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PRACTICALITIES / LA VITA MATERIALE / LA VIE MATERIELLE

Curated by Marina Dacci

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"Je me souviens de la sorte d'émotion qui s'est produite dans mon corps d'enfant : celle d'accéder à une connaissance encore interdite pour moi. Le monde était immense et d'une complexité très claire. Là, il faudrait inventer un vocable qui dirait que, très clairement, on sait ne pas comprendre ce qu'il y a à comprendre". (Marguerite Duras, La Vie Matérielle, pp. 30-31, Gallimard 2021)

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"I can remember what my childish body felt: as if some knowledge had been vouchsafed to it that was still forbidden. The world was huge and complex yet very clear. One would have to invent a word for it—for the way I managed to act as if I didn't understand what was there to be understood." (Marguerite Duras, Practicalities, pp. 21-22, Grove Weidenfeld 1990)

Baert Gallery is pleased to present *Practicalities*, a group exhibition curated by Marina Dacci. The show takes its title from the journal of Marguerite Duras, originally titled *La Vie Matérielle* and translated into English as *Practicalities*, which was first published in 1987. The exhibition is the result of a lengthy process of sharing and exchange of ideas by a grouping of women artists. The Los Angeles version will be the third iteration of the exhibition whose prior versions took place at the CENTRALE Center for Contemporary Art in Brussels Belgium (as *La Vie Matérielle*), and the Palazzo Magnani in Italy (as *La vita Materiale*). Works and venues have changed, but the spirit animating the project has remained the same. In this American iteration, German-born, L.A.-based Sophie Wahiquist has joined the group of Italian artists who all share a similar sensitivity.

In one of the galleries, a "dining room" has been set up which emphasizes the value of sharing. It can be considered a tribute, or else an echo, to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. This is an intimate space in which the large table and a reading corner are elements pregnant with potential for the exchange between the artists and the psychic energies of appreciation for their work—a *comfort zone* where the visitor can feel welcomed.

The exhibition is an invitation to look at everyday life through different eyeglasses, accepting its complexity and mystery, using the imagination and the ability to transform matter, to open the body and the mind, to know how to share.

For all the artists, art and life—in all their complexity and fertility—are closely knit together, both in the poetics of their research and in the choice of their materials. The works speak of the ability to give life to inner landscapes where the sense of belonging to the world fluctuates, of the ability to destroy the obvious, and to bring new, desirable, and desired visions to light. They speak of ancient memories and future possibilities, of humanity's migratory paths through matter, objects, nature, and the relationship with others: a continuous process of influence and exchange that comes to life by mutually shaping us. Some reflect on human phylogeny and the nature/culture relationship in its multiple features; others on the possibility of

merging the inner dimension and the outer environment by creating real interior landscapes meant as spaces of life and imagination; yet others are transforming literary sources into visual narratives. They employ different techniques, with different emotional punctuation made of silences, of slow rhythms sewn into daily lives, of uncertainties and fears, but also of strength and conflict in search for the freshness of "tomorrow". They are always in precarious balance, like our lives themselves.

We are also matter, like the objects surrounding us: both are the repositories of memory. The body, the central element of the project, denies the fracture between the physical matter and the psyche, which seems today increasingly insidious. The body is not a coat. At first, we get to know the world through the synesthetic relationship the senses offer us, which then reaches the mind to be transformed into consciousness—a path that is possible only by reassembling the complex unity we represent, made as we are of material substance and inner motions.

For the artist, the relationship of the hand with the matter arises from an urgency, sometimes unconscious, but always thaumaturgic. The created work is released to continue moving energy between the "inner self" and the surrounding environment—of which we are an integral and indissoluble part—giving new perspectives on the mystery of existence. The work is a trigger. Memory is a central element feeding on selective stratifications by striking a dialogue with the entropy of matter during the work process.

Practicalities, like Duras's work, is an intimate journal yearning to be shared, a way to experience intimacy and belonging while leading us towards a collective experiential dimension. Intimacy refers to the way the artist "sees the world" and the way this gaze is conveyed into the work, in the way it is being offered and shared with others. It is not only the visible that is essential in a work but also the connection being created between the artist and the visitor when the works are displayed and looked at.

- Marina Dacci

ALICE CATTANEO (b. Milan, Italy, 1976. Lives and works in Milan) creates sculptures and videos using commonplace materials such as wood, cardboard, felt, masking tape, rope, and glass, among others. Within her works, everyday objects take on a life of their own, often acquiring qualities connected with the artist's idea of landscape. At once ephemeral and playful, Cattaneo's installations seem like sovereign entities, growing out of any available surface—floor, wall, and ceiling alike—as if living microcosms springing forth against all odds from the most unlikely places. Her work's organic quality shifts the significance of her DIY approach away from its usual pragmatic functionality. While precarious and poetic, Cattaneo's delicate constructions appear as both unruly self-generated growths and science models constantly in search of equilibrium.

ELENA EL ASMAR (b. Florence, Italy, 1978. Lives and works in Milan) works with sculpture, painting, paper, and tapestry. Born in Italy, and living in Milan, she has Lebanese origins, which lead her to be interested in the memory of objects that characterize domestic life in Lebanon and that are able to make her remember the visions that have fascinated and contaminated El Asmar's childhood. The artist's approach is focused on these thoughts that she wants to translate into images. In her annual trips between Italy and her family home of Jbeil, the exchanges of furniture, cups, utensils, and aromas of spices have become the way to keep alive a belonging to a place that is very important for her. El Asmar creates her works from the suggestions of these objects. She is one of the founders of Madeinfilandia, COSMO space (Come Ogni Semplice Movimento Ortogonale, or Like Every Simple Orthogonal Movement).

SERENA FINESCHI (b. Siena, Italy, 1973. Lives and works in Siena and Brussels, BE) is one of the founders of Grand Hotel, a nomadic project in collaboration with Italian and international artists. She also formed the cultural association Fondaco, a project aimed at the diffusion of contemporary Italian art and artists on the international scene. In 2016 the artist created Caveau, a safe built into the medieval walls of Siena to serve as a container for ideas. In 2018, with Alessandro Scarabello and Laura Viale, she founded MODO asbl, a cultural association focused on contemporary art located in Brussels. Her work is characterized by research into the material and its origin by method of subtraction. Fineschi's practice is grounded in the study of the history of painting with an acute sensibility toward the constant physical presence of her body, crossing over the traditional performance processes—the body seen as a bearer of experience and memory.

LUDOVICA GIOSCIA (b. Rome, Italy, 1977. Lives and works in London, UK)'s process-led practice reads like a diary of layered experiences and relations, using the studio as a catalyst for non-linear ecological experiments. Alongside ceramics, fabric, papier-mâché, paper, watercolour and wallpaper, she often employs unusual materials, such as cat hair, distilled water from flowers, emotions and energy. Born and raised in Rome in the eighties the layering of many architectural styles has become a definite influence in her work, as well as Memphis design. Gioscia's practice exists somewhere at the cross road between the Electronic Baroque, Memphis and Arte Povera.

LOREDANA LONGO (b. Catania, Italy, 1967. Lives and works in Milan) uses a variety of techniques and materials to create predominantly site-specific installations, sculptures, performances, photographic- and video documentation. Longo's research can be summarized in what the artist calls "aesthetics of destruction"—a set of visions, often provocative, in which she destroys and rebuilds her subjects, creating extremely suggestive and scenographic works. Known especially for a series of works called *EXPLOSION*, in which the artist builds real theater sets that she then destroys through an explosion, only to rebuild all over again at a different location, leaving incomplete parts on site that testify to the event. The whole process is simultaneously documented by a video projected next to the scene of the explosion. The *EXPLOSION* series has been presented in various events, theaters, museums, and private galleries. Longo's favorite subject remains the fire, which she applies to every available material, be it as explosion of ceramics—as in her latest pieces—or as burns upon velvet fabrics, in which the artist sings collected images from the internet with an electric welding torch—as in the *VICTORY* series of works. The word *VICTORY* here thus becomes a

provocation, the images often representing dramatic situations or moments of social and political interest. In recent years Longo has additionally been the leading artist of workshops such as Art & Social Change at Gam in Palermo and the Art of Freedom at the Ucciardone Prison in Palermo.

CLAUDIA LOSI (b. Piacenza, Italy, 1971. Lives and works in Piacenza)'s practice addresses the direct and embodied experience of nature and its relationship with the natural sciences and the humanities. Slowness and manual processes are important aspects of her work, consciously contrasted with the speed of the contemporary approach to time, production, and consumerist behaviors. This is one of the reasons why embroidery and sewing are among the technique Losi utilizes in most of her projects. The choices of materials and collaborations are also very important—relationships Claudia Losi develops with other artists from different disciplines, poets, scientists, artisans, or persons whose collective contribution represents a fundamental passage in her poetics.

She is interested in a relational and processual unfolding of her projects, often on an extremely extended time scale.

SABRINA MEZZAQUI (b. Bologna, Italy, 1964. Lives and works in Marzobotto) manages, through a reflective process of self-imposed discipline, to revitalize and express in concrete images and objects the essential connection with words and language. The principle of distance, cultivated in the secret rooms of an intimacy that is reflected in her life choices and her periods of isolation and "suspension", reverberates in the practice—as minutely detailed as it is compulsive—where construction and deconstruction succeed one another. What emerges in all of Mezzaqui's work, governed by a relationship with the world filtered through a literary and diaristic dimension that persists like a constant background sonority, is the magical concreteness of a highly concentrated and iterative manuality, seductive in its meticulous adherence to the apparent simplicity of a gesture immersed in the temporal suspension of the ritual. This work is a way of exorcizing the ineluctability imposed by external, exterior rhythms while, at the same time, being an evocative reference to the "feeling" of memory.

SOPHIE WAHIQUIST (b. Eckernförde, Germany, 1983. Lives and works in Los Angeles)'s work combines the dueling sensibilities of a historically rich European lineage of figuration in painting and California's sun-drenched prism on the natural world and New Age expanded sensitivity. Wahlquist's paintings depart from a state of mind rather than from a narrative. Playing with different genres of painting and medium, new gestures and perspectives reverse existing ideas. The artist likes to negotiate the level to which absence can be replaced by paradoxical clarity of something intangible or how the depiction of something recognizable can become a trigger for the imagination. She graduated from Parsons the New School for Design, New York.

I'm deep light and shadow,
earth, flower and wood,
landscape and shelter.

I'm the fire warrior,
Potnia, the Mother,

I'm the dream,
the weaver of dawns:

I partake of the table of life.