

## South Parade

### In conversation: Lucy Rose Cunningham reflects with Carole Ebtinger and Esther Gatón on South Parade's latest show *phosphorescence of my local lore*

On show currently at South Parade is the dynamic duo show of new paintings by Brussels-based artist Carole Ebtinger and sculpture by London-based artist Esther Gatón, *phosphorescence of my local lore*. The show pairs new painting and sculptural work by Ebtinger and Gatón, both practices exploring the potential to reside between spaces, to enter into shifting landscapes and then retreat back. Lucy Rose Cunningham - who wrote the exhibition's accompanying text - discusses these practices further with the artists.

*Lucy Rose Cunningham (LRC): Hello both, lovely to speak again now that the show has been open for a while. As a point of entry, I was wondering what brought you respectively to the medium of painting and sculpture, and why the materials?*

Carole Ebtinger (CE): It's difficult to talk about the work without telling some personal stories. I left France because my family was falling apart. I did the concours (in French, a public competition) in summer before my eighteenth birthday, before heading for La Cambre, just wishing to make my summer less empty, and have some fun with my best friend. Then, when I learned the news about the possibility of starting my studies at ENSAV La Cambre\* I didn't think that much. I felt no desire to remain in France and so very intuitively I went to Brussels to begin. The five years of school there, studying from Bachelors to Masters level, were a great break from my mother, and the school itself gave me the impression to have a roof - to have my own space - with another kind of authority. In the end, the perfect

shape for learning and starting as a young independent woman and artist. I have drawn since early childhood. I had some problems as a child, not learning to speak until quite late, but often having things in hand; actively doing things was always my way to live through time.

*\*La Cambre is an art school in Brussels with 17 departments (sculpture, architecture etc) with Drawing being one of them, situated in the old abbey.*

Esther Gatón (EG): I agree with Carole's approach. I also think that we find ourselves working, almost as if by chance, influenced by unconscious triggers. I remember growing up surrounded by furniture and toys that were half-broken. My father and brothers played aeromodelling, and this meant that our kitchen and shared rooms were permanently turned into a workshop of absolute amateurs. They would spend a whole fortnight carefully building a small plane with very DIY mediums, sticking together tiny pieces, patching up impacts and balancing out the weights of the wings. All this dedication for a flight that might last less than a minute.

I secretly picked up their leftovers and broken carcasses, and used them to play and decorate. These scraps were full of marks from their measurements, and sometimes also incorporated traces of grass or mud, from the impact. I got used to the crashed toys around me and found them beautiful. I can now read strong visual similarities between those toys and the

sculptures: they're both handmade, show their inner structures, are light, incorporate marks from being used and move with the air.

*LRC: Amazing, thank you for sharing these insights and experiences. I love the thought of finding the ruinous toys beautiful, their visual enticement. And I suppose linked to your emotional responses to the mediums you utilise, why have you chosen the particular colours on show in the exhibition, and the specific mark-making or forms, the shapes in the work? What do such combinations convey?*

CE: Colour is mostly never a decision but a way to go through. I approach all my pieces of work with the same rituals. First, the big roll of paper I wet with hot water in my bathroom. Secondly, the painting - a mix of pigment, glue, water - in my small kitchen. Then the first layer of painting on the studio floor. White doesn't exist anymore and I can start something, many things appearing in the beginning. It's certainly the moment where I feel very free - always naked feet, some colours already here and there, body between rhythm and viewer.

EG: When installing, we used the setting of the sculptures to reinforce the irregular floor plan of the gallery; underlying, for example, the pronounced diagonal of the room and giving attention to the mixed materials of the floor (wood, drawings and concrete). It was also important to make the two sculptures behave as one single installation, visually connecting their positions but without touching. With regards to colours, my starting point was really simple: I knew that the show would take place during darker days and it felt relevant to give a shiny glimpse, a cheer up, a sugar high... At the same time, I think the vibrant colours function well in relation to the materials they're made of - burnt silk and poured bioplastic. I'm attracted to their

contradiction: objects that are, all at once, lively and decrepit or crumbling.

*LRC: I remember at your studio Esther, how you spoke about London's pale skies and wanting to inject colour into the room, like a colourful kite breaking through cool-toned skies. I love this idea of breaking up the darker autumn times with lighter feelings and textures. And that's such a touching thought of the body Carole, held between rhythm and viewer. As though the art is a body on show but also showing something itself. Off the back of these thoughts, I wonder whether - although both your works are very intuitive - either of you have any influences? What are you thinking about / looking at / reading / listening to at the moment?*

CE: Mostly I don't have the feeling I am thinking too much during the making of the work. Or the way of thinking and responding is something separate from how I consider other things. This is the addictive part - physically, I become a combination of eyes and gestures, looking and doing, constantly assessing and working at the surfaces. It's me and the material. I like the fact that every step in the work is useful, even what is destined to disappear, even those in the trash, or all the papers reversed. I haven't been a good sleeper since I was sixteen, but I am quite accustomed to it now. Some readings that had a big impact on me; Fernando Pessoa's 'Le livre de l'Intranquillité', Lou Andréas Salomé's 'Rainer Maria Rilke', and Simone Weil's 'La Pesanteur et la Grâce'.

EG: I like that the word 'influences' originally referred to the action of a fluid going inside (influere); the things that slide, flow inwards and penetrate. In this sense, being influenced would not necessarily be different from working intuitively. I often think of the immediate environment in which I'm living, as one of the major influences that transforms the practice. In my case, vision and attention are shaped in response to what I encounter daily,

and thus, the style becomes a transference from whatever is around: the streets, the light pollution, the noise and voices... Not only their appearances but also their velocity, rhythms and temperature. All that enters the work.

Some of the poets that I have recently been reading and love are Carilda Oliver Labra, Circe Maia, Blanca Varela, and Germán Pardo García. During the making of this show, I had the pleasure of reading: 'Things Fall Apart', by Chinua Achebe, 'L'Horde du Contrevent' by Alain Damasio and 'Open Water' by Caleb Azumah Nelson. Maybe, 'L'Horde du Contrevent', ('The Horde of Counterwind') is the book that most clearly connects to the sculptures I made; I could feel myself feeding from it before going to the studio. It's a science fiction that follows this horde, trained from childhood, whose quest is to seek the origin of the wind, in a world dominated by this force. They move by foot and use minimum technology, to be able to read the different languages of the turbulence and learn to make use of their varied directions and forms. The story speaks of complex human relationships in extreme conditions and also brings amazing reflections, like the potential transformation of time via breathing.

*LRC: Mmm, that's such a great reference, the thought of influences being not only being a noun in an intellectual sense but a very physical presence, the essence to both your work, action and movement. Things circulating and impacting one another. It's such a reassuring thought about what you encounter or read really finds its way into the work, or how you address your practice. And in terms of how we encounter, what do you hope your work talks about/explores/offers to the audience?*

CE: It's more about giving. Each person has their own way to give. It also means how I can find my way to experiencing

pleasure. For the last 5 summers, I haven't left the studio because at this time of the year, daylight is the most beautiful to me for work. I discovered through Les Terres Rares ('Rare Earth') and *Tous Mes Jardins* ('All My Gardens'), from my bedroom and morning coffee in bed, that after the door, there is something waiting - an imaginary scene to build, an atmosphere that makes me stay.

I wrote this thought about one work;

*Qui habite le corps,*

*qui habite le travail,*

*et le travail habite un espace qui n'héberge ni le corps ni l'esprit,*

*alors je me demande où je suis.*

(Who inhabits the body,

who lives at work,

and work inhabits a space that accommodates neither the body nor the mind,

so I wonder where I am.)

EG: I love that Carole, you begin by talking about giving and pleasure. It does feel like that, it's giving something that we don't even have to those who we don't know. Because with this work it's mostly an exchange between strangers.

I aim to create an interruption. I think that I make something like presences, that will hopefully make someone pause, even if briefly; as they've encountered something they can't fully read and are intrigued by. At the studio, I switch positions, from artist to viewer, often becoming clueless to the work that I have made. Then, at the exhibition, I hope to share this willingness to stay with an ambiguous presence and be comfortable in such uncertainty.

*LRC: For sure. This is all so interesting and I feel like these things you've discussed are deeply inherent in the South Parade show. I'm wondering also - because it feels like there is a relationship established between both practices - whether, or how, you see your work responding to the other's artwork? How has your experience been working as part of a duo show, thinking about the collaboration of these two practices?*

CE: Beside the central position that Esther's sculpture occupies in the gallery, I was first impacted by her sculptures' shapes, by the eminent colour she provoked. It's a relationship of pleasure to me, pleasure I don't find really in everyday life. I also saw Esther's sculpture as a centre, as an anchor point perhaps, and it encouraged me to find a way to start my own works with a centre - or kind of. It also makes me think about the way we discuss in analysis, the way where words and things are tight, too tight. A therapist's work is to keep what means the most to the patient... in my case, it's to slowly eliminate many things, only to keep what has to be my focus, my centre - the work.

*LRC: I love this idea of an anchor point; of treating the work as an entry point for navigating other-worlds, unfamiliar narratives or perhaps for re-surfacing old memories, but also as a body that holds you as you seek out details and feelings in the works.*

EG: Carole and I were talking about how it seems that the room at South Parade has quite an engaging rhythm; one's vision jumps around, going in circles from one spot to another. The combination of our practices has produced a very dynamic show; some latent, twist-and-spin-way of seeing.

To me, Carole's pieces have a gentle and settled tone, and a lot of depth. They feel like ponds or wells, opening up vertical voids in the room. With them around, I think that the sculptures that I made increase their vitality, as if they were coming out from, or reaching out to, those voids.

*LRC: That's beautiful, the sense of entering into the marks. The pond image, this murky but also inviting, richness you want to be enveloped by. I see that. And now, to conclude our conversation, which has been so generous on both your parts, where are each of your practices going?*

CE: I know *Tous Mes Jardins* is pretty close to an ending. It makes me anxious, because I can feel this reality; your questions, Lucy, have made me relive things on the train, a loop inside my memories. *Les Terres Rares* was a title found by my father between rain and sun, and was a way to make him proud; the need to give him something real with his full support, recognised by being awarded the Eeckman Art Prize. *Terres Rares* took root after the heartbreak, it was an emotionally-driven period of my life in which I was submerged by a totally new energy, reflected in an entire month of 4 reverse drawings, through the first gesture of turning a new leaf quite literally, reversing the paper side I

work on. For the first time, the living world appeared in my work, but also the birth of flowers who rise, to then wither immediately. In the work I found a thread; doing-ending-bringing.

Each work seems to create imaginary spaces that I live through with infinite possibilities. Even when all the work, in each series, is complete, the pieces seem to say 'I want to be born again'. They are born systematically, by two or three at a time, like a story of appointments. Then it's all about construction, consistency and relations. *Tous Mes Jardins* was found regarding the one I keep in my bedroom, 'The garden I left' (and belongs to *Terres Rares*, some of them found titles). It was a two year-long work really different from the work before. It was almost an entirely lonely year, entirely focused on colours and how I manipulated them to make me peaceful. I became so close to the work, forming an obsessive relation to my practice that hasn't really left - I live with my work physically and emotionally.

I already know the title for the next body of work, and it appears like some others, short or long sentences - nothing to change after. *Une promesse que je veux résoudre*. 'A promise I want to resolve.' And when I think about that on the train, the loop is here, almost three years later. I realised that I need, in some ways, to talk to my father.

*LRC: Oh that's really moving, thank you Carole for sharing that. I can't wait to see how the new work unfolds. And what about you Esther?*

EG: I've been reflecting on 'distillation', as a verb that could be inflicted to the practice. It describes the process involving the conversion of a liquid into vapour, that is subsequently condensed back to liquid form. Distillation is used to separate liquids from nonvolatile solids, (as in the separation of alcoholic

liquors from fermented materials, or the separation of two or more liquids having different boiling points).

I have been working mostly via aggregative and juxtapositional procedures. The idea of using distillation comes out from my wanting to enter different processes of thinning and disengagement. Instead of adding up, I want to take materials and stories and unbundle them, going for more raw and plain reflections.

*LRC: I feel like this is something you both seek to navigate, building up imagery through intricate surfaces and textures, constructing spaces to reside with, but also untangling and addressing the intimacies and aches within them. I'm really grateful for you both spending time reflecting on your practices, your approaches, and thinking, and for coming together to form such a memorable show. I'm excited for you both, to see where the year ahead takes you, how your art unfolds.*

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*phosphorescence of my local lore* continues at South Parade until 13th January 2024