

*The flowers were once flowers,
but now they are chunks, blobs, globs*

by Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, with cameos by Nora Aurrekoetxea

In the room a cluster of tin and bronze rings hang on the walls. They protrude like metallic molluscs. I think of the barnacles which I used to see during summers in Santander, when I was a little girl. I would encounter them stuck on the surface of rocks in the coast, living their salty crustacean existences—alive—or presented on platters in restaurants. Dead? I couldn't really tell. I used to look at them with a mixture of fascination and disgust. They were alien-like, but very flavoursome. I used to put them in my mouth, half expecting them to wriggle out of it.

The rings come across as a tiny army, hovering at eye level. Like a swarm. I don't know yet if a benevolent or a malevolent one. I wonder if a ring is still ring if it doesn't have a finger to prop it. Does it become an empty shell? Or is the body just filler? Like the ring displays at the city's old museum, there's something uncanny about these disembodied objects, which must have belonged to someone once, centuries ago. At the museum I always felt like if I squinted my eyes I would be able to make out the contours of skeleton phalanges, criss-crossing the rings like ghostly remnants. Here, at the gallery in Madrid, there are no bones, imaginary or else. The question of ownership remains unanswered.

*Nora, hi. You could maybe lay on the couch today, rather than sitting?
Please take your shoes off, if you don't mind.
You were telling me the other day about your dream, the one about the contrasting
approaches to the question of ornament of William Morris and Adolf Loos. For the
former, the idea of the beautifully decorative was something to celebrate and preserve.
For the latter, ornament was something akin to an aesthetic crime, banal and frivolous—
a harbinger, even, of planned obsolescence. I'm curious as to why this tension is so
obviously important to you... I guess I'm wondering if we could boil this question down
into a consideration of the idea of surplus, of excess, of what's essential and what's not.
Is pleasure, aesthetic or else, a basic necessity for you?*

Lorena! how are you??? ooohh yes.... i would love to lay down on the couch, thanks.
i had a very hard week and i am exhausted.

actually, I finished the last session quite angry, and frustrated.... It is very frustrating for me to see how
validation comes from external forces, how they shape the way we perceive our surroundings, creating a
hierarchy of what is important at a given time. this hierarchy will change trough time and space, won't be
solid or unmovable but binary, cis, in juxtaposition:

one OR another
instead of
one AND another,
conjunctive rather than disjunctive

i feel attracted to both positions, I guess what interests me is their arguments to prove their opinion.
personally, i find the debate so interesting because it makes me think of what is structural and what is
ornamental, and if so, where can we define a line.

i see ornament attached to the idea of desire, of impulse, of emotion. both ornament and crime as a pure
rational exercises to maximise economy, presuming there is no ornament in the straight and pure lines.

i see an imposed hierarchy based on an external logic where emotions are
sublimated to function, understanding function as production.
the question for me is between need and desire.
is desire structural?
can it be?

if we understand the concept structural as a way of organising things, what would happen if
the logic behind organising something was desire? is that enough?

you told me many times that in psychotherapy you differentiate the needs from desires in order to make
good decisions. needs are not negotiable, ("i am hungry "), desires however can be negotiable (we won't
discuss if i am eating or not, but we can negotiate what do we eat together).
But the fact that they are negotiable doesn't mean they are redundant, or less important.

i guess for me this is an exercise to discover up to which point my decisions are driven by desire, by
drives, or by convention.

The phrase "I bought flowers for myself" makes me think of the small acts of defiance we sometimes feel compelled to commit in our extremely regimented emotional and financial existences. Flowers, both expensive and ephemeral, are meant to be gifts, from nature and from people in our lives. We are meant to receive them if we have been "good", if we have achieved something, or if we look particularly obedient or lovable. Alternatively, we might receive them if the procurer has been "bad": nasty, deceitful, lazy, forgetful. An act of reparation to assuage guilt. The beauty of the flowers belies this cause-effect dialectic, ensnaring us into compliance through colours, smells and bulbous forms.

Buying flowers for oneself subverts that logic. It says: "I don't need your fucking approval or permission, or to wait for you to think that the time is right to reward me." Buying flowers for oneself requires a spunky sense of agency. It is a small gesture, but one that says "I'm worth having beautiful things around me that give me pleasure". In that sense, buying flowers for oneself has a certain onanistic or masturbatory quality to it. It's taking the question of pleasure into one's own hands. Like Clarissa Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel, whose very first line, "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" read like a veiled *carpe diem*, informing us that after a period of convalescence the protagonist is ready to once seize life once again.

Yes... I think I see what you mean. I just think it's interesting that you have chosen both flowers and rings for this exhibition. They are both classic "tokens" of love the classic patriarchal paradigm, the two kinds of "gifts" that men bestow on women as a proof of love and commitment. I was wondering what associations you might have to these?

Hahaha, COME ON, YOU KNOW ME...!
it feels you are again playing the role of trying to turn my work into something more rationalist,
IT'S SO ANNOYING!!
it is funny how someone from the outside comes and makes a whole new narrative about your intentions
within the work...
but we have talked before of how I position myself firmly against interpretation.
obviously i know that these selected objects have certain meanings, which it becomes a challenge itself to
try to isolate them from a specific narrative through form, getting somewhere else,
isn't it that the whole point?
otherwise i would write a manifest against marriage and romantic love as institution.
i guess the reason behind was desire, my fetish for rings on one hand, and also that i was working in a
flower shop until this COVID thing happened...
it was funny how people apologised when they bought flowers for themselves:
"oh no, don't wrap them they are *just* for myself!"
while other people would come seeking help, seeking meaning in these vessels called flowers:
"i am looking for apology flowers"

precisely flowers made me think about the role that transitional objects play in our lives. these object that
allow us to transform our fears, gain security or just act as vehicles of emotions, objectified somehow.

a meaning that is attached to it, unconsciously.

The flowers were once flowers, but now they are chunks, blobs, globs. The outlines of the original item can be definitely still be ascertained, but it seems that what was once organic has been crystallised into something inorganic. Some of them look like atomic mushrooms, congealed in their most dazzling and lethal state. On others, the edges are sharp and rough, like unpolished diamonds. The artist has sent me images of the process and I am fascinated by what I see on the small screen of my mobile phone. The flowers are cast, entombed in a pink matter that looks like bubble-gum. The bouquets become moulds, hollow. Like the rings. Only these will be filled with a mysterious substance and undergo an act of transformation, becoming these strange stalagmites. Alchemy.

The resulting textures are inviting. I feel like I want to touch them, put the tip on my tongue on them.

Nearby I see a metal-like plait, like an offering or a reliquary. Two plaits rather, elastic bands on one of their ends and weaved together like a hairy ouroboros. The ouroboros, yes, the ancient symbol representing the eternal renewal cycle: life, death and rebirth. A snake biting its own tail, perhaps just before shedding its old skin. The structure is perfect—rounded, thick, decorative but in a rather imposing way. I want to wear it around my neck, like piece of perverse jewellery.

Rings, flowers, plaits. Rings, flowers, plaits ... A part of me wants to say these works are all representations of very feminine accoutrements. But another voice begs me to remain watchful. They make me think of the girls on "Picnic in Hanging Rock", braiding each other's hair and picking up flowers in the field... on their way to oblivion. I sense violence lurking underneath. Do you?

it's funny you should say that... i recently started understanding violence differently, and yes, i believe we are constantly living violent experiences in the form of emotional encounters. It doesn't matter if it's another body what is in front, or a landscape, another language or an aesthetic experience. i believe this violence is positive, a transformation, a change, and every change *is* violent in a way. but i think you are referring to violence like a conspiracy, something uncanny in the feminine aesthetic that has been stolen from the meaning of violence, of power, of agency. a violence that challenges the traditional, acceptable face of femininity, as something nice and cute.

a force that becomes desiring,
rather than desirable.