

The *Delicate Aggression* of Mira O'Brian

Mira's work impresses the instant you stare at it. There is a tension between perfection and chaos, all is perfectly intended, but unconventional and impulsive.

Entering her wide and spacious studio in Berlin, my eye was caught by the two large-scale paintings on paper hanging on the wall. Fences, broken glass and panels with translucent surfaces, are the subject matter used by her in most of her work. A couple of these elements are to be found at her studio.

There is not much there at the moment, because she is about to ship her work to Switzerland for her next exhibitions. Telling me about it, our conversation started her describing how she starts her creative practice. I asked her to tell me about her ideas, her future plans, and to share her artistic and creative process with us.

How do you come up with new ideas and how you manage your creative process from this incredible workspace?

I work in a couple of different ways, I do large scale works on paper and I also do installation sculptural work with glass and projecting shadows, and that kind of things.

I use all kind of media to create my work, I start out looking for forms, I photograph them and then I recombine different elements from different places, I change things around of it, I manipulate them on the computer, and I draw by hand or on the computer, there are a lot of different layers. I combine, change and reinvent the source material and it ends up in tracing paper. The compositions are quite large, so I have to plan it

The colors that I use have a special quality. It is a general feeling of the colors of shadows and reflections, there are connected to urban landscape, like asphalt, reflection of water on asphalt, etc.

I also have a couple of different performance projects that I worked on, they all are really overlapping, and I don't necessarily distinguish so much in terms of the ideas, I try to let them all influence each other.

You mean, the form or the concept?

I am really interested in working with materials and what is specific to each material, so yes, that would obviously change depending if I am working with watercolor or glass, but then a lot of the ideas behind the work, I think, are kind of consistent from one medium to the next.

I have been always really interested in forms, like architectural forms becoming more organic and then being introduced in to an environment; or like when materials go from being diagrammatic to being used in other context.

Fences are forms that you use recurrently in your work. What is your motivation to do so?

In the paintings there are places where the fences had been cut open and then stitch back together, and that is the starting point for the works, and you know, it has a lot to do also on a formal level, like starting now with a grid that is like a diamond grid and it is becoming more organic and less perfect, like disrupted.

Is there a special historical or personal relation to it? Or what makes you conceptually use this kind of forms?

One reason is more on a formal level, but it means a structure that has been broken down and unraveling. I am really interested on disruption of geometry, and then on the other hand, I think about what it actually is, it also relates to landscape and I think a fence is almost the most minimal architectural structure that you could have. I mean it is not even building like any kind of dueling; it is literally only just a division within the landscape. From one space you have immediately two.

Are you creating through this kind of imaginary space a presence of something or someone that is not there?

It is almost like a drawing through the landscape itself, and then of course, once you divide one space into two spaces there is an inequality that gets created. I focus on these places where the fence has been cut open and then put back together, because it is showing interaction from the two sides of the fence, which I like to call "an unwilling collaboration", because the result is like a drawing with the lines and everything, but it is also showing the tension and the conflict of both sides. It is like one person has put the fence there and another has open it to get in or out. The context is kind of removed.

You do remove the evidence of a presence. How transparency, which you use a lot, could be considered as a language to perform this phenomenon?

The glass panels are part of the performances and installations that I made. I make interventions on them. I was doing a lot of research about the idea of transparency in glass architecture. It is making a connection between the origins of glass architecture starting with green houses, making the connection between landscape and architecture, overlapping civilized space and nature. I think transparency, as opposite of opacity or reflectivity, can bring the presence of the inside into the outside and vice versa. Transparency plays like a power structure, like fences do, there are two spaces, there are interacting.

Why architecture is so important for you, what is your connection to it?

Architecture always starts with a plan, and this is the most perfect that it will ever be. And then you built something, like following the plan, but it can't really

be the plan because it is made out of materials, and materials have their own demand. Gravity, weather, forces of conflict, process of decay or entropy of a system, are always influencing materials. So you are always experimenting with something new, and that is part of creating new work based on processes after a plan. My work has a lot of a tactile quality, I do love the Trompe-l'oeil effect, and my stuff has a little bit of this effect, it has a direct experiential eminence.

Does this have also a relation to you performance and installation work?

My performance and installation work is more experiential, like my installation on 2013 here in Berlin -at General Public Space- I used panels of glass that were rolled up and pushed against the wall, then they were gradually sinking through out the exhibition so you could hear them like ice crackling. I recorded the sound of rolling up the panels, and it was like bones breaking. It was really violent. If you want, you can say it is all tri-dimensional, like architecture.

You have a project called *The Berlin Drawing Room*. Can you tell me something about that project?

It started on 2011 with two students and it grew pretty fast. I started to provide classes for adults. The main connection is a little bit broader, I am not teaching classes specifically related to my artistic practice, and the idea behind this is not teaching to make art. It is more about developing specific skills, for example the core of it is the drawing workshop. It has a lot to do with perception. It is drawing from observation. We use still life, models, and what we do is retraining the way people see.

Most of my students are international that is another thing that is interesting about it. The situation right now is that because it is happening in my studio, it limits a little bit to make this broader. It is an advantage for me to work here but if it makes things a little difficult if we want to grow. Maybe in the future I will need to look for another space and to hire some instructors to work with this project with me.

We have plans, in connection with The Studio Visit, to make some Critic programs in collaboration.

What are your future plans regarding your work. Do you have some ideas how can you manage your personal production and managing *The Berlin Drawing Room*?

Actually, it is a little bit hard for me to enter that at the moment. Do you know that sometimes you are in a mode of a research phase and planning some projects?

At the moment, I am more in the position of looking my "today". Today I have been in execution mode for my work because I have three exhibitions opening in Switzerland within the next month. I am not having the time to think about what is coming next regarding my production.

From Zurich I am going directly to Venice to a residency for printmaking. I will be there around a month and then; I am going to have the time to reflect a bit more. It is actually the first time that I show a lot of the work that I am bringing to Switzerland, and I always have the feeling that until something leaves my studio is not finished.

So I am in the middle of things right now, and I feel attached to the current work and I want to see it succeed in the world, so I guess the next for me is very short term at this moment in time.

Do you consider yourself a successful artist at this very moment? Or are you still in the process to be well known in the art world? What does this means for you?

I don't know, I don't think I could answer that definitely. Maybe I am negative, I guess, I always think about just what I can do more for my art, what the next to. I have never had the feeling to say that I am satisfied and to stop creating or doing things. I am very self-critical.

I think it is like a more feminine humbleness. Male artists are more into say that they are successful faster as we women do. At least they are able to project their image easier that women artists do.

Does your art has something to say about gender issues?

Yes, definitely. It is like beneath the surface, but not far from there at all. To me it is there, for sure. The thing it is hard to talk about without just sounding really general. A lot of my work, like the fences for example and the way that they are painted, it is something very architectural but the lines are very lyrical, they start to create a pattern and almost start to feel decorative at times, these are sometimes perceived as feminine, taking more a masculine form but the expression becomes more delicate.

There is a phrase that describes my work; it says that it is a *Delicate Aggression*

It is the same with the broken glasses that I use, it draws you in because of the glittering and forms but on the other hand it means danger, and I think that it is not a far stretch to see that through a gender topic. I mean I don't need to specifically name it, but is definitely there. Feminism is very important to me, personally.

Your work has a contraposition between these two tensions. You as a woman can recall it, but your message is aggressive and disturbing sometimes. Is this your intension for your art production?

That is something of the quality that I try to balance in my work. I always have to have both. It cannot just be pretty and decorative, but it also cannot only be harsh. The tension between the two creates something new, it is the reflection of the way I see things.

