

***Something like the sun – or any other creature that dares to shine as bright as the star that the artist carries within herself.***

Curatorial essay by Victor Gorgulho (Curator and writer, Brazil)

If we are able – in some way, who knows? – to collectively build a colossal silence, right of a sudden, in the exhibition room where Janaina Tschäpe graces us with a new group of her paintings, we could maybe just disappear in time – for real. Or, in another similarly fantastic scenario, our eyes would suddenly be filled with joyful tears of splashy but also low palette of colors such as purple, brown, grey, beige, white, purple-again, off-white, black, dark green, damn-hot-red, and many, many more unexpected tones that would keep dripping from our eyeballs either as dramatic and slow tears of commotion, or either furious and cautious small sips of human fluid that would, to some, at least, be an embarrassment of riches.

Those would sure look for the gallery's exit, dizzy and stunned, while the remaining group of spectators would lie down on the gallery floor and enjoy a moment of total peace and incomparable internal silence, putting to rest their own thoughts and rushed feelings. In a world populated by endless screens and images of all sorts – digital, pixels, grains, files up above us in heavy clouds of data and such –, painting would, then, make sense again, proving the power of the subversive exercise of seeing that it still does induce. No matter how big or visible the digital screens that surround (and scare) us these days, may achieve. The many supposed deaths of painting have proven only the exact opposite: its seemingly eternal lifetime.

\*

If years (and decades, as is the case here) of artistic practice may likely build tools that – more or less – create a deep sense of proximity and knowledge between the artist and their own work, it is not difficult to identify what has clearly evolved and precisely stayed throughout Tschäpe's career. Be it in the photographic and performative works above mentioned or be it the ongoing artist's vast painting production, there is a mischievous and unapologetic sense that Tschäpe's seems to carry along in her body of work. For example, both some of her oldest investigations into photography and the paintings here presented in the current show carry a provocative carelessness regarding traditional conventions still attached to contemporary art productions.

Ever since stepping – roaring, may we say? – into the contemporary art scene, almost three decades ago, Tschäpe has embodied, somewhat, a persona that seems half a woman and half a tigress, a fact made evident, for example, by her early photographic and performative works. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tschäpe produced a myriad of photo performances and videos in which the artist invited us to dive deep into a fantastical world filled with unidentifiable amorphous and outrageous beings, inhabiting lavish landscapes that seem to belong somewhere deeply in Tschäpe's memories. Most of which, let's admit, unfold before our eyes in dream-like scenarios and stages.

Among these, maybe the biggest (and frequently loud and omnipresent in most discussions around painting practices) is the dichotomy between abstraction and figuration. There comes her... Has there ever been a more daring Brazilian German – of course, the peculiar combination plays a lavish part in this delicious mix here – that defied more the thin lines that still insist, purposelessly, to separate the ideas of what figurative or abstract is, especially in the field of painting? If you have not listened back, then to the affirmingly powerful words of Sir. Giorgio Morandi famously said: "Nothing is more abstract than reality". There you go, period. Oh! And by the way, the year was 1958, in case you were wondering.

\*\*

Some years later, in her drawings and paintings, the artist kept on digging deeply into her own repertoire of memories, in peculiar forms of images of landscapes, of places that she had visited (or maybe even not), of her childhood reminiscences and other material that we must leave to her own intimacy – things we will never know..! – and others that psychoanalysis and such

would have a ball trying to discover. Looking backward, one can even wonder that the most beautiful and complex landscape we were confronting was the artist herself.

A tigress, a mermaid, a whale, a woman lying on the floor pretending to be dead in remote or unrecognizable places across the planet (as seen in the deliciously unpretentious series of photographs *100 little deaths*, from 2001). In the following years, the artist began to conceive fluid and translucent abstract landscapes and complex natural and organic scenarios in her paintings, usually in large formats, through the combination of the use of materials such as casein, watercolor, colored pencils, crayons, oil, and oil sticks. The present group of works presents us with a shift that's been occurring in the artist's *oeuvre* in the past years.

\*\*\*

Like oil paint in a more convenient, easy-to-hold form, oil sticks consist of a blend of pigmented drying oil and wax. Though, as pointed out above, the use of such material is not new in Tschäpe's paintings, it has been a lot more explored in the past years. Oil sticks – which are not entirely new to her paintings, though have been used in much more discreet ways – here take center-stage places in this new set of works. Their capacity of filling the surface of the canvas with unparalleled density and strength makes sure to leave no doubt that we are in front of more refined and decisive gestures of the artist over the canvas surface.

The replacement of watercolor pencils, crayons, and more to investigate the varied possibilities of the use of oil sticks feel like a true expansion of sorts for the artist: regarding the use of colors, tones, and body gestural and expression among Tschäpe and her paintings. Regardless of the scale that Tschäpe's is working on, we are here in front of an artistic practice that could almost flirt with the field of dance – and there is no pun intended here.

During a whole day of work in her studio, the artist composes involuntary choreographies, atypical dances that we can only try to inquire about or look into if we stand for a reasonable amount of time in front of Tschäpe's paintings. Just like the feeling of somehow being suspended in time and space (dreamily described at the beginning of this piece of writing), here we are gifted with another chance to penetrate Tschäpe's indescribably beautiful labyrinths made of oil and more. There is no winner here, but there is infinite beauty saved for those who may well

\*\*\*\*

Last but not least... It is almost impossible to speak about Janaina Tschäpe's works without addressing this-to-be-named *third* territory that is beyond abstraction and figuration – a space that evidently is not exclusive to Tschäpe's production but one that, here, shows its thick and multiple layers. Proof of that is how much has been said about how the dimension of memory – personal, collective, and even from unknown sites of human brains – plays a key role in Janaina Tschäpe's works. It sure does, undoubtedly.

Though, as a strange creature that inhabits the so-called third territory of Tschäpe's paintings, the Brazilian-German artist guides us, without asking for our consent or understanding, to a landscape – or better, to a land where time is a scape – and where they wish to represent anything close to reality is similar to a process of hallucination. If we feel lost, at some point, better just let this sun (or the star that appears “something like the sun”, as the show title points out to us) shine its light over us.

After a very brief moment, we will not be able to differentiate the origin of this: is it coming from the sun in the sky, from the one shining in Tschäpe's painting, or – one must believe – from the sun the artist holds inside her own self, visibly close to her chest. In pure delight, we should just let ourselves be blindsided. Oh, painting is alive. It *sure* is...