

Last Year's Ten Best Tourist Destinations in the World

A waterfall of Arabian skirts, an El Dorado in the tropical Egyptian forest, the great store-lake of an airport, a baroque province's Saint Thomas celebration, the modern wasteland city, the never-built cathedral in a corner of the northern world and an altar for the biggest Fabergé egg ever seen – these are some of the places to which the images gathered in these sorts of objects project us, behaving as large-scale tapestries, pillows, arm and footrests with their printed, rubberized, colorful finishes and their billowing, advancing fringes, frequently harassing us to touch them.

It so happens that the landscape has officially entered these works as a prime organizing element: there are always skies, horizons, and frequently lakes. Who knows, not exactly landscape as a genre but as a necessary condition for these works to remit to *somewhere else*, that, in its blatant impossibility, given an excess of compositeness and incongruity, deals, however, with a much more materially verifiable reality than the mere idyllic, arcadian image of some lost place; these are, after all, landscapes that come saturated with bags, tags and labels, that show up ready for tourism, with the presence of those brands whose logos already seem like old familiar friends – those quasi-characters we feel at home with: here, Wilson, there, the nice little fellow that appears on bags of rice...

If there is something that does not go unnoticed in these pieces, it is the constant inquiry into this "other place"; but these are landscapes that are no longer dreamlike, that no longer admit the subject's absorption in its elysian plots: they're frequently confused with all sorts of patterns; they have a certain speed while filling in spaces with patches, colors, and information springing from different places. They react, in sum, to a compulsion toward totalization and accumulation: the works close in upon themselves, round each other out, and offer each other up as many small-scale cosmos in which disparate things must submit to an order of encompassment. However, made of easily detachable parts of frankly disparate provenances, hanging, volumetrically dissonant, these works force this totality to recognize itself in its impudence. From the get-go: a strange form of belonging to their own immediate context, a country already much-abstracted in some form of tropical exoticism, all the while striving not to capture it in its endogenous, indulgently national iconography; after all, other places to which these works open onto are so devoid of substance, density and history that, somewhere, they seem to correspond to any place that can be called *other*, distant, exotic, incongruous – ribs from which may spring some Eve painted over in the colors of a Monstera plant; wild virgin thickets topped with wandering camels; golden paradises that must have learned how to take form from Las Vegas, Miami and theme parks and dollar stores the world over; or, in other terms,

incongruences that no longer admit any safe, genuine terrain, without stridently revealing its mythification.

To all these landscapes – as impossible as likely to be set in a contemporary imagination in which so much of what springs from unlikely sources can easily occupy the same semantic space – objects are added, the scale and shape of which seem ready to respond quite directly to the body, sometimes hanging just so off the wall, giving the impression that they might be held in an embrace; sometimes, they almost invite a light brush of the hand; elsewhere, pleats lead us to suppose they might perhaps be worn – promises kept by a compulsion for empathy in which all that is disfigured, weird or abject must, after all, be returned to immediate apprehension and wind up making sense to an observer who is keen on possessing the objects that pose them a challenge.

By the way, these works knowingly display the habit of appropriating things and images: they live off of objects' indexes of dislocation into their particular universe. A slight glance and one notices jeans made into paintable surfaces, shopping bags that have barely begun to degrade and are added to sailcloth, and T-shirts with movie prints. A polyphony, then, that does not appear to deny the memory of anthropophagous dietary habits, a readiness to acclimate the social history, variety of tastes and object provenances that are digested there.

However, even the way they string along their disparities is readily ambiguous: on one hand, the language of clothesmaking, with stitching, studs, finishes and overlaid fabrics, the volume acquired through layering swaths and pieces, which leads the *structure* of these objects to be offered as a complex composition, all in all opposed to a distracted accumulation of fragments; on the other hand, these parts of existing things tend to accommodate each other visually through a sort of standardizing of their volume, chromatic intensity, size disparity and shape, through the astute application of paint on surfaces, as if that first structuring operation were layered over the more commonplace practice of customization.

The result of this is that the works forsake the discontinuities in their materials as soon as they are absorbed, as well as the shock that might be produced through the encounter between things from such distinct places. Little remains of the promise of the “impertinence of underdevelopment” that fed a passion for all things dirty, marginal, peripheral, capable of being shocked at the violence of the present, made up of irresolvable perplexities and contradictions.

These pieces know that everything they bring in bears the mark of what is already passed, of what has no space left to set off any sort of scandal. On the contrary, they seem to resolutely affirm that it makes no difference what they contain, what the nature of the images or things annexed to them are, everything will be tamely recognizable and familiar. As big as they are, as full of mismatched elements, the strangeness of these works does not lie in their choice of materials,

in their inconsequence, but in why they always end up as composites of slightly outdated things.

Indeed, it is no sigh or billow that fills these works with life, but a sort of gravity on the trim of a fabric that has stopped moving and now weighs there. They suppose, in their accumulation, in their many layers of likened things, many past objects agglutinated together, but it would not do to try and examine the history of fashion or the textile industry while looking at them. If they host a large number of objects, their volume sometimes corresponds to a fraction of fabric, to one or two of last season's prints, nothing more. If they become huge and fat, it is not because they carry or pretend to narrate the thickening of genuine accumulated experience.

In their materials, these are not works with much of a past. They mostly deal with the gigantic material dimension of one or two months ago, in the time of image circulation and consuming objects, and they extract from there the most coincidences and analogies that can be created in a single stroke: a saint painted near a decorative pattern and the work seems baroque, with the addition of patches of fabric, it begins to seem like *São João* flags; in another work, a banana tree tropicalizes everything in Moroccan exoticism; plaid leads the architectural element to rush to the aid of an image's meaning; geometric symbolic forms and suddenly Klee, theosophy; gold and blue and the same element that was a skirt in another piece now magnifies a gothic-inflected stained glass pane.

Let's face it, it is by no means hard to guess how much these works secrete references to art history. We know, however, that simply looking like something seen before in art does not justify them. Perhaps they pay no respect to art, or maybe it's the case that they do not exactly need the tradition of art in order to be understood. What they do to the odds and ends they display is to very quickly call them art, before one gets to thinking they are scraps, things of culture, that they are in good or poor taste – none of this matters. What arrives in the piece as any old print on fabric, ending up on the edge of one of these objects, is quickly repainted; paint makes the print convert, through quick cover-ups, to painting, with enamel over the faded printed pattern; and through a reduction to the manual effort of the brush, that random print now possesses something of the barely indicated quality that someone like Matisse uses to conjure the aroma of an imaginary world lost in the manipulation of patterns.

Leda's procedures with and on her objects stylize them and impose a personal behavioral manner, the justification of which is not given in this or that work, but only in full view of her trajectory. If those rounded fringes here resemble organically phallic objects, it is because they have long since learned, in the artist's trajectory, to signify tongues, then insect wings, then drops, and now they know very well how to acquire volume without failing to be regarded as her work's specific vocabulary.

These works are grounded in references to the artist's own oeuvre but are, more than a repetition, an extensive formal narrative that in order to be explained must be observed in the time of its development – since they can be explained as individual “findings” in one work or other from the beginning of this trajectory (it would be relatively simple to observe how, way back when, the procedure of painting the connecting areas between glued or sewn patches began to appear in Leda's work; or when she began to glue smaller frames within larger frames or canvases; or, still, when objects began to hang off the wall toward space – they melted, and were justified by the image of a waterfall that, later, turned into sorts of fabric cut into the shape of drops, before they began to look like fingers, phalluses and suddenly being taken up as *São João* flags here, and tongues or skirts elsewhere.

There is no doubt that this contributes to the impression that this is now an oeuvre offered up with airs of “maturity”, to be perhaps very swiftly associated to a repetition of formulae that would lead to the perception that the works have given up on inventing and have now settled into late-career versions of themselves. It would not be incorrect to say it: these pieces no longer justify their appropriation procedures, object insertions and figures in terms of a discourse more or less disguised as “avant-garde”; they are, the procedures that is, silently artistic, which is today they are no longer willing to reveal the fractures in their formal justification through the social, historical or ideological elements they know they harbor – elements of taste, of provenance, of their prints' meaning. But that is precisely the point: to offer themselves as “formalisms”, as “aesthetic” excesses, is the way in which this oeuvre deals with the process of ultra-aestheticization to which it knows it is destined; or, otherwise, to which its materials are equally submitted. This year's print that loses its unexpected value in a short time and ends up in the vast universe of unimportant fabrics; the iconic image of the idea of exoticism – a camel, who knows –, that in a short while becomes a logo; the inscrutable image of one-thousand-and-one nights substituted by the most abstract composition of chains with golden straps hanging from a skirt. This is work that offers itself up in a process of autonomization in the face of the supposed impact of the objects that compose it, certainly not tackling them head on, but silently challenging their omnipresence in the cultural sphere with the affirmation of plasticity over them.

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