

Fire Suite. Vall Palou

Curator: Carles Duarte i Montserrat

The fire of the stars shapes the night and kindles life with light. The flame gives life and consumes. We burn to be like the ashes. All around, there is the dream and the wound. And in her hands, Vall Palou creates the forms which contain the essence of what we are.

With an insatiable thirst for rewriting her world, without rest, without respite, and of capturing it in paintings, engravings, collages, raku ceramics, and sculptures... Vall Palou is an artist with admirable courage and determination, who is committed to her work and who constantly sets herself ambitious challenges with results that deeply impress us.

The raku technique is of oriental origin and is very demanding of the ceramicist and of the clay she uses to work it. The high temperatures to which the piece is subjected, the first immersion in wood or paper, which is set on fire, and then in the water, which quickly cools it, producing an effect on the material that blackens it, with a notable risk of the piece cracking or breaking. The very nature of raku means that it is not usual to produce large pieces and that it usually ends up offering highly varied shades, which are wonderfully uneven. Well, Vall Palou has a go at it and excels.

Fire Suite is an exhibition that has been born out of the successful experience of Vall Palou with raku, although it also includes some magnificent paintings on canvas of considerable size and with predominantly dark colours, with reddish blacks, greens, and blues that have emerged within the framework of the same exhibition project and which perfectly dialogue with the ceramics because they refer to the same chromatic range and evoke their own emotions.

We talk of a suite because it is a broad and coherent proposal, which is developed through a well-articulated sequence, in a succession of different, but intertwined, settings, by a narrative that re-bonds with the technique adopted by Vall Palou, in a completely natural way.

If the name of the exhibition evokes in us the intervention of fire in the raku process, it also leads us to think about the tenuous thread that unites life and death, as elements within a single cycle, in an infinite dance that begins time and time again.

As if it were a prologue, we begin the visit to the **Fire Suite**, entering the Fundació on the right-hand side, via a room presided over by a cherry tree that gives us a connection with nature and the landscape and which Vall Palou has dressed up, making it emerge from the branches and contrasting it with the tree-like forms of raku. And nearby, harmoniously completing this first section, there is a set of other ceramic pieces with vegetative gestures, sometimes with embedded seeds to create chromatically different visual textures.

Leaving behind this first room and continuing along the route from the entrance, we are greeted by shoes and footprints, as metaphors of the path that we have to take, the steps that we follow, and which others will later follow. And then there is death, an explicit or latent presence throughout the journey. From the very beginning, Vall Palou confronts us with it, without contemplations. It manifests itself in the crudest of ways, brutally, through the hanged and the ditch, two works that refer us to aggression, hatred, revenge, wars and their victims. Despite the peaceful scenario that the European institutions have generated since

World War II, not a day goes by without armed conflicts and violent deaths somewhere on our planet. The straightjackets that then appear, tell us about the limitations, the – visible or invisible – corsets that restrict us, and which at times marginalize us and rob us of the freedom to think and to act.

The next stage of this journey is through shadows and fragility and takes us to the tragedy of the Mediterranean, to the shipwrecks and bodies that the refugee crisis and desperate emigration leave upon our coasts. It does so with the tragic image of the drowned child and with a series of paintings that help to convey the disturbing, oppressive message of this space.

This is then followed by a continuum that we could call, remembering Xavier Romeu, **The point of death**, as we enter a dark area of cemetery niches and coffins, of crows, stones and spirits, which however, for contrast, is illuminated by a composition of raku pieces with golden glazes that combine with the glass of a rose window to bring us to the impression of a temple, of the sacred world, of what is transcendent.

When we arrive at the end of the hall, we are met by a pair of glasses that invite us to reconsider, to look again, to look with new and critical eyes upon the fleeting nature of the life that we often move through without stopping to give much attention, with only precipitation.

In the following room, a huge painting with a succession of skins and lights looms out, in a single movement of horizons which confuse us, captivate us and calm us. In front of this splendid canvas, there are two artist's books - one about the plastic languages that Vall Palou has cultivated in a most brilliant and innovative way - in raku, both associated with the initial call that Vall Palou sent out to us from the body of the tree, the **Book of the sown fields**, with various crops, and the **Book of Clay**, in which the primordial elements: earth, water, air and fire, are affirmed.

The trip through the **Fire Suite** culminates in two fascinating series. The first has a notably formal virtuosity and an evidently symbolic strength; it is dedicated to the dinosaurs and immerses us in a remote past, now erased from the face of the earth, but rebuilt in our minds. It contains distant shadows that reveal within us the consciousness of the ephemeral condition of strength. The second presents us with a group of meticulously worked necklaces that introduce us to other and constitute significantly relevant forms of cultural expression.

With **Fire Suite**, Vall Palou reaffirms with force the unique nature of her artistic universe. He does this with a strategy that constitutes an unequivocal demonstration of power and talent, successfully confronting a technique full of subtleties and traps, proposing a brave and uncomfortable reflection - as does Art, with a capital "A" - on the human condition, on the meaning of our existence, on our primordial bond with nature, on our desires for transcendence, on dignity and degradation, on the omnipresence of death.

Carles Duarte i Montserrat
(Translated by Malcolm Hayes)

From October 17, 2019 to January 20, 2020

From Tuesday to Friday from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM and Saturdays from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

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