

Interview with LEONOR SERRANO RIVAS

on the occasion of the exhibition *The Dream Adventure* in Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía, Córdoba.

Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya: When we started talking about the project, as a curator, I initially envisioned an exhibition that would approach almost a decade of artistic praxis. However, the resulting display revolves exhaustively, even in sketches, around the works developed in the last three years. Why is it so important to take this in-depth look at a specific moment of your career right now?

Leonor Serrano Rivas: From the beginning, I've had an interest in responding to the building space. For this reason, I have collected all of my audiovisual works in this solo exhibition. On the one hand, video represents the core of my practice and sculpture orbits around these works. On the other hand, video creates spaces within spaces—the screen being a threshold or gateway to another site, sometimes amplifying the architecture itself.

Once the exhibition halls were confirmed, I decided to focus on my last two works: *The Dream of the Mouth* and *Estrella*. These videos involve a significant sculptural element, as well as drawings of the procedural nature of the work. The exhibition flow is traced upside down: we start from the most recent production, *Estrella*, and end in what has been my most ambitious body of work, *The Dream of the Mouth*.

Both proposals share elements related to scenography, theatricality, and the process of transferring interests or concerns of the pictorial into three-dimensional space. The route of the exhibition establishes a double inverted movement: it moves from the abstract—forms immersed in water—towards the figurative—in relation to the human body—ending at the beginning, as a memory or a dream. *Estrella* immerses the beholder in a liquid terrain, an unknown cosmos, guiding them little by little to a space where they unknowingly acquire a certain agency by interfering in the shadows cast by the pieces in *The Dream of the Mouth*.

ARF: In part, you define your work not as performance but on performance, along with other elements that we will address later. Why is this distinction so important? It seems that everything is explicit in your performance, *Yet the Sky is Still the Same* (2014) at Serpentine Gallery (London), choreographic, almost gymnastic elements appear, as well as body movements aesthetically linked with the historical avant-garde, ultimately pointing to a relationship with architecture.

LSR: I would say that, more than the concept of performance, I am interested in the structures between work and audience that are present, by definition, in both the performative and the theatrical. My approach to both concepts is broader than how they are commonly used as an artistic "genre." In fact, my approach to the performative and the theatrical has more to do with the properties they contain than assuming them as a particular medium.

In my practice I usually relate performance with theatricality. Theatricality (not the theater) in the visual arts, looks at the figure of the beholder as an indispensable element for the artistic experience to occur. The art object expands its framework of representation to the body of the spectator subject, granting it not only psychological but also corporal agency. The object thus dissolves in the experience of viewing art.

As you indicate, these approaches are present in *Yet the Sky Still the Same* (2014). It is an unannounced performance in which the beholder enters a scenographic structure and the performers generate a certain strangeness, replicating the architectural scene of previous years pavilions with their bodies as well as instruments of rhythmic gymnastics. However, the speech or script was not given: it was instead created by the audience's movement through different 'stations' and their choices among many alternatives. The spectator is thus an agential builder of meaning—an actor that develops possible narratives by expanding upon aspects from the set itself.

ARF: The intangible, the occupation of space and, especially, the notion of the obstacle that intrudes and hinders circulation is introduced in *Harmonic Motion* (2016).

LSR: And this also happens in later and previous works. For example, in the video installation *Limbs Describe Curves* (2015), a floor is introduced to the scene in addition to a stage screen that retracts itself, thus enveloping the viewer. The beholder must step onto this stage to see the piece, located in a transitional space that forces the viewer to cross what you have called "obstacles" to continue watching the exhibition. However, more than obstacles, I conceive of the sculptures as suggested guidelines or inflection points—indicators of where a single point of view is eliminated. The pieces intersect, they have to be surrounded, passed under or around, so that the beholder can choose from where and how to see what is proposed.

ARF: The exercise on the immaterial, the translucent, and the itinerary culminates in 2018 with *The Dream Follows the Mouth (of the one who interprets it)*. It is a choral work, with many voices, and it is not a closed project as it leads to new variations, mutations, and versions in different media.

LSR: These mutations, that I like to understand as reverberations or echoes, are a dynamic correlation of images that occur at different levels. I begin with the pieces themselves in various modes and manifestations ranging from video, sculpture, and mixed media, to site specific installations. These echoes invade the beholder's senses in last instance. That is to say, a game of affective identification is presumed between the exterior (the relations of the work with the given space) and the inner world of the spectator. It is a movement located in the air that exists between the work and the viewer; the echo created between what is evoked and what is imagined. There are points of indetermination or discursive gaps, which evoke a need to be resignified, to be reconstructed through interpretation and in a process *ad infinitum*. Thus, the echo is not a repetition of the original, but rather a process that creates—each time—a different piece.

This question has also become a crucial methodology in my own practice. My work has to do with a kind of circular or almost conical story, where the pieces change from sculpture to performance and from video to installation, only then returning to sculpture. These transitions of means and forms are fragmented manifestations of a story in constant reinterpretation.

ARF: *The Dream Follows the Mouth (of the one who interprets it)* has a liturgical component in the foreground, and incorporates the viewer as an actor in this liturgy. The interaction between the spectator and the artwork, however, is not relational, but acts as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with a continuous jump between the screen, the three-dimensional, and inhabited space. It is a permeable space, and in some way it is also a liquid space, as you reflect in your later work, *Estrella*.

LSR: Fluidity has to do with taking a position opposed to rigid narratives, based exclusively on rationalism. This fluidity or permeability also characterizes a kind of intermediate space resulting from the encounter between my work and the beholder—what I understand as a dream state. My work looks at certain structures (whether they are theatrical, architectural, or psychological) as methodologies to evoke intermediate spaces of reverie (processes of reverberation or echoes to which we have alluded previously) that facilitate a movement from the exterior to the interior (and vice versa) in a cyclic or circular gesture. It could be said that the beholder (who is now an actor) participates in a dream within a dream... a dream that dreams of itself.

ARF: The video installation *Estrella* (2018) dominates one of the two spaces that make up the exhibition. It is a continuation of the works of which you have spoken before, and also it is the first work that the public encounters when entering the exhibition. But at the same time, and although it reflects previous interests, it starts from a very specific historical document that is the book *Un Teatro de Arte en España (1917-1925)* by Gregorio Martínez Sierra.

LSR: I often start from archival or documentary material to reconstruct a "fact" in other possible ways. In the case of *Estrella*, I look to a key historical moment in the development of the performing arts in Spain linked to the old Eslava Theater building (Joy Eslava Disco in the present). The Eslava architecture itself is subjected to a re-reading process that opens up new ways to poetically approaching that moment of the past. Thus, the Eslava building is a space that translates its architectonic and historical elements into images, which are created in a sort of parallel or alternative world enabled by the imagination. The imagination is creativity; it is openness, and if something is poetic, it is also a multitude of possibilities translated into multiple latent narratives. However, I do not understand imagination as the progenitor of random images. There must be a logic to the imaginary, which does not cease to be a logos after all, although in this case it is paradoxically a poetic logos.

ARF: There is something that intrigues me personally, which is your persistent interest in the work of Edouard Vuillard. I find his work to be distant from the historical avant-gardes to which it is commonly related, and at the same time it inspires your fascination with the problem of the background / figure as an open question to new research processes.

LSR: A certain perspective entails a certain order or interpretative positioning that delegitimizes all other possibilities. If in Vuillard's pictorial interiors, the background is situated in the same plane as the action, thus evidencing depth as an optical illusion (something contingent), then in my pieces the break of perspective or unique order appears with the introduction of the beholder as an actor—an unknowing member of a larger corpus called the "chorus".

Also, the large sizes and distances established between the elements that make up the works, as well as their distribution in the exhibition space, help to project the gaze (and the body) in multiple directions. There is no privileged point of view; instead, what is apprehended is a fragment of a fragment of a larger fragment.