

Dora Economou - Mountains and Valleys

10th November – 12th December 2016

*“the scattered tea goes with the leaves and every day a sunset dies: a poet’s extravagance which as quite often mirrors truth but upside down and backward since the mirror’s unwitting manipulator busy in his preoccupation has forgotten that the back of it is glass too: because if they only did, instead of which yesterday’s sunset and yesterday’s tea both are inextricable from the scattered indestructible uninfusable grounds blown through the endless corridors of tomorrow, into the shoes we will have to walk in and even the sheets we will have (or try) to sleep between: because you escape nothing, you free nothing; the pursuer is what is doing the running: no fleeing nor repudiation nor for this moment more even urgency anywhere in the room or outside it either above or below or before or behind the tiny myriad beast sounds and the vast systole and diastole of summer night.”*

William Faulkner

Dora Economou’s work bewilders with its intense simplicity and sublime plainness: skulls fashioned in a child-like manner, plainly folded curtains and artless origami. Economou’s work is inspired by the work of a ferocious commentator of modernity, José Guadalupe Posada, a Nineteenth century Mexican printmaker and engraver, known for the depiction of skulls, calaveras, and skeletons. A calavera is a representation of a human skull and it is often applied to decorative or edible handmade skulls made from either sugar or clay which are used in the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead (Día de Muertos) and the Roman Catholic holiday All Souls' Day. These skulls engage in an endless Danse Macabre, which accounts for the satirical acuteness and the political and cultural urgency of a critic of modernity. Skulls are also often visible in still life paintings of the Dutch Golden Age in the first half of the Seventeenth century. They are visual cues of the frenzy and violence of life, which is contrasted with the often frivolous and lush representations of wealth. Economou employs this vanitas motive in her sculptures, however, with a touch of sophisticated wit. The artist’s paper sculptures are just imperfect and irregular multiples, individualized copies of a generic original. As a matter of fact, they appear to be rather ‘expressionistic’ – as Economou maintains. Conversely, the paper skull cannot be taken literally as an actual manifestation of the inevitability of death and as an appeal to consider mortality. In fact, these skulls are rather mock-ups of how art always exhorts the viewer to consider and contemplate. Economou adores this kind of mock-ups. This is visible, for instance, in her love for traditional Japanese origami (from ori

meaning "folding", and kami meaning "paper"). This technique transforms a flat sheet square of paper into a finished sculpture through folding and sculpting techniques. No tearing or gluing is allowed. The best-known origami model is the Japanese paper crane, and Economou has devoted some of her time in making thousands of such cranes.

It should be noted that making endless copies and surrogates constitutes a standard practice of the recent work of Economou. She is inspired, for instance, from these small mounds with the name fujizuka, which represent Mount Fuji, and were very popular during the Edo period. These ersatz mountains commonly found in and around Tokyo are usually around three meters high, and replicate the ten stations on Fuji itself, from the foot of the mountain to the summit. Pilgrims who were unable to climb Mount Fuji would ascend one of these surrogates instead. This practice poses a serious question regarding the value of reality and authenticity.

The artist's arrangements defy the idea of originality or even composition, which supposedly let beauty to triumph through the depths of the formless. Economou's sculptures resemble rather such naturally shaped rocks of an awkward asymmetry, known in China as scholar stones or viewing stones – an inducement of thinking. Her work renders visible the emerging and immersing, the mental space between there it is and there it is not. In this regard, she sides rather with the way of thinking of the Orient or the Pre-Socratic philosophy in ancient Greek, which values process over outcome. Uncovering the flux of life is done however not with the utopian pathos of a modernist, but with the restricted self-irony and the allegoric scepticism of a contemporary.

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