



SAO PAULO

Allison Katz
Rumours, Echoes

SAO PAULO, BRAZIL – BFA Boatos is pleased to announce the opening of the gallery with *Rumours, Echoes*, the first exhibition in Brazil by Allison Katz. Comprised of paintings, an installation of ceramic works and announcement posters, the exhibition is populated by some of the recurring motifs in Katz's practice: black pears, strawberries, monkeys, noses. Over the years, the artist has been continuously recycling these images, thus creating a particular visual lexicon in which they function as specific signs in an invented language.

Therefore, it is quite fitting that the exhibition title originates from a mistranslation. The artist tells me that, when asking about the meaning of the gallery's name in English, two possible answers were given – rumours or echoes. The first is indeed the corresponding term, but the fact that another (incorrect) definition was also offered aptly coincides with her approach to visual language, and the way she explores the limits of the medium in order to develop associations that expand, warp and distort meaning.

Despite the supposedly obsolete character of painting in what is now termed the "post-internet" condition, Katz embraces an expanded practice of painting as a possible field of experimentation. This non-hierarchical and provisional attitude is perhaps better illustrated by the story behind the recurring image of the black pear which, as the artist tells me, emerged from a feeling of disgust when watching her grandmother eating the darkened bits of the fruit, only to be informed that these are the best parts because that is where sugar is concentrated. Likewise, one could say that painting is just that: an overripe medium, at once extremely sweet and repulsive.

Another important aspect of her process is the manner in which her works circulate as both discreet objects and as part of a discourse built on the tension between original and copy, quotation, transparency, corporeality, and a layering of repeated elements. These can be "read" in relation to each other, that is, not as images that represent something, but often as meditations on the nature of representation that are infused with humour, eroticism, and self-doubt/mockery. It is no surprise then that Katz has a long-standing appreciation of Clarice Lispector's writings.

In a recently published interview, Gilda de Mello e Souza¹ talks about how she admires Clarice Lispector as a writer “with restrictions”:

“She has something which I am not sure if it’s really a quality or if it is a quality that brings with it a great shortcoming. In a language in the making such as ours, she hesitates too much about her chosen words, she constantly replaces one word for another. For instance, she says: *‘It’s a square. No, it’s not really a square, it’s more like a rectangle. A black rectangle, I mean it could be black if the lighting...’* (...) See how she hesitates. She is a great artist, who transforms a shortcoming into a quality.”

As Katz rightly suspects, quoting Lispector in Brazil is a bit like quoting Joyce or Borges when writing about art – it has become a bit of a cliché, but sometimes a necessary one. And Mello e Souza’s opinion, even if expressing her reservations towards Lispector’s writings, illuminates this singular feature of her work that seems to resonate particularly well with Katz’s practice – the construction of a language that is at once hesitant and precise. Which is perhaps better put by Lispector herself in a direct quote from *Near to the Wild Heart* that was sent to me by the artist:

“You see, vision consisted of surprising the symbol of the thing in the thing itself.”

It is this very idea of reconnecting a *thing* with its *symbol* – words and reality, in Lispector’s case – that is at the core of Katz’s questioning sensibility: a language articulated through expressive symbols that generate their own meaning, and mutation.

Kiki Mazzucchelli

¹ Gilda de Mello e Souza (1919-2005) was one of the first women in Brazil to pursue an academic career and was the founder of the Aesthetics course at the philosophy department of University of São Paulo. The interview was published in the book *A Palavra Afiada*, a selection of texts organized by Walnice Nogueira Galvão. (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro sobre o Azul, 2014)