

Lía Ateca
HMBR (HeMBRa, HaMBRe, HoMBRe)

11 April – 22 May 2019

This project is built on three key words: environment, identity and feminism. In march 2017, on the occasion of the Women´s Month, the artist started a sequence of actions, in which she illustrated t-shirts, bags and other kind of fabrics. From this moment on, she brought the quality of symbolizing certain ideas to a series of fruits.

Trying to scape from the figurative and obvious symbol, but keeping the concept, she charges orange color with meaning, that corresponds with the feminine and feminist universe. She wants to avoid the reference to already standardized flags, decision that she acknowledges as a way to have a critical artistic vision of the claiming movement.

With a Polaroid 600 camera she takes pictures of the orange elements that she finds incidentally, because since the camera is analogical and instantaneous, it results more efficient as tool to create a narrative with each scene, as a kind of improvised and critical still life.

Through these paintings or drawings, she builds landscapes and scenes to interpret her environment and reflect on her identity as artist, woman and female artist.

Marisol Salanova

A gaze at the work of Lía Ateca in terms of feminism

The uncertainty of the environment in which we live transcends the personal boundaries of the construction of the subjectivity of our identity. With the exhibition *El lugar en el que creo*, the visual artist Lía Ateca (San Cristóbal de La Laguna, Canary Islands, 1991) explores in the need -as much individual as collective- of understanding our surroundings, the context in which we all live in, and the ways in which this affects our identities.

Although many of the features that form our identities are inherited or innate, the surroundings have a great influence in the conformation of the specificity of everyone. The cities where the artist has lived in have left a mark in her and have established the dialogues between the two series presented here: *Dime qué piensas*

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and HMBR. The first consists of paintings, their titles are all formed as a question, which generates one interrogation after the other. This is because it comes from the sudden need of painting, breaking with the black trace to which, until then, she felt bounded to. She thinks about who she is, as we all have in a moment of crisis and introspection.

In 2016 she received a grant from Centro Atlántico de Arte Contemporáneo (CAAM) with which she spent a month in Quito (Ecuador) in the residence No Lugar, developing *Dime qué piensas*, an experience *Ateca treasures*, because she considered it to be very enriching, as much personally and professionally.

Her work, full of a colored abstraction tries to create dreamlike landscapes where different themes flow within, always with a feminist background. Under the title HMBR, she gathers consonants which point out that she is referring to a man, also suggesting the words "female" and "hunger", creating controversy. This uncertainty in her recent works is what the artist explores in order to reinterpret landscapes and photographic details in a pictorial way, looking for a metaphor for the social presence of women, how the idea of the "woman" is considered nowadays and claiming the figure of the papaya as feminine symbol where the colour orange becomes the protagonist.

Symbols of fertility and immortality, fruits convey a connotation depending on its shape, masculine genitalia is commonly associated with a banana, this is why HMBR she tries to avoid stereotypes of popular cultural and to create a new collective imagination. There is an external imagination. There is an external reference in History of Art Since fruit, as much nutritious, as it is a desirable food, has been an ingredient that has formed part of manifestations of the most important ancient civilizations as a sample of the importance in the daily life of human beings. Later on, the still life and portraits of everyday objects were related to realistic art. But it is during Renaissance when fruit becomes a real protagonist within European painting for its subtle symbolism.

Nevertheless, towards the end of last century and the beginning of this 21st century, we find that when there are artists who include fruit in their works, it is no longer done with the purpose of symbolizing and representing many different meanings, but it is used as a more conceptual element to transmit the emotions of the artist. In this sense, *Ateca* turn her face towards the Renaissance and uses fruit as a tool of social representation yet subverted. In other words, the method is the same but subverted but now inverted, it now pays attention to which fruit suggests which evocation of the virile organ in

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our environment, namely the banana, and she moves towards a different tropical fruit, but one which has a closer shape to the vulva, to come up with the papaya and giving its image a value in not too obvious yet different formulations, turning towards abstraction.

Why papaya? Not only because of its shape but because of its proximity and it is there there when she connects with *Dime qué piensas*, for she returns to the observation of the environment, climate, Canarian agriculture, transforming this fruit into a symbol of feminism and empowerment of the women. We think, inevitably, in how unfair it is for genitalia to be, for the majority of people, an indication of what constitutes our identity. The work of Ateca rebels, it questions the determination of gender, the roles of gender which, in a historical way, associate delicacy and weakness with the feminine while skill and strength, by definition, to the masculine. Gender identity is set through the intimate experience of the actual gender, creating a concept of the self, and through people's perception over physique and sexual tendencies, placing us under a constant prejudice. What is mainly interpreted to be feminine or masculine is determined to be related in different social aspects that make a difference in how space and time is used, which brings us to the clear relationship between environment and identity.

It is vital to dismantle stereotypes because men among themselves are not identical, nor women among themselves, genders are not reduced to binarism either, excluding trans or inter-gendered identities. The work of the artist to this respect is very laudable considering that from a colourful pictorial and photographic expression, vigorous and digestible; she instills a rule-breaking message, necessary, bold and hopeful. A feminist message which opens a world of possible to women, which breaks boundaries and glass ceilings. Is her art political by any chance? Undoubtedly due to its intentionality and her well prepared speech. The illustration, photographs, paintings, videos and installations of Lía Ateca reclaim the creation of an innovative landscape where there is no place for sexism, free of prejudice and covered with love the diversity of bodies. Remnants of colour, complex shapes with an apparent simplification and a sublime subtleness of volumes make *El lugar en el que creo* an exhibition which manifests the artistic moment in which Ateca stands and leaves a trace. Not only is this a step ahead in her emerging career, the young talent strengthens her style and delimits the themes she worries about and deals with in an intelligently mordant manner.

El lugar en el que creo makes the audience consider the layers of conditions which intercede with our gaze and our daily routines. In the same way, the space where we create something lies in a specific

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place and we have therefore a double context; the one of the working studio which contains tools and other belongings and the area where such a place can be found geographically, which will go, of course, along with cultural customs and peculiarities. This is why the artist uses the word "creo", referring to the things people live in, many times affected by our social and cultural context, in the same way as the things we create, as in artistic creation, referring to the physical space of labour where her works germinate. The result is a point of no return where sinuous geometrical forms which we can see in the room evolve positively, inverted trapeziums sailing over plain backgrounds of lively in a vibrant and cheerful manner. The choice of strong predominating colour over pale tones appears to respond to the approach of empowerment, that has been questioned so much.

The expanded paintings of Ateca transcend the more or less traditional supports, perfectly using conceptual tools to transmit her worries and desires into the field of matter. Feminism as a movement of transformation of society intends to influence the way in which reality conceptualizes and this is present in the discourse of the artist. As the feminist movement acquires relevance in the academic world, an independent theoretical body is generated with its own conceptual tools. Therefore feminism criticizes the androcentric vision of society, the main objective of HMBR which, as said before, places the papaya as a feminine symbol that displaces the phallic hegemonic order.

Collage and acrylic handled with dexterity coexist in Polaroid photographs associated with different paintings. For decades the Polaroid became an artistic tool of the first order, used by the most famous photographers who faced creative challenges captivated by the camera's ability to respond and its peculiar range of colors. Its success at the time and its recent return are primarily due to the short time it takes for the photograph to be visible after being shot. The dark room disappears but also the magic practiced in it, and with it, the notion of a latent image that slowly appeared, reducing the uncertainty between the time it was shot and the developed picture. This impasse is also a place –or more like a non place- where we can be. The artist, when creating a painting or a drawing strictly linked to the instant image mentioned, takes this place, reclaims it and rescues it from the nothingness in an exercise that is almost poetical.

The loose and energetic brushstrokes usually show dark traces, particularly black, over warm colours. The chromatic range used by the artist is wide and varied although the varied tones make their way through their symbolic meaning. With all of this, the pulp of the papaya with its idyllic orange invades, sometimes more strongly and other times with subtleness, the dreamlike landscapes still lacking bodies (without a need to constantly recur to show human figures at

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all), evoking femininity. To be more exact, it reminds us of the feminist frame of mind from which the artist speaks to us loud and clear.

Transcendence and transforming power is what this project emanates, where we do not only verify that Ateca is one of the young Spanish promises in contemporary art, we can also confirm that in the artistic field there is a way of promoting feminism and of making people aware of things regarding questions of social nature. We cannot forget, however, the influence of the context in each case and the uncertainty of the future that is waiting for us. This is why we should appreciate how new generations of artists become involved in this. For a work of art to have content, discourse and a political effect, it is not necessary for it to be an obvious, nor a conceptual piece, since in this case it is clear that the pictorial techniques are up to date.

These types of works where chromatic relationships are priority derive from special experiments of cubists. We witness an expression of the inner world of the artist that can be extrapolated to the reality of the spectator, something that touches the audience, making them think, something based entirely on expression. We have to memorise the plastic language of Lía Ateca in our retinas because soon we will hear from her again. Identifiable for being peculiar, she keeps all elements in equilibrium, converging in an absolute manifestation that will give the opportunity to create new projects based on the present and which will show us the evolution of her aesthetic horizon.