

Sarah Margnetti & Megan Rooney**Opening 01.03.19 from 18:00****01.03.19 – 04.05.19**

This exhibition looks at the potential of the fragmented body: fluid boundaries and vulnerabilities expressed through the medium of mural painting, trompe-l'œil and sculpture. Fragmentation, experienced here both in formal and abstract articulations, makes palpable the somatic and emotional potential of the body. Recalling Lacan's notion of the fragmented body when viewing the show, one is potentially able to experience the self as an imaginative creation, not constituted as an atomic individual but rather as a liminal space between language and society mediated by one's own body.

Be it within the context of aesthetic theory with Adorno's focus on the fragment's potential to magnify and resist wholeness or the postmodernist idea in which the fragment is considered an opportunity for plurality, the discourse around the fragment and its latent symbolic rhetoric has been widely adopted and articulated in many artistic and cultural spheres. John Cage's open-ended approach to music composition, Dieter Roth and John M. Bennett's concrete poetry, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco's Theater of the Absurd, Pina Bausch and her introspective dance compositions, Cy Twombly and his freely-scribbled, calligraphic paintings or even the writings of second and third wave feminist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Carla Lonzi and Adriana Cavarero are just few examples of the fragment in use as a creative tool.

Megan Rooney (b. 1985) is an enigmatic storyteller. Her practice unfolds across painting and murals, writings, spoken word performance, sculpture and installation. Her narratives and characters start from a restless looking at people in public space. Inspired by the city and its social fabric she observes the invisible boundaries and distances between people. Her vast, improvised, rawly painted and colour-drenched paintings often contain hazy human figures lurking, seducing the viewer to get closer and incite "something that might make you feel a bit funny in your teeth four days later."** It's a deviating and shifting play with the audience. Much like in poetry, Rooney uses devices such as repetition and symbolism that take shape as unidentifiable splotches, linear and anthropomorphic forms, naïve-looking mushy faces. They convey an unease. Rooney notes: "I think about marks and destruction and reducing forms and faces hiding inside smears. Flesh that's dripping, sagging, bleeding and wet. Contorted bodies laying in bed at night."**

Sarah Margnetti (b.1983) is known for her mastery of trompe l'œil. It is a technique she acquired after her studies at the Institut Supérieur de Peinture Van der Kelen-Logelain in Brussel, one of the few schools in the world still teaching traditional techniques of decorative painting. The replication of wood and marble as in Venetian frescoes have become an integral part of her practice and frequently incorporate fragmented body parts suspended in midair. At first sight these monumental caricature-like extremities have a humorous appeal. Sometimes only partly visible behind curtains or pillars, the figures reveal a concern with the commodification of the body, a questioning of the symbolic power of various body parts, but also relates to a discourse on gaze, sex and gender.

Rooney and Margnetti break up the unity of the body. We see this in Rooney's works on paper and her white-primed canvas with hovering body parts in a backdrop of washed tones of purples, blues and rose-madder reds. Margnetti's enlarged yellow noses and ears, and her trompe-l'œil of marble and wood also extract the body from context and suggest a new subjectivity. Their idiosyncratic visual languages open up the discussion on the fragment as a vehicle of resistance. Many are the artists who historically have embraced this ambiguity and have influenced a generation of artists, mainly female, who have taken up the challenge to disrupt unity as a subtle and yet structural resistance to the status quo.

One of these references is Carol Rama and her treatment of the body. A self-taught Italian artist, Rama dealt with themes of sexuality and bodily forms in a deep desire to release inner anguish. "I paint out of passion, anger, violence, sadness, a certain fetishism, out of joy and melancholy together, but out of anger especially," she once explained.*** Rooney's raw and candid portraits of sensuous faces, limbs, breasts and nipples echoes Rama's watercolors ability to unmask taboos around sex, pain, love and mental health. The fetishistic vitality of these works recall Margnetti's vocabulary of the body.

A similar liking to the appropriation of body parts as a fetish totemic element can be found in Sarah Lucas's obsession with protuberances, be they male genitalia either disguised as vegetables, meat, fish or beer cans or exposed realistically in deluxe materials like brass and solid gold or her grotesque headless female figures draped seductively on chairs. Margnetti also flexes body parts with both humor and urgency compelled by a dry and caustic ambiguity, one that seems to question the imperfection and absurdity of the human condition.

Louise Bourgeois and her monumental spiders, eerie "Cells," evocative hanging figures and fabric works is a further example of a highly personal visual language which has used mythological and archetypal imagery as a tool to address issues like the feminine psyche, beauty, and psychological pain. This alternation between forms, materials, and scale, figuration and abstraction can be found in the practice of both Rooney and Margnetti.

An interest in the body as a vital subject for storytelling in literature, artistic practice and mainstream culture has reached a heightened interest in the past years. From gender fluidity, digital activism, intersectionality to material feminism we are today witnessing a collective moment where there is a desire to escape from the pressure of a physical predetermined form and to embrace ambiguity.

* Megan Rooney, "Megan Rooney interview: 'Things have to evolve, otherwise it means you've stopped looking,'" <https://www.standard.co.uk> (15 August, 2018)

** Megan Rooney, email correspondence with Last Tango, February 12, 2019

*** Carol Rama interviewed by Francesca Manzini in 1996, circa 06:42 – 07:38 min, listened from: <https://www.rsi.ch/rete-due/programmi/cultura/attualita-culturale/Morta-Carol-Rama---intervista-di-archivio-del-1996-di-Francesca-Manzini-6131704.html> and translated into Italian by Arianna Gellini, January 25, 2019