms of size, the works have outgrown me. I've had good luck – for a while now I've been assisted by a young Estonian artist, Kristin Reiman.

What does your studio look like?
It depends – at the start of the working process, everything is very organized. I like to organize everything – I take down from the shelves things that could be important, and I make little piles of materials according to texture and color.

Do you purchase or "find" your materials?
At the time when I began working with sculpture, I worked at the Palais de Tokyo's residence Le Pavillon, in Paris. You can do a lot of walking there, and that's how I found many things. Especially after Christmas – people throw out a lot of things, especially shiny ones, which are of interest to me in relation to projections. Now I don't want to wait for Christmas... (*laughs*). In addition, I like to select materials according to the colors in which I see the place – every city has its own color which has been somehow integrated into its environment.

What is that color in Riga?
Riga has a lot of green – for instance, on the scaffolding erected alongside buildings; there are also shades of red. It's rather close to nature. There's not much of the color blue, as there is in, for example, Berlin and Hamburg. Shades of brown and gray also dominate there. In Italy, orange is a very conspicuous color.

How great of a role does chance play in your work?
That's the foundation on which I base it. It could also be looked upon as one of the variants of conceptualism (*laughs*). In any case, it would be in the same category as Gil Joseph Wolman's *L'Anticoncept*. I think it's very closely related to one's perception of life. That's how it enters the work, and that's as much as you allow.

Do you follow along with what's going on in contemporary art?
I'm very interested in conversations with artists, what artists themselves write and publish, and how active they are when it comes to taking responsibility for their works. I also think it's very important to actively accept your role and not hide behind the works. I also tell myself that as a form of therapy (*laughs*).

Do you position yourself as a Latvian artist?
No.

Does that even seem relevant to you?
No. I have a very difficult relationship with the concept of identity. And that's not just in terms of nationality. I think that is related to the fact that I grew up with several languages. Depending on which language I'm speaking, my voice changes. The Latvian language has its own voice frequency; that of the German language is much lower; and French is somewhere between the eyes and the nose. All of that, I think, influences identity. I think it's important that I don't have this sense, and that I don't search for my national identity. There are a few people whom I talk to a lot, and with whom I spend a lot of time – and that's enough. And that's something that you can create yourself.

Daiga Grantiņa. Grotto from Glammar, exhibition at Galerie Joseph Tang (2016). Photo: Photo: Aurélien Mole

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Chloe Stead, 'Daiga Grantina: Pillars Sliding off Coat-ee'
Spike Art, March 2017

Daiga Grantina
"Pillars Sliding off Coat-ee"
Kunstverein in Hamburg
28.1. – 2.4.2017

Like a fair few of her contemporaries, Daiga Grantina (*1985) makes idiosyncratic, zeitgeisty sculptures that can be seen as abstractions of bodies. But, whereas the proxy bodies of, say, Olga Balema or Jesse Darling often emphasise the imperfect nature of our real ones (which drip, ooze, slump and collapse), Grantina's sculptures are remarkably self-contained and in many cases appear not entirely human. In this show, for instance, *Head bark* (2017) looks more like a strung-up jellyfish than a person. Bunched-up material is held together by wire to create a centre of sorts that, along with tentacle-like strips of wood which graze the floor, are wrapped in a translucent "skin".

Daiga Grantina
Installation view

Deep-sea creatures like jellyfish and octopuses (as well as many insects) fascinate and repel us in equal measure because their physiology is so different from our own. Grantina taps into this primordial fear through her intricate layering of materials. In works like *Playing house* (2017), different types of fabric and plastic are crumpled together, coated with a layer of plastic the colour of pre-op, antiseptic-swabbed skin and threaded through with wires. The result is distinctly creepy, because it speaks of a near future in which cyborgs have broken out of our imaginations and infiltrated our daily lives.

The eerie science fiction aesthetic is balanced out with the bon-bon hue of other sculptures, such as the almost lickable *Buff gang or Nectar bough* (2017). Its bulbous shapes are created by elastane stretched and made rigid with a layer of liquid plastic. Through the use of a specialised "pulling" machine, which stretches and folds air into the mixture, its molecular structure is actually changed during the production, enabling it to be both hard and soft in its finished form. Liquid plastic also used in other works from the same series, *Buff off RED* (2016–17) and *Buff in Flight* (2016). These pieces, along with *Tadasana* (2017), hang from the ceiling and imitate the protective sphere of an insect's cocoon or a crustacean's shell. They are curiously human-sized, however, bringing to mind a huge Venus flytrap or its horror-movie equivalent, the vagina dentata.

Not all of these assemblages are as successful as others. *White Corridor-odour (The Mountain)* (2017) attempts to be a site-specific modification of the white cube, but it ends up looking like an experiment that could have been left in the studio. Overall, though, the show lures the viewer in with an attractive facade that leaves one with a pervading sense of unease not unlike the experience of looking at a many-legged insect.

Chloe Stead

DAIGA GRANTINA
by Stephanie Seidel

Daiga Grantina's sculptures and installations are material experiments as much as they are associative formations. Subjecting collaged material to associations of bodies and landscapes, Grantina addresses human desires and longings as they become activated through the eye of the viewer. Grantina directs the view in manifold ways, both secluding and revealing, as she opens surfaces and volumes at one point and seals them through the amalgamation of disparate materials at another. Spanning between the poles of figure and landscape, her layered sculptural installations are at times voyeuristic, panoramic and archeological.

In her exhibition *The Mountain Guide* (2015), shown at Mathew Gallery, Berlin, Grantina set the exhibition space as a landscape, populated by sculptures, which acted as its "inhabitants." Winding up out from the floor, protruding from the walls as well as sitting heavily and slothfully on the ground, these sculptures amalgamate disparate materials into dismembered figures. Floating along a Plexiglas bell of a jellyfish, bright red textile bobbles wiggle along plastic encrusted wires. A glass marble is suspended in the wide throat of an extractor tube staring back at the viewer like the abject iris of Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Another work supports a net of wire distended with transparent bulges of an anonymous, coagulated liquid, streaked with slim red strings like veins, summoning the female body as morphologically muddled and abstracted. A little crystal earring dangles coquettishly over the whole ensemble as if to lure prey into a trap.

Grantina's works are slowly grown ensembles that break down and metabolize their material like fuel or nutrients, mutating their matter by forces of heat, adhesion and the pull of gravity. They are not singular things in themselves but rather an aggregate of varied substances, flowing into each other, rejecting each other, merged forcefully and stringing into process-like narrations which are elliptical, irrational, sensual. Interference and overlapping result in barbed frictions. These shimmering, sticky concatenations evince the irreconcilable tension that results from deliberate making and a yielding to the unfolding of material properties, forces of forming and deforming.

At the center of Grantina's exhibition is the eponymous piece *The Mountain Guide*, both a figure and a landscape. In a wreckage of wire, plexi, plastic and aluminum enveloped by a floppy membrane of acrylic, the work suspends from the ceiling at the same time leaning on an askew crutch-like pole, dug in the ground. Its leg and poles are wrapped in cables bundling energy, while blue marble eyes vigilantly peep out of a multitude of folds and creases of plastic sheeting. Through the multiple layers of half-melted plastic, a projector throws a grid pattern, similar to a map, in splintered facets and at kaleidoscopic array onto the room, as if diagramming the position of the other figures in the room.

The sculpture's posture resembles the pose of the mountain guide in Balthus' painting *The Mountain* (1937). Here, seven scattered figures are depicted on an imaginary mountain plateau, unaware of one another. Their

~~Source~~, 2015 Installation view, The Mountain Guide, Mathew, Berlin, 2015 Courtesy: Galerie Joseph Tang and Mathew (p. 203)
Buff in Red, 2016 Installation view, Heap-core,,, kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, 2016 Photo: Toan Vu-Huu Courtesy: Galerie Joseph Tang (opposite page)

gaze is trancelike. Rendered in exacting detail, the realism of the figures and landscape seem at odds with the surrealistically contrived narrative. A young woman, stretching her upper body into the sun is subject to the desirous look of the mountain guide, who is kneeling on the ground resting on his hiking pole. While the connection between the figures is dramatically mute, there is a tight correspondence between the shape and posture of each person and the surrounding mountain formations. Here, the figures seem to merge with the mountains and become as inert as the rocks, while the landscape gains vitality through theatrical light. The distinction between animate and inanimate, body and place, seems to be suspended as matter in a state of phase change – the precise material condition of which Grantina induces in her exhibition.

Balthus' brother Pierre Klossowski describes this conversion of materials into one another, writing about the effect of light on the landscape:

"The landscape of Turin, the monumental squares, the promenades along the Po River, were bathed in a kind of 'Claude Lorraine' luminosity […], a diaphanousness that removed the weight of things and made them recede into an infinite distance. The stream of light here became a stream of laughter – *the laughter from which truth emerges*, the laughter in which all identities explode […]. What also exploded was the meaning that things can have or lose for other things, not in terms of a limited linkage or a narrow context, but in terms of *variations of light* (despite the fact that this light is perceived by the mind before it exists for the eye, or that a reminiscence emanates from its rays)."

In her compositing of aluminum tubes, Plexiglas, cables, plastic objects and wires, Grantina explodes functionality into a vortex of material and haptic properties which sediment into unstable bodies. Light here is treated as a material equally destabilized and deformed, as it filters the manifold components of the installation. The works of *The Mountain Guide* oscillate between figure and micro-landscapes, gestalts, which shift in scale. These voluptuous, slumped characters, reveal mini-vistas within their cracked surfaces: mountains and valleys built-up of smoldering plastic and bent metal, suffused with projected light, marbled with stripped wire.

Grantina's sculptural approach to landscape continues in her solo exhibition *Heap-core,,,* for kim? Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, Latvia (2016). Building a second wall that frame the windows of the space in a dramatic angle turning them into light shafts soaring into the sky, Grantina manipulates the architecture of the exhibition space so that the walls seem exceptionally thick, giving the whole space a darkened vault-like enclosure which seems to be cloistered underground. Sculpting the light that is directed into the space *The Natural History of Tan* hits the skin of the figures inside the space as the latter becomes a secluded grotto. This motif of the skin continues in *Buff in Bloom, Glow and Thumos*, a group of sculptures shown in the frame of the group exhibition *Adhesive Products* at Bergen Kunsthall at the same time, comprised of resin-stiffened spandex, suspended from electrical cords, interspersed with luminous plastic strings and with gaping openings of bent metal ventilation pipes. The outer shell of the works is skin colored and leathery – "Buff" originally referred to the color of a buffalo's skin. They recall hollowed out nudes, reposing open-air, each bearing tiny traces of personality, such as the accessories of a grand dame: a fluffy garland and pouting aluminum wings; bright green curls and blue-ish veils. Yet, their cast-off skin bears no flesh. The skin is not substance but threshold, an interface that does not divide an inside from an outside but assembles contact, where light and surface momentarily hold shape before shape-shifting again.

Sarah Hyde, 'Young and Fun, Paris Internationale Fair Cements Its Reputation as a Serious Contender'
Artnet, 19 October 2016

The second edition of the fair Paris Internationale, directed by the youthful duo Silvia Ammon and Clément Delépine, held its preview October 18, a day before FIAC. This fair may be young and fun, but it's certainly not a game and it has doubled in size since its debut last year.

The fair takes place in the 19th century hôtel particulier home of Calouste Gulbenkian, situated just by the Arc De Triomphe, in the heartland of the most luxurious arrondissement. This is the house that featured in the Bertrand Bonello's film Saint Laurent, and Paris Internationale takes place in it, including the servant's quarters and the back stairs.

The entrance to the fair is very discreet. There is hardly any indication that there is an important art fair taking place inside, but this low key entrance works well, as does the apparent informality of the event. The atmosphere is enthusiastic, smart, friendly, and charming rather than dry and professional. All of this contributes to reducing expectations, which is perhaps intentional and means visitors will be all the more dazzled by the quality of the fair contained within.

I was lucky enough catch up with Delépine, co-director of the fair at the entrance. "Participation at the fair is by invitation only. Gallerists submit their proposals and we allocate them spaces," he said, explaining how Paris Internationale works and what makes it special.

Delépine's extensive experience as a curator at the Swiss Institute in New York is evident and he delights in working with the space of the hôtel particulier. "It is so much more interesting than a sterile white space," he said.

"We try and keep the cost of the booths down because we want people to take risks, I want the gallerists to feel that they can be braver," he said, when asked about the cost to exhibitors.

The actual fee is between €4,000 and €8,000, depending on the size and location. Delépine has also included seven non-profit organisations into the mix, allowing them to sell at the fair at no extra cost, keeping the mixture vital and pure. To confuse this fair with anything outside or against the Parisian art establishment would be a mistake, however, as the large contingent of serious Swiss collectors leaving as I arrived demonstrated.

Delépine would like to see Paris Internationale as absolutely complementary to FIAC, although there is no official relationship between the two at this stage and FIAC has its own junior section. His nose screwed up when I suggested that it was a "feeder fair." With prices ranging from between $1,000 and $50,000, the artists represented here are important if not yet stellar, and many have represented their countries at the biennales and have shown at major museums.

One of the intended functions of the fair is to bring international galleries into Paris. Of 53 galleries and 7 project spaces hailing from 19 countries, only 11 are local. Five are the galleries that established the fair: Crèvecoeur, High Art, Antoine Levi, Guillaume Sultana, and Gregor Staiger.

When I discussed this melting pot effect with Elyse Derosia, from the Bodega Gallery in New York, she said: "This was one of the major attractions of the fair, a chance to see works from artists who are represented in other countries and perhaps find potential synergy."

On the day of the opening the atmosphere was cracking with energy and optimism. The booths are relatively small and gallerists can only offer a taste of what they sell, but it is the thoughtful positioning of each gallery that makes Paris Internationale work so well. It is almost like eating a carefully prepared tasting menu, one delightful artistic exchange follows the next. By careful curation, each is more outstanding because of its comparison with its close neighbor, and I suspect that Delépine and Ammon have big careers as curators ahead of them.

Moving around the fair, Dubai's Green Art Gallery makes brilliant use of the display cabinets in their space, to show the works of Nazgol Ansarinia, a female artist from Tehran, who has represented her country at the Venice Biennale. Her practice involves breaking down domestic items and putting them back together again to explore the inner workings of a social system. By placing the works in this context they gain another layer of complexity.

Further along, Joseph Tang gallery maximizes the use of the space, displaying Daiga Grantina's show stopping Three Graces from the ceiling, blowing my theory that gallerists here are showing works that are easy to see on a domestic scale, and making Delépine's words about wanting gallerists to take risks echo in my mind. The pieces own the space. In the next room, the delicate conceptual works of Guy Mees, exhibited by Brussel's non-profit Bureau des Realities, appear even more fragile and minimal because of this genius juxtaposition.

The phrase "expect the unexpected" is perhaps the best guideline for visitors, and works by Kaoru Arima, from Tokyo's Misako Rosen gallery, were particularly strong in the basement kitchen. My journey into the underbelly of the house continued with more joyful surprises, including discovering Bailey Scieszka, a larger than life performance artist from Detroit, as she lit up the gloomy laundry room.

Other personal highlights included Basim Magdy's work at Hunt Kastner and Sean Townley at Antoine Levi, the amusing paintings by Celia Hempton at Sultana, and, of course, the intrepid OUTPOST, coming all the way from Norwich, on the top floor.

EMA⁄LIN

Melissa Canbaz, ‘Critics’ Picks: Daiga Grantina’
Artforum, 02 October 2015

The exhibition “The Mountain Guide” by Daiga Grantina features five abstract sculptures composed of found objects that together articulate a vision simultaneously poetic and disturbingly uncanny. The individual works consist of complex striations in which transparent and metal materials, melted plastic, and cables are woven together until they start to resemble organic forms while taking on other, alien, futuristic qualities.

Here and there, elements emerge that breathe life into the bizarre shapes. In I source D (all works 2015), for instance, red cables and wires run through a figure as if they were pumping blood through its body. A work lying on the floor, titled PF—also known as Path-Finder in the exhibition’s accompanying pamphlet—is a cocoon-like formation that, like an ouroboros, bites its own tail. This is reminiscent of how, in analytical psychology, the iconography of “self-consuming” serves as a metaphor for the early development phase of childhood in which no conscious differentiation between inner and outer worlds has been learned, and also no gender identity is yet assumed. The piece hanging on the wall, Realm of Desire, takes this thought further. Based on a treatise by psychologists Alfred Kind and Curt Moreck, “Morphology, Physiology and the Sexual-Psychological Significance of the Secondary Gender Characteristics of the Female,” this work hints at an examination of a female history of sexuality and the erotic. Characteristic of the whole show, Grantina sketches a visual landscape that, by way of a multilayered analogy, opens out into an eruption of psychological moments.

Translated from German by Diana Reese

EMA⁄LIN

Mary Rinebold, ‘Critics’ Picks: Daiga Grantina’
Artforum, 30 November 2014

In psychoanalytic terms, a visual or a literary preoccupation with abject forms, such as sludge or refuse, is a manifestation of the death drive—an instinctive, often repressed aspiration to return to formless, corporeal material. Daiga Grantina obliquely explores this fascination with indescribable matter via diverse references and an abstract, plastic lexicon. For instance Crashino (all works 2014), which references J. G. Ballard’s 1973 novel Crash, consolidates scrap materials: a repurposed red plastic automobile brake light; slot-machine ribbons that depict iconic fruit shapes. Patches of red sprouts resembling algae populate the assemblage’s surface, altogether secured by red thread coated with an eerie yet appealing clear acrylic gel.

Nearby, an otherworldly mood permeates Quitting the House, a vertically oriented composite of white gel matted over and through a twisting bulk of silver twine suspended from the ceiling by cord and hook. This thick, congealed braid meets the floor in the shape of an eccentric-looking tripronged claw that alludes to Baba Yaga, a forest-hut-dwelling female archetype from Slavic folklore and a historically ambiguous figure whose abode was set atop an unforgettable identifying feature: a pair of chicken legs. 1930s-era Russian critics associated the stilt-based houses designed by Le Corbusier with the avian appendages, which here signify Grantina’s fixation on misshapen anatomies. According to Grantina, the sculpture at the gallery entrance, ЯR—an interpretation of a carnival taffy-pulling machine, rendered with reflective polycarbonate foil, upon which a white, circular grid against a fuchsia background has been digitally projected—is intended to provide an amorphous, glimmering map to the somatic exhibition that follows.

EMA⁄ ⁄LIN

Barbara Sirieix, ‘Daiga Grantina’s “Legal Beast Language”’
Art Agenda, 07 November 2014

There are not many galleries above the ground in Paris. Every time I walk up the narrow stairs to the second floor of 1 rue Charles-François Dupuis, I brace myself, as if I’m about to enter a state of altered air density or gravity. Previous events there have often dwelled on constraining the political body, such as the two-year program of “The Institute of Social Hypocrisy” initiated by artist Victor Boullet and developed between 2009–2011, where curator Damien Airault was locked up inside for a week and was exclusively fed on whale meat. The apartment was later taken over by gallerist Joseph Tang, who continued with the radicality of these earlier artistic projects. Last winter Boullet, now also represented by the gallery, removed the windows of the space and arranged a wall where only a tiny Alice in Wonderland-sized door allowed Joseph access to his office. These past experiences of the space lead me to be on the lookout, and true to form, the current exhibition induces an unease in the viewer, soliciting the body’s sense of place towards a greater consciousness of the enthralling, blood-curdling chaos of space.

The first Paris solo show I saw of Berlin-based Latvian artist Daiga Grantina comes as a genuine surprise. The artist’s previous projects had generated mostly video and photographic works; she seems interested in an extended materiality of film towards the mineral, as if drawn by the vortex of contemporary archaeology, working on layering images and materials towards an organic flatness. With “Legal Beast Language” the artist takes a steep turn towards sculpture, revealing her interest in the densely theorized concept of the formless, from Georges Bataille to Rosalind Krauss. Allowing for the three-dimensional, the exhibition unleashes a pack of semiotic dogs.

The display stands as an organic annexation of the space, where its politics mate with the materials via language. The title “Legal Beast Language,” a quote from the glossary in Ben Marcus’s book The Age of String and Wire (1995), situates the exhibition as a system of animal semiotics, where one can think about how words come into contact with matter to shape forms, in a general interrogation of the definition of figuration. This gesture works as a cycle of referentiality; as Marcus quotes the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson in his foreword, “Every word was once an animal.”

Across the threshold stands the riddle ЯR (all works 2014), an unpronounceable name for an installation harnessing a range of potential realities between two letters: it looks like a massive crumple of torn-up bouquet wrapping; or an old lady sitting in a pink lampshade; or an astronaut sleeping in a crashed spaceship; or a cyborg grotto; or... Each proposition remains interchangeable. The materials used are as variable and unpredictable as the weather: mostly transparent or reflecting plastics, heated, folded, creased, or wrecked around a projector. A moving beam of light reflects on the lavish folds of the wrapping, so every breath of the projected image reshapes the work. The creases cast trembling shadows on the wall like twitching membranes, reminiscent of the microscopic filming of cells.

ЯR stands as a sort of permanent referent for the other pieces in the exhibition, as the native work while the others are born elsewhere, in the artist’s studio. It stands as the commander of an alien army in turmoil, a prime number of an absurd equation over chaos. Together they unfold in the room as a spill of mucus, plugging into the walls of the gallery in a variety of ways.

“Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy,” wrote JG Ballard in the 1995 introduction to his novel Crash, a suitable referent to the title of Grantina’s floor piece Crashino, to the rear of ЯR. On a red Plexiglas plate stands a lump of burned brake lights and slot machine rolls, flecked with a rosso corsa lichen, giving form to the contraction of the words “crash” and “casino.” Next, stands Quitting the House, an eerie stalactite held up by a tripod and attached by strings at the ceiling, a failing supporting arch of knotted plastic and metal innards for the space. Opposite, vertically sticking up in the air is FRUSC, a phallic club made out of a mannequin arm wrapped up with small yellow lights, transparent plastic, artificial asparaguses, and wires. Stepping back towards ЯR, Mouth Harness hangs uncertainly from the ceiling, as a melted cornucopia pouring phony translucent red grapes and plastic necklaces; the result of an attack of heat which has formed some lace pattern upon the synthetic material, hanging as a chimerical garment.

Each sculptural gesture resonates as an evocation of the body and its limbs, and their relation to the space through the way they invest its architecture. Grantina develops a conflicted dynamic system that simultaneously generates and devours objects, a black hole turned into a wild beast, further expanding her interest in physics, and her interrogation of the matter of light, which is present throughout the entire show. Despite the pandemonium of forms, it feels that she is ultimately reducing her enquiry to a very simple question: what is a gallery truly, if not a space wrapping up light?