



Down the liminal valley

Duo show Lou Masduraud & Cécile Bouffard
Duplex / November-December 2019

Down the liminal valley is the first exhibition project of flight of fancy, conceived and curated specifically for Duplex.

Down the liminal valley stemmed from the wish to bring together the work of Cécile Bouffard and Lou Masduraud, whose respective sculptural practices, fields of investigation and thought processes strongly resonate with each other's and whose paths have often crossed – starting when both artists were still studying at the Beaux-Arts in Lyon. This first collaboration and exhibition has thus been thought of as a meeting point, a definite space allowing their artistic practices to cohabit and permeate each other.

Combining what makes Duplex such a distinctive and appealing initiative - party hub, playground for artistic experimentation, area of freedom - together with the realities linked to its independently-run, resolutely anti white-cube nature, this exhibition was imagined as an opportunity to experiment around the notion of *rapprochement*. To be understood as much from an artistic, formal point of view as a human one.

Night opening for a nocturnal exhibition. The exhibition opening was thought of as a convivial, festive occasion, including an electrical programme of DJ sets (claravite, ven'3mo and Mighty). A friendly, welcoming format meant to highlight the strong connection that exists between artistic production and sociability. A format which also resonates directly with the core of the exhibition's project, namely the topic of the night and all that night life can encompass (dreams, emancipation, new configurations of possibilities, etc.) - an exhibition not only *in* but also *about* darkness.

How can one build pathways towards new emancipatory vanishing lines and how could those then be contextualised in an exhibition space?

Sculptures made from sanded, coated and painted wood - reminding both by their form and function of lanterns - are scattered through Duplex's exhibition space, plunged in semi-darkness. The sculptures' gutted parts, filled with fabric and latex, form new cavities concealing a light system whose intensity hopelessly fails to either illuminate or warm up the dismal atmosphere of the barn, mercilessly engulfed by the bleak winter air. Those fluid, fluffy forms nonetheless bring to mind an original warmth which would have melted and shaped them; the suggested curves appear as an invitation to apprehend them through the prism of anthropomorphism.

Neither particularly reassuring nor really worrying, those open, free-formed sculptures by Cécile Bouffard entitled *Sombre voltige* seem to have freed themselves from their original function and any fixed interpretation. They simply float there, as if torn between different polarities.

While those sculptures seem to indicate a different horizon, emanations and radiations of activities that seem to come from elsewhere overflow into the bar's inter-space through carved grids. Lou Masduraud indeed furthers within this exhibition her plastic research around the notion and architectural element that is the window well - used to bring a bit of air and light in a basement or any

other underground space - which she started with her series *Plan d'évasion*. Here, she presents five new pieces realised from pre-existing carved grids (bronze and ceramics), behind which are visible intricately elaborated spaces, built *in situ*. This allows her to address the question of individual and collective emancipation vis-à-vis public, normative spaces.

Natural antidepressants escape from this window well, hinting to a strange underground activity whose evanescent physiological virtues overflow into the bar on the first floor. Two more grids are integrated within a light system which sparkles in a way that recalls that of the lanterns hung in the exhibition space. Yet more grids are embedded in a panel wall made from a patchwork of different fabrics; this recurring element in Bouffard's practice, aimed to mark a shift - visual or corporeal - is here transpierced by additional elements, scenic device allowing to add an additional level to the exhibition. New potential spaces to glimpse at and possibly invest.

As a matter of fact, those grids allow to discover new productions by Cécile Bouffard; among them, *Réserve*, a series of artworks made from silicone filled suction pads. In light of the significance Masduraud attributes to window wells, apprehended as spaces full of possibilities and concealed realities, the notion of "réserve" - which in French recalls among other things the idea of food storage - can here perhaps be metaphorically linked to that which remains out of sight, buried in our unconscious minds. Bouffard is actually interested in the plurality of definitions available for this word - in French *réserve* is a synonym for care, reluctance, secret, temperance, provision, etc. - and how this polysemy amplifies its meaning.

Through those grids, we can also observe other works from Bouffard's series *Ecornifleuses*. These small, parasitic pieces of work uninhibitedly infiltrate, insert and append themselves to what surrounds them. Their physical envelope is composed of elements and materials which they extract from the environments in which they are hosted, and consequently evolves from one exhibition to another. Here, they occupy the exhibition space's exposed beams but also introduce themselves and contaminate in a more pernicious way one of Masduraud's window wells.

The term *liminal* is largely used in psychology in order to define any transitory stage, process or period. However, although liminality indicates a transitory stage which de facto implies a *before* and an *after*, the timespace it delineates is in reality that of indetermination, opacity, and of any non-actualised potentiality (and which may never become actualised). The notion has therefore less to do with the idea of anticipation than with a form of speculation resolutely anchored in the present time.

It is with this in mind that one has to understand the concept of liminality pertaining to the artwork presented by Cécile Bouffard and Lou Masduraud in this context: an ellipsis invested by the artists as a space of possibilities as well as of resistance. Incapacity, but maybe also conscious refusal to pick one over the other. This desire to remain on *the edge*, on *the verge of*, to play with this tension between in and out, darkness and light and between what is perceivable and what is not, is finally part of an ambition striving to not only give back its value to latency, but also to challenge the binary logics which govern our schools of thoughts, our interactions and our imaginary worlds.

Liminality is a question of bodily disposition, but also of the mind and the sight - the eye does not know in advance what it sees, neither the mind what to do with this information. *Down the liminal valley* attempts to foster those moments during which the limits of our mind and our behaviour loosen, opening up a path for novelty and imagination to flourish.

Ascending ladders, climbing steps, crossing thresholds... echoing what is special about this hybrid and disconcerting exhibition space, *Down the liminal valley* is a summons to liberate thought and desire; an injunction to navigate the troubled and liminal zones where Cécile Bouffard and Lou Masduraud are negotiating the possibilities of inventing new ways of perceiving the worlds and spaces that we occupy.