

## Nothing Happens Pollyana Quintella

*vedettes*, 2017. A latex mask molded from the face of a mannequin is mounted on a support. Its mouth opens and closes with the help of a small motor, while videos of women's mouths are projected onto it. It is too mechanical a creature to awaken any empathy. It tends to sound stupid, useless, or delirious even though it can harbor our multiple fantasies. I don't know what it says and its ineffectiveness bothers me.

Mannequin, motor, vedette. The components are stripped of singularity; rather, they correspond to the shallowness and superficiality of something that is purely exterior. Mannequin, motor, vedette: a double, avatar, generic mannerism of what humanity is. It's not the image of a body, but the body of an image that is clichéd par excellence.

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Ilê Sartuzi (1995, São Paulo) is an artist interested in ambiguous vitalities, (in)animate objects, bodies, and subjectivities that are shaped by technology, nonsensical dramas, impossible dialogues, perishable sculptures, crude choreographies, hollow representations, flaws and flaccidity. They are images and machinery that prompt us to draw some parallels in search of similarities and differences.

It is worth recalling the fascination surrounding the mannequin, machine-like composites, and monstrous figures that populated the early decades of the twentieth century. From the mannequins by Eugène Atget, Jindřich Štyrský, and Iwao Yamawaki to Raoul Hausmann's mechanical hybrids or Hans Bellmer's perversions, the psychological effects of war and industrial capitalism were already manifested in a play of reality and fiction, combining at one and the same time the traumatic scenes of disfigured soldiers and the subjective consequences of technological progress. But if at that time people's imaginary about mechanical figures was still centered on a clear relationship of opposition (the idea of *us-versus-them* is explicit in science fiction classics from E.T.A. Hoffmann and Mary Shelley to Karel Capek and Isaac Asimov), here the artist invites us, in the light of his time, to reposition these terms – neither Promethean promise nor spectacular threat of the destruction of humankind. Given the circumstances of a post-human capitalism whose transgenic reality exceeds any binaries, Sartuzi tensions the relations between naturalness and artificiality without aiming to dissociate them (thereby avoiding any moralizing perspective on these topics). At the same time, he is not interested in being restricted to

a presentism circumscribed by the here-and-now, while dialogue with a certain tradition is a constant that adds different dimensions to his output.

One manifest example of this is *Arnold Schwarzenegger* (2018-2019). A cutout sheet of expanded PVC presents the merged form of four poses taken by the actor and bodybuilder after whom the work is named. The image of each of the poses is projected separately on this amorphous silhouette, making us piece together the exhibitionist movements. Sartuzi explores the echo of the ideal of the Hellenistic – Herculean – body present in this type of bodybuilding, revealing the body as a technological artefact continually negotiating and constructing, scrutinizing tensions between sculpture, image, and modeling. If the aesthetic precepts of Classical Antiquity were about making man the measure of the universe, then Arnold Schwarzenegger's poses are a caricature of a project for manhood rooted, among other things, in an investment in self-design. The classical repertoire is dissected by irony and profanity until it is propelled into contact with mass culture and the celebrity phenomenon, testing the limits of high and low culture. By overlapping of the actor's silhouettes, Sartuzi ends up also making the figure grotesque and monstrous, turning him into a cyborg-device of himself. In fact, if in the imaginary erected by mainstream twentieth century cinema all manner of anthropomorphic monsters had the effect of reflecting widespread racism, heightened aversion to difference, and manifold insecurities surrounding the vulnerability and malleability of bodies in mutation, what is presented here is the idea that the obsessive normativity of the ideal body itself borders on the misshapen and aberrant.

The interweaving of artifice and nature, added to questions concerning the very history of art, is also seen in other moments. *skin (arm\_tripod)*, made of latex, refers to the motif of "The Three Graces" and other triple figures whose role was, alongside their mythological content, to enable the artist to exhibit his virtuosity by exploring variations on a theme within a given composition – like an anachronistic 3D version that captures different sides of the same surface – while corresponding to the ambition of a sovereign all-seeing spectator. Meanwhile, *column (heads)*, which alludes directly to Brancusi's program, makes modular manufacturing look like a crude, failed, violent enterprise. Just like Pygmalion, who falls in love with the statue he has sculpted in his attempt to reproduce the ideal woman, or the bunches of grapes painted by Zeuxis, so real that the birds try to eat them, as Pliny the Elder tells us, the latex that is a constant in Sartuzi's work comes close to the flaccidity of skin, and, just like the living matter, is inevitably doomed to perish.

Yet in all these cases, unlike the classical urge, the point at which art and reality coincide is not in the success or effectiveness of a possible program, but the rawness inherent to failure. The flaw is situated as refusal, imposture, and impossibility, but also a purposeful way out and an inventive resource. It is not unusual to experience a sense of malaise when looking at these bodily fragments. Our urge to fill them with subjectivity and imagination

exceeds any capacity to sustain the precariousness they imply. Just as they present an absence and remain unfinished, they also operate as disturbing fetishes.

This is one significant aspect of Sartuzi's work: the paradoxical negotiation between flaw and rigor. Despite constantly pointing to fractures and cracks, his objects are marked by a degree of economical refinement, which lends them a precision of their own. Wires, cogs, motors, tripods, and other supports are considered in detail in the calculation of the works, breaking down any separation between structure and content or scene and backstage. What they reveal is the efficiency of failure. As Beckett teaches us, what matters is not just failing, but failing better. And failure can come in all shapes and sizes. In *hollow head doll's foam*, a play without actors staged in 2019 that could be considered a landmark in this experimentation, anthropomorphic figures topple over and break apart. A latex body seems to be disjointed. The mechanical movement of a mouth is out of sync with the recording of its speech. The projection of an actress's face on a mannequin remains defective. Incessant repetitions and loops bring method and dementia, machinery and delirium, closer together. Fragmented, broken dialogues reflect the audience's own fitful attention and rebuff any notion of unity and linearity in a quest for a diffuse experience that calls for the viewer to actively engage as an editor with what they see and hear. A call for a certain opacity of language remains even as we are presented with the fantasy of a sovereign apprehension of the work.

It is this incompleteness that ends up indicating the things as characters of themselves – doubles to be broken down and regarded with mistrust. It is not by chance that theatricality is a constant in this artist's work. Everything is scene, even when there is no dialogue at all, because the setting is always a space of *appearances*. In the library of *auroras*, a 1950s modernist house where Sartuzi held his last exhibition, a curtain opens and closes incessantly, but no show is announced. It is in this in-betweenness that the surrounding context begins to look staged and it is possible to find the hackneyed elements of the house – also made a focus of attention – odd. In the bedroom, a male and female mannequin seated on a double bed discuss their relationship, but their fragmented dialogue only goes to reinforce the impossibility of any communication. Although it is crude, the scene conjures up an uncomfortable familiarity. There is no opposition between imitated and imitator, nature and artifice, reference and referent. Machinery, mannequins, and miniatures act here to lay bare the artificiality and emptiness of whatever is taken as natural or human, showing its fictional dimension. In other words, the work of Ilê Sartuzi continually rearranges subject and object. Objectifying the body, subjectifying things, not to save anything, but perhaps to cleanse and rescue the clichés from their debris, defunctionalizing anecdotes... until nothing happens.