

SHELLEY'S STITCHES

Karina Beltrán occupies a little rectangular table in the smaller part of the studio. The punctilious order with which she arranges her things stands in stark contrast with the happy-go-lucky chaos both Santiago Palenzuela and I need to feel in control of ours. Respectful to a fault, she accepts the situation with equanimity and there you find her, focused like few I've seen, in the midst of that riot of music, big bellowing roars of laughter—Santi's, I'm more reserved—and bickering, all sorts of objects, and oil stains attached to no canvas, lurking in wait for the chance to leave their mark on someone's clothes.

For some time now, we've been watching her, as she moves about the space we all share together, camera in hand. She pans the walls, the floors, the still almost immaculate ceiling the fluorescent casings somehow manage to cling on to—heaven forbid the day they come toppling down on somebody's head—with their neon tubes also still in place, lighting her pursuit of frames. She doesn't go far. Perhaps better said, she discovers faraway treasures that were right here in front of our eyes, made from chance happenings, slips of the mind, stains, stains on stains, little corners and absentminded objects telling each other that they are not where they should be, pockets of nothingness transmuted into potential material thanks to an exacting, multi-faceted gaze.

She returns to her table with her iPhone, the Porsche of those gizmos which were once called telephones and now, who knows ... (someone is just after whispering to me: simply *aifon...*), loaded with images brought back from another world. Now seated, Beltrán manipulates it with a small Canson notebook closed in front of her. She is sifting through the instants. The chosen photos will transfer to the paper an account of whatever Karina translates for it, a translation that will never be literal, not that this is her intention. Then, she opens the drawing notebook and, with a pencil, divides its surface, always in the same way, in an almost imperceptible grid. The layout brings to mind old polaroids—those white tongues the camera used to stick out, which, like a magic trick, gradually stained with memory in front of our eyes. And *Polaroids* is the title the artist gave to this whole series.

She uses colour pencils. Rembrandt fine art pencils. That and Canson paper are non-negotiable. In her own personal way, she draws from life. She places the iPhone with the image in front of her, unhurriedly opens the pencil box and draws what strikes her as most significant. The role of this Porsche as a technological mediator is no more than to keep the image in front of her eyes. As I said, she will translate whatever she sees fit.

Once finished with the pencils, she produces needle and thread and continues. When she is sewing, in those rare moments of calm in the studio, it is not strange to hear her whispering in a low voice, something like lullabies that make me think of Scout, Atticus Finch's quick-witted daughter, sighing softly to herself as she opens the box with her little treasures. In the first drawings, the stitches were hesitant as if underlining, staying true to the compartmentalisation imposed by the drawing. However, along the way, they took more liberties as they began to explore a possible dialogue with an ever greater emancipation of the parts. She ended up ingeniously using the track of the thread entering and leaving the paper in pursuit of the needle, thus rejoining the structural caution of the preceding step with unpredictable new itineraries, fraying, straying dangerously close to the edge... The fruit of her endeavour—dirtying the tongue of the memories she had agreed on with the camera—did not, as expected, give birth to polaroids: shrewdly, the

artist decided not to let the same elements interrelate with the same logic. This all reached its climax in a beautiful and complex suite of drawings in which the dirt of the walls and the soiled memory, the flawless gizmo and the sinful female reach an entente on forty Canson tongues. A peace achieved in these territories by stringing together lullabies.

As Palenzuela said, Hesse and Bourgeois sewed, Shiota sews, Ghada sews, Karina sews... many sew and knit. Personally, I am fascinated by this group drive—or should we say gender drive—with echoes of a culture of mending, of a logic of protection, of an area of those "ways" which had no stock in the combatant's yearnings: a sort of rearguard. A form of repairing, an urgent way of reuniting the parts, or at least, of passing through them, inventing paths that neither the Porsche nor the pencil would be capable of grasping.

Sorting out the mess, or maybe dislocating it... As Junger tells us in his photographs emerging from the hell of the rearguard in the Great War, or as the artist does by denying the bayonet the borders and perspectives she herself had drawn.

And once the doctor has finished his task, all that remains is the monster, showing the stitched face with the twisted gesture of seams. Just like that unnamed one made up of fragments nobody claimed and that has passed into our memory with the wrong name. For the doctor did not sew the monster. The one who did it was the one who imagined the way, and none other, to come up with an answer to the dilemma. Mary Shelley invented the idea of sewing the poor wretch by fragments, and she sewed a doctor to the sad story as the male responsible for the fact that everything remained in a fiction about human's eternal identificative anxiety with God. Karina Beltrán's *Polaroids* have nothing to do with Frankenstein's monster, but bear a strong resemblance with Shelley's, not only because the title lets us in on a clue to an impossibility as a starting point.

Eventually, and nearly always after long observation, Karina takes the finished drawing out of the notebook and places it alongside the others, after first providing it with a sheet of onion skin paper. She closes the metal pencil box and happily joins the conversation going on at that moment.

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