

An endless question

Gonzalo Herrero Delicado

Fear and love. Violence and kindness. Explicit and hidden. Domestic and urban. Gendered and neutral. Hard and soft. The work of Nora Aurrekoetxea is about opposite feelings, emotions and meanings. One rarely encounters a body of work that fosters you to question your own thinking at so many levels. Hers is a powerful riot of symbolisms, open to different interpretations and narratives, often contradictory. Different attributes and elements that play with our perception and the very meaning of things. Yet Nora's work moves beyond standardised symbolism to accompany you into an intimate journey and experience between the sculptures and the people, and between the materials themselves. What at first might seem the result of an error and trial creative process, it is in fact a delicate and careful juxtaposition of materials and shapes, all strategically arranged to create a very personal and intimate symphony.

This text is a good exercise to post-rationalise my own thoughts. Of course, these are mere interpretations of Nora's work, because her work is both widely generous and open, very difficult to be placed into one box. It is somehow familiar and accessible, visually striking and sexy, but also distant and alienating. Her forms and materials build easy connections with sculptors from the last fifty years or so, from Louise Bourgeois to Rachel Whiteread and Matta Clark. But let's not fall into comparison, that'd be irrelevant when you encounter such a rich work.

My first thought when looking at her work is about intimacy. Intimacy through the casts of mattresses, the crystallised melting candles and the carefully arranged chains on walls. All them speak to me about love, an existing one or perhaps an affair that didn't end up well but left a returning memory. A very intimate and personal experience. What happened on that inflatable mattress? Why are they displayed vertically? When were the candles blown out? Previous works such as *jausi erori amildu* (2019) presented similar works including an inflatable mattress plaster cast. In that case the cast was laying on the floor as a mattress would normally be used. An element intended by the artist to be displayed in that way, perhaps as a then present memory. However now in *Hard as Horse Hair, Soft as Feathers* (2020) these are vertical and supported by rough corrugated bars like the ones used in reinforced concrete. These steel bars aren't only supporting materials but an integral part of the pseudo-concrete casts which in fact are made of plaster and fiberglass. Are those memories attached to the memories too weak to be self-standing? Or are they intended to present the casts as fragile elements despite their apparent solid materiality? Many sculptors from the Basque Country have often made use of construction materials such as concrete and steel, to present impossible and very traditionally male positions in their work. However, Nora works with these materials and others which have a similar visual effect to create soft experiences that contradict and question their very nature.

At a first glance, I didn't pay much attention to the candles and chains on the walls, or even the clay plates on the floor. Somehow, these were to me playing a supporting role to the much larger and visually striking casts on the floor. Here it comes my second thought. The objects that surround us define our daily lives, no matter whether they are big or small, shiny or gloomy. What is important are the feelings and experiences that connect us with them and the unconscious decisions that we take to present them in our domestic settings. We curate our homes and select the objects that are displayed in them. We decide which objects are relevant enough and we want to see every day and which ones should go inside a drawer. We arrange them in a specific way, even if we don't realise. Nora does the same with the space, it is again an intimate decision as if it'd be her own domestic space, always using recurring materials that she has a close connection with. A memento mori made of many parts, which you can analyse individually or as a whole. The whole is what I find more relevant. After a careful analysis of each element in the exhibition, you start building conversations between the different objects. It is more like an aseptic domestic scene, a bedroom where the works tell you a story about what happened there in a both cryptic and explicit way.

Nora Aurrekoetxea is an endless question about meanings, narratives and material explorations.

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