

An interview with **EMILIA MARYNIAK**

by **Dario Rutigliano**, curator
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Through an effective multidisciplinary approach, London based artist Emilia Maryniak accomplishes a refined investigation of the themes of the ephemeral nature of existence and the way we relate to the reality we inhabit. She guides the viewers into a liminal area in which memories and perceptual reality blend together, to highlight the ubiquitous role of our cultural substratum in the way we question apparently simple concepts, such as memory and the unstable dichotomy between dream and experience. We are very pleased to introduce our readers to her refined artistic production

Your approach is marked with a deep synergy between several practices and viewpoints, which provide your works with dynamic life and autonomous aesthetics. I would suggest our readers visit <http://www.emiliamaryniak.com> in order to get a broader idea of your multifaceted artistic production. While superimposing concepts and images, crossing the borders of different artistic fields such as painting and installation, have you ever happened to realize that a symbiosis between different viewpoints is the only way to achieve certain results, to express specific concepts?

I don't know if that's the only way, but it is the way which works for me, and I realized this a long time ago within my practice. Going through many different perspectives to phrase a general idea of particular project may sometimes bring new directions, questions and issues I didn't expect at the outset. Multilayered artistic activity, in terms of media and concepts, is my method of attaining synergy, of reaching a specific combined effect by creating interactions between paintings, drawings, everyday objects and living vegetation. It is important for me to expand and cross edges between fields, because I don't know any other device to reflect the multifaceted, complex and complicated world within and around us.

*I would start by focusing on your artistic production beginning with **Daddy, Daddy, Sleep, Sleep, Sleep - Cause What Is There It's Our Fear**, an interesting project featured in the introductory pages of this article. What most impressed me in this project is the way you have created a point of convergence between references to reality and a particular kind of oniric dimension, establishing an unexpected equilibrium between what appear to be opposite concepts. Did you conceive it in an instinctive way or did you rather structure your process in order to reach the right balance?*

It is always a balance of both. I start every new project by writing down my thoughts and thinking about the process, forming some structure through asking questions. But again, I never know in advance which part of this first, written stage I will keep or change, or which will change me, and lead somewhere else. With *Daddy, Daddy...* instinct played an essential role. On recorded video, I played the old Polish nursery rhyme entitled "The Old Bear is sleep, sleep, sleep" on a children's glockenspiel, which I later used as an object in itself by putting this instrument in the middle of the nest I wove. While working on this project, I lived surrounded by a natural environment, so I was able to walk to the forest not only in order to collect branches for my installation, but also with the aim of observing my reactions and emotions. I made a collage as a back-screen for the video, partly of the book from my childhood called "Fairytales of the People from the North" where the main character was a bear, lived in the forest and acted as a very beastly creature. I read so many northern legends and stories which contain the oldest fears and dreams, I could only understand them through my instinct.

In this installation I wanted to look deeper into memory, to test the relation between collective and autobiographical memories. It seems to me rather unclear: what is the connection between our own

sensation of past and what we think about it, and something which comes from a general idea of the past, some co-memory of us as a species? How much of it is the story we are telling today? Where is my fear, the one to be found in the forest, coming from? It brings up questions not only about the vanishing, the disappearance of something we think was true, but also about the essence of our being. What is that story we remember happening and where is it now? To what extent is our identity dependent on such susceptible perceptions?

This way you challenge the ambiguous dichotomy between memory and experience reminds me of the idea behind Thomas Demand's works, when he highlighted that "nowadays art can no longer rely so much on symbolic strategies and has to probe psychological, narrative elements within the medium instead". While the conception of Art could be considered an abstract activity, there is always a way of giving it a sense of permanence, going beyond the intrinsically ephemeral nature of those concepts you explore. So I would like to ask, in your opinion, is personal experience absolutely indispensable as part of the creative process? Do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience? Moreover, what is the role of memory in your process?

I don't think it is possible to separate self-experience from the creative process in order to create more objective art. It is only a matter of how much we want to make it visible, how much we understand it, and how much we are able to act with it. The creative process is based on the need to compose some new value, but there is much material and only what we are given, and that is what we think and feel through, thanks to which we exist. Memory as a past, or a number of past facts, doesn't have a key role in my art, but it doesn't mean it is separate. Sometimes, it works subconsciously, and when I see it I want to make something of it. Memory itself fascinates me as a non-definable process, as something ephemeral upon which we still build our self-existence.

In Heaviness of the Nest I can recognize a suggestive and successful attempt to establish a dialogue between materials marked out with opposite features, both for their intrinsic physicality and for the role that they play in universal imagery. Although I am aware this might sound a quite naïf, I have to admit that at first such composition had unsettled me a bit, especially through the evocative juxtaposition between the idea of a nest and the presence of a weight that suggested me the idea of a Sword of Damocles ... as in Franz West's installations, Heaviness of the Nest reveals an unconventional aesthetics that comes out from a process of deconstruction of accomplished concepts in order to assemble them in a collective imagery, offering to the viewer a sort of Ariadne's thread which draws us into a process of self-reflection. An interesting artist I had the chance to recently interview remarked: "Artists are always interested in probing to see what is beneath the surface". Maybe one of the roles of an artist could be to reveal the unexpected sides of Nature, especially of our inner Nature... what's your view on this?

As John Berger said, a long time ago: "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled", and that knowledge is liberating for the viewer, the artist and the artwork itself. We don't have to follow what we believe is true, we can let ourselves connect and experiment with different views. Art is meaningful only if we allow it to be. I don't think we need to understand it fully, but we need to be fully open to engage with it. Art is a dialogue, it is a conversation, not so much with the artist, but with ourselves through the artwork. So if I think about the role of the artist, I would say my role is to create a tool which you can use or not, but if you do you may discover some unexpected part of your inner or outer nature. The collective imagination is made up of recognisable notions and connotations, but it is also a process. There are symbols and signs, but the understanding of them is evolving. I like this association you made with a Sword of Damocles, I didn't think of it myself. When I started to work on *Heaviness of the Nest* I wasn't sure where exactly this project would take me.

I was invited to create a three-dimensional art object inside a historical tenement building in Warsaw. It was abandoned and devastated with only few mosaics, marble stairways, some wallpaper left, and there was something absolutely wonderful about this house. For the installation, I chose a three-room apartment on the fourth floor, in which the main room had a broken fireplace. It occurred to me to weave a huge nest, as the object contains so many opposite associations,

especially with the word “home” which is truly powerful and allows us to tell almost everything about ourselves through this one word and through the way we feel about it. This installation doesn't need more words, because it is about our emotional states and questions we reach in correspondence with it.

Another interesting body of work of yours that has particularly impacted on me and on which I would like to spend some words is entitled Bio-Elusive Art; I have to admit it's one of my favourite works of yours: what appeals to me the most about this multi-art project is the way you accomplish the difficult task of investigating the ephemeral and at the same time elusive nature... when I first happened to get to know this work, I tried to relate all the visual information and the presence of a primary element as water to a single meaning. I later realized I had to fit into the visual unity suggested by the work, forgetting my need for a univocal understanding of its symbolic content: in your work, rather than a conceptual interiority, I can recognize the desire to enabling us to establish direct relations... Would you say that it's more of an intuitive or a systematic process?

I would say that the *Bio-Elusive* project is more intuitive than systematic, although it started with scientific curiosity and paradoxically, compared to my other works, this one is the most about seeing. The paradox came from the fact that this project is about something we cannot experience directly, something we need to let ourselves be drawn into, that underlying level of premonition, but through observable nature. There is no single meaning, just like the primary element is not something perceptible. And it is about a forthright relation with the work itself. It is also about my passion for and connection with painting, and about my understanding of it.

Probing the evocative potential of the medium you incorporate in such an unconventional way, you provide the viewers with an extension of the usual perceptual parameters, which allow you to go beyond any dichotomy between Tradition and Contemporariness, as in the interesting Inextricable, establishing a stimulating osmosis between materials and techniques from a contingent era and an absolute approach to Art: do you recognize any contrast between Tradition and Contemporariness?

We could say that everything that exists is Contemporariness, because Tradition contains thoughts and ideas through which we can express our current and present selves. So there is no contrast, it is only a constantly changing narration. I see Tradition as the notion of endless possibilities, which cross lines between understandings. It gives me, as an artist, a deeper and richer context with regards to what I do now. I am deeply fascinated by ancient Greek philosophy and myths. I use them to create new values and to talk about issues which are vital for my present artistic invention.

Your practice is intrinsically connected to the chance of creating an area of intellectual interplay with the viewers, who are then urged to move on from the condition of a merely passive audience. So before leaving this conversation, I would like to pose a question about the nature of the relationship of your art with your audience. Do you consider the issue of audience reception as being a crucial component of your decision-making process, in terms of what type of language is used in a particular context?

I wouldn't say that audience response is a crucial component in my decision-making process, but it is important for the artwork, especially in a co-participation context. While I was working on the *For-Gossip* installation, in which I used Polish words, I was interested in the idea of naming things, but I didn't know in which language this idea would affect me more. I started with linguistic associations and word-playing, but those connotations were not the essence of that work. And even if it was, at first, understandable only for a Polish speaking audience, it was also carefully translated and explained. When this installation was exhibited, people's reactions were striking to me and it seems that those linguistic games were not essential, what was more important was the grass itself, the unpleasant touch of it and the fact that it was inescapable. So not the intellectual, but the physical experience of this work was more significant.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Emilia. Finally, would you like to tell our readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

My next project is going to explore the subject of human identity through the biological body, something I started with my series of works entitled "Transformation". Previously, I created many drawings and traditional paintings and I feel there is time to research and include other media in order to discover some new areas of perception. This subject is engaging me deeply, so I will not only create a spacial piece or video, but I wish to work with the body as an object itself. I am very excited about it!