

TOMORROW WILL BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY OF YOUR LIFE

10 November - 15 December 2021

ESSAY BY EDOUARDO DA COSTA

“I Am Enough”

Starting in the affirmative, ‘I am’ and ending in the declarative ‘enough’, the quotation is an emphatic start to this body of text, enforcing in an internal way in the mind of the audience, what is physically present, when an artist is inspired by a muse. What we have is a mantra taken from one of Victoria Cantons’ encaustic and linen works.

It is fair to suppose that Cantons’ work is reflective of her lived reality; whose is not? Moreover, is that all it wants to say; I argue not. This text seeks to complicate the implicit assumptions that people read into Cantons’ work. Yes, it is about her personal journey to womanhood and its physical affirmation. But in this stage in her life, Victoria has begun thinking of history and posterity. I am sure she won’t mind me revealing a lady’s age - Victoria has reached the halfway mark in her life. What do people at such an age think of when youth in the physical sense can no longer be relied upon?

“La vida es para vivir - Life is for living”

To borrow from Chaucer’s turn of phrase, Cantons is entering the winter of her life. Winter may not be as warm and embracing as summer, but it lasts longer. As is the case in the UK at least, if we are to assume the visual metaphor of a garden, the roses in this show are dead because they have bloomed in spring and have now been pressed down and preserved in the pages of a sketchbook. In the act of preservation, the question of the vanity of youth that the artist is grappling with, is answered by or assuaged by the practice of making work – recording permanently her thoughts and ideas.

“Love is the answer”

The nature of speaking is what we are here to discuss. “A mantra for daily living”, which is the title of the text and the floral works, is an extract from Cantons’ sketchbooks. The term ‘mantra’ is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary in several ways: as an affirmation or chant that is derived from Hinduism; a sacred text or passage, esp. one from the Vedas, used as a prayer or incantation; a word or phrase from a sacred text repeated in this way. Also, a holy name, for inward meditation.

These definitions are an apt way to begin our exploration of Cantons' work, concerned with ontology, in an almost cosmological fashion, Cantons' fabrications function as windows into not just her own subject hood, but as universal frames. Drawn from history and time immemorial, the works and their titles function as portals, towards the moments that we, the audience, may have felt similar emotions; be that of love, fear, hunger etc. These bodies of work are concerned with synthesising diverse languages of experience, from the domestic to the domesticated. The main motif of the rose conjures a diverse panoply of connotations that serve as a lattice of interaction for the stratified layers of meaning we are forced to confront.

“Trust the process”

Acting as a form of indexical mark-making, language is a tool to navigate the world that she and we both inhabit. A world can smell as ‘sweet as roses’, but paradoxically roses grow best when nourished by manure, confirming a process that all living beings experience - the only certainty if you like.

Hence, like the great poets of history, in her work, Victoria seeks to capture in amber or preserve, like making jam or chutney, the historical richness of the art canon: the history of what we now call the “Fine Art World”.

“Like a candle needs a flame”

Cantons explores what it has been to have lived, not just having lived passively, but with intent. Her oeuvre is filled with arabesques of introspective writing, I choose this term specifically as it draws on the idea that she is creating a language in her work, sometimes abstracted, at other times direct. Cantons explores what it has been to have lived, not just having lived passively, but with intent. Her oeuvre is filled with arabesques of introspective writing, I choose this term specifically as it draws on the idea that she is creating a language in her work, sometimes abstracted, at other times direct. Cantons draws from her own experiences. In the tense video work “Clinging to My Own Beliefs/ Belly Button Fuzz”; the viewer is forced to experience Victoria herself being continually slapped. Acting as moving punctuation marks for the question ‘What is of...’ is a verbal motif or mantra that trails an interrogative one and is never answered within the performance.

Written by Eduardo da Costa following a conversation with Victoria Cantons on 10 November 2021.