

**“... And we are magic talking to itself, noisy and alone...”**

The neurotic body is a dismembered body. I remember, years ago, a seminar by French anthropologist François Lupu about the dismembering bodies of the people on an island whose name escapes me now; it could be Melanesia. It was a time when any talk about neurotic bodies fascinated me, and I knew from personal experience that the reference to a dismembered body was not just a metaphor but a literal, everyday experience. In that seminar Lupu had spoken of a population which had set the fear of dismemberment into its cultural and religious system in the form of a permanent risk of fragmentation: the faithful (in want of a better term) felt several times in a day that their body was about to fall apart, magically to lose its cohesion. Their cosmology had thus developed some chiropractic rites against this threat: they would place their hands, in a specific order, on the organs and limbs they feared were about to detach themselves from their torso, hieratically ending up onto their genitals.

Lupu’s seminar left me relieved. What I saw as a personal ailment was, in an Antipodean anthropological system other than mine, a culturally organised faith. And my relation with my body as it was at the time—erratic, ritualistic, obsessive, anxiously checking by touch that my limbs were still part of my whole and keeping me alive—had its normalised equivalent in that remote world. If it had a therapeutic, comforting function in that world, it could also have it in mine.

In the exhibition “...**And we are magic talking to itself, noisy and alone...**” of Georgia Fambris, the dense, chimerical, contorted, folded-up bodies—especially in the 2023 series *My Nuclear Me*, with its technically mature and boldly confessional works are in a similar borderline space between dismemberment and reconstitution.

Some works, like *Nuclear Me 4*, bring to mind the Skiapods, the mythical creatures in Ethiopia who used their single huge leg to shade themselves from the sun. Indeed, the upturned leg is a recurring motif in the works of Fambris: as with the SKiapods, the dysfunctional nature of the grotesque, oversized limb adds a sensual quality to the body, as if amputation contributed to a manic propensity for (self-)pleasure.

Others—*Nuclear Me 7*, for instance—retain memories of cubism, although here the enclosed volumes do not convey a formal experimentation but a psychological burden that crushes the body upon itself. The only elements to break up its introversion and open up the composition to the surrounding space are either the high heels from boots or, mostly, the pointy, weapon-like breasts whose nipples bespeak an expanded femininity but also a thorny protection mechanism.

Almost all of Fambris’s works feature drops of liquid like punctuation, sometimes clearly drops of milk from the breasts and sometimes black drops that could be tears, blood or sexual secretions. The drops serve a morphological function, indicating the downward direction of gravity in compositions that often show a chaotic mix of limbs with no other pointers to orientation; above all, however, they restore the organic quality of the severed and crushed bodies and underscore their gendered identity: they are bodies that enjoy and bodies that are suffering.

Femininity is always depicted in a state of entrapment in the art of Fambris. In earlier works the element of narration was more pronounced and often of an anecdotal character, as the main female figures were always set in relationships and family or social contexts that were

highly alienating, in dollhouse-like apartment blocks or as part of the meal of grotesque men; the colours were dull, which in painterly terms revealed more clearly their roots in the artist's studies in religious icon painting. After that time, the painting of Fambris has been following two seemingly contrasting paths: the compositions become increasingly freer, less narrative, or rather the linear, anecdotal narrative recedes and more painterly levels are introduced from non-conventional painterly idioms such as children's drawings or cartoons. The bodies are fragmented, intertwined into vortices of limbs and disparate objects, getting denser and erotic with a pronounced, wild and often lustful femininity. The colours are stronger, pop, but the composition does not completely sever its bonds to the artist's religious-icon background. Yet the gloomy feeling does not recede, and this atmosphere does not suggest a condition for liberating pleasure and regaining the body. Fambris seems no longer to examine on a narrative level—through, say, existential anecdotes—this unspoken existential condition that trapped the body; instead, she conveys it in painterly ways through the use of colours, the disturbed perspective, the solid masses of revolving limbs, the levels of her script. Two affects coexist: the surrender to pleasure and a suffocating sense of malaise. The two sentiments neither antagonise nor balance out each other, but the one is a prerequisite of the other. Both of them dissect the body and both reconstitute it, as the fear of the body's dismemberment is the starting point for assuring its wholeness.

In the exhibition **“And we are magic talking to itself, noisy and alone...”** Fambris expands her painting by using weaving and embroidery to convey her chimerical forms of limbs, symbols of femininity and falling drops. The double bond is depicted through the comforting texture of the materials, which also reflect the tradition of weaving as a staple of women's pursuits. In *Tribal origins and boots*, Fambris's anthropological bedrock comes to the surface. Totemic, hieratic, chaotic and generative, the core element of the work, a vulva and an eye, emanates not drops anymore but cascades of wet threads which are at once sexual secretions and tears. The origin implied by the work is, of course, an allusion to Courbet—but above all it leads back to that primordial neurosis that constantly seeks its cure.

The title of the exhibition comes from a verse in *You, Doctor Martin* by suicide poet Anne Sexton. Written during the poet's confinement in a mental hospital, it addresses her doctor in a way that oscillates between an expression of desire and the degradation or fear she feels under the gaze that sees everything. On a narrative level, that magic that talks to itself, noisy and alone, is the magic of the voices of psychosis that multiply to exacerbate rather than disperse the loneliness. It may be that Doctor Martin represents that same gaze which dissects the body in the work of Fambris. Yet these vortices of limbs, the falling drops and the soft textures of the woven fabrics provide something beyond magic and cure, something that underlies Fambris's entire oeuvre: tenderness.

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