

Interview with Ingrid Luquet-Gad and Valentin Ranger

Ingrid Luquet-Gad – From my initial encounters with your work, what stood out to me most were the topologies: divergent spaces of aggregation, emergence, or transformation, preceding any alternative representation of other bodies, identities, or ways of being. The hospital, but also the monastery, the theater, or the darkrooms: what status do you attribute to these places that appear in your works?

Valentin Ranger – These enclosed spaces carry social norms while implying a certain relationship to the body. They are spaces of constraint but also of security, pushing for crossing and movement. Here, each individual finds themselves facing their own individuality because encounters are brief, occurring within a temporality comparable to that of a dream. I have a very powerful relationship with solitude, which I see as a necessary step in encounters. In this regard, reflecting on these spaces is a way of considering the conditions for the formation of a community or the collective.

For four years, I kept personal journals while subjecting myself to a state of overproduction. It was from these swirling ideas that I could begin to think about the organisms I wanted to translate and, secondly, the narrative that could give them a story beyond simple storytelling. There is yet another type of place for me: the digital space. I conceive it as equivalent to the ones we discussed earlier, and I emphasize this point to avoid confusion with the grand fantasy of the virtual. For me, it is simply an uncertain and indeterminate space.

Digital space is of crucial importance to me. It is the place of first experiences and forbidden explorations. This includes encounters with an image on Wikipedia as much as avatars performed on forums. The individual traverses this space; they can see without being seen. Judgment, which governs in society, is less burdensome here. The body exists without norms; its form extends and stretches to become fluid, arched, expanding. These experiences leave traces. They are real because they contribute to self-construction – and the reverse is equally true: digital space is born within the body.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad – This digital universe then becomes a matrix that you translate through a wide range of mediums: 3D film, colored pencil drawing, or engraving on aluminum foil. For your first solo exhibition at Spiaggia Libera Gallery in Paris, you also include new works: oil paintings and digital prints. How do you materialize this universe without freezing it too much?

It's a real question that I ask myself because I include myself in the practice as a body in continuous proliferation. In this regard, mediums are places of prayer and reflection for me. They embody the tension between the search for meaning or results and the path of thought until letting go. I work according to a process that advances through repetitions, in a spiral movement. With each rotation, it hooks onto a new idea, detail, object, or form. All of this accumulates and mutates. The magma becomes a lexicon, a glossary.

Initially, drawing allowed me to translate certain ideas. These drawings were deliberately done without education: their function was to be an outlet for thought, a more fluid form of expression than language. The aluminum ex-votos are also older pieces started four or five years ago. As I wanted to talk about sexuality in an internal world, I mutated genital organs. Today, this origin is not necessarily visible anymore. Instead, one perceives symbols multiplying like an infection, with a result that I often liken to hieroglyphs.

Dabbling in everything is a real joy because proliferation avoids prostration. I am also driven by a strong desire for popularization. Currently, I am trying to give tangible and graphic meaning to this digital space to present it to the viewer. This exhibition is a claim to real space; it is the first emergence from a non-fixed space. The power of the object in space fascinates me, and when I was a student at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, I had only worked with conceptual artists [Figarella's studio; Ann Veronica Janssens/Hicham Berrada's studio]. Despite my language being far from abstraction, I remain convinced that one must traverse chaos to find harmony.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad – An associated aspect concerns world-building. The theme has deeply influenced science fiction literature, and Phillip K. Dick's formula remains famous: «How to build a universe that doesn't collapse two days later» [title of a 1978 lecture]. However, it seems to me that the internal continuity implied by any fantasized universe has been less explored from the perspective of visual arts. On your part, long-term time is an essential factor, as evidenced by the four years during which you let your «Orgiax» group mature...

On the contrary, I find it interesting that this universe can collapse. It's a world that advocates for its ephemeral existence: it hangs on a few seconds of electricity, but the more it repeats, the more autonomy it gains. This raises the question of the value placed on the characters it contains, once they begin to have a lived experience and a history.

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The «Orgiax» are degendered 3D characters from which I have already drawn many elements. They are source bodies, avatars of myself mixed with the memory of other presences, living, viral, or dead. They have undergone a thousand mutations, and I eventually lost them in a black hole because I did not give them stability. They have not yet spoken, but they have taken the time to be alone before presenting themselves to others. With this first solo, I realize that the heads of the paintings are still them, even though one head gives rise to fifty others.

I started painting last July when I left the Beaux-Arts. I set internal challenges that are difficult to frame, asserting a philosophy of overflow: ingest, digest, regurgitate. For now, it's an accumulation process, involving a lot of collages. Despite being painting, it is still something that exceeds the different languages of art, not necessarily integrating a perspective on a certain history. For me, there are no colors that do not go together: if they are side by side, something will happen.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad – This method of proceeding with dissident topologies and para-fictional communities has an artistic genealogy. I think of Shu Lea Chang [especially Brandon (1998-1999), a virtual project taking physical form, notably through the «theatrum anatomicum»] and more broadly, the cyberfeminist movement of the 1990s. At that time, the digital was an unexplored sphere. It opened up a relatively private space, into which gender dissidents, societal dissidents, and norm refuseniks plunged. Today, cyber-utopias seem distant. As a young artist of the 2020s, what role do you attribute to the digital?

In my work, there is indeed a genealogy. I recognize certain things in Shu Lea Chang's work; perhaps ultimately what I have tried to transcribe with these paintings. The idea of an «anatomical theater» appeals to me a lot and corresponds to my current concerns because real spaces also bring me back to the theatrical space. In the future, I imagine a digital troupe based on my organisms – and who knows, perhaps their first word or cry?

Regarding digital space today, a crucial issue is censorship. It threatens a return to hierarchical relationships of morality, judgment, and authority

This question might be a next avenue of exploration for me, as the notion of counter-power has been linked to my different spaces from the beginning. For example, the emergence of the «Meta Hospital» in my practice comes from a discovery I made at eighteen that deeply affected me: in the early 20th century,

German physician Magnus Hirschfeld [one of the founding fathers of LGBTQ liberation] founded the Institute of Sexology in Berlin, a hospital with a naturist space and a library.

This library was targeted by one of the Nazis' first book burnings, and in response, I wanted to recreate a place of repair within the digital. But if we think about the return of censorship, perhaps we will need to build the same dark places within rigid digital space that already existed in the real world – cyber-space darkrooms. For now, it's the idea of a theater that preoccupies me. However, I am certain that I will invest it with an essence of counter-power: perhaps not yet a political theater, but certainly a theater full of monsters.