

The Equivalences of Matter (translated by Bernard Shutze)

Metamorphoses – The Analog Traces of Onira Lussier

Retracing the Stroke

It's a stone, it's a being, it's vegetal, animal, sexual, erotic, obscene, almost dead, almost alive, I feel it inside me, it does not speak, I do not speak it, a ghost perhaps, and this is neither nothing, nor something, I know it without knowing it and it is *fate* at the tip of the tongue.

Outside of mathematics there is no salvation for those who want to protect themselves from the polyps of the real, and much to the dismay of geniuses, there is nothing factual about mathematics. One can thus explain the birth of art and Onira Lussier's work as taking place, and placing whosoever encounters it, within this primordial and primitive uncertainty.

At first glance, Onira's works captivate the mind through their complexity. An infinity of lively strokes masterfully replay the history of relief and shadows. Varying between terse and ample, each pencil stroke marks the paper sheet in a manner that we have all experienced since we were old enough to hold a pen. While we may know each stroke from experience, knowledge of the whole escapes us, technically and figuratively. Onira's drawings are at the threshold of graphic and mental experience in the way a word is on the tip of the tongue. Like Rorschach tests, they continue to engage our mind on a level below words, but contrary to these, they connect it with a complex and controlled pictorial figure, the development of which goes back well before the sole drawing on the paper. Whereas the Rorschach test probes our reading of forms, Onira's work connects us with the technical and mental birth of forms.

With Onira, the graphite pencil acquires a digital thickness. The primitive experience of a pencil stroke is here linked to a digital image processing that intervenes in the creation process like a feedback—the digitally reworked drawing is redrawn by hand and thus sets up an infinitely repeatable loop—to open new avenues for an unprecedented complexity. At a time of a potential digital breaking point, Onira reexamines our fundamental relationship to the stroke, which is clearly a technical relationship, but also a psychological one, because beyond strokes, and below words, it touches on our representation of things and our relationship to the formless of the world that precedes our experience. Onira's drawing is halfway between the mind and the world, it is at

once form and matter, control and constraint, like a pivot, it expresses matter and its mental equivalences.

Cave Art

Onira's work thus takes place at the heart of art's birth and the sites that she occupies can be viewed as so many cave walls, at once primitive and modern, upon which the artist has left her mark. When Onira sets out for several days during her exhibition to draw an immense imprecise and divine form, a form that says everything while depicting nothing, she reproduces the key moments of art history over the course of which the human being, sheltered from the sun and the world, was busy creating the stroke and forming the formless without ever being able to delineate it. The term "grotesque" comes from the incongruous figures that were discovered in the grotto that Nero's abandoned palace had become. The term—derived from the Italian word for cave *grotta*—was henceforth used to evoke the madness of a mind left to its own devices, wandering far from the forms that are dictated by the exercise of norms and reason. In reinventing caves to rework the initial experience of art, Onira Lussier is, in the most noble sense of the term, a *grotesque artist*.

The word *grotto*, comes from the Latin *crypta* which is in turn derived from the Greek *kruptê* from *kruptein* meaning "to hide" and from which English takes the words cryptogram, cryptography or decrypting.¹ While Plato's cave is the site of illusion in Western culture, the grotto is that of the secret, of the decrypting of a hidden truth; hence the mystery of the pictorial traces that adorn the walls of Lascaux or Nero's Golden House. A deliberate trace inscribes the existence of a moment in the world, the en-"crypting," places it in the grotto, immobilizes it, buries it, all the while giving the world a form. Grottoes, galleries, white cube, art is, fundamentally and in a broad sense, a particular—putting in a crypt—or "encryption." Art thus emerges between two poles: on one side, the world, and on the other, its "grotesque" equivalences.

Onira decrypts and encrypts. On one hand, the self-reflexive character, the reworking of the same motifs in different mediums, the various sketches that show and allow us to understand her methods—enlargement, shrinking, projection, digital and manual reworking—deconstruct the idea of the trace by showing its development and the underlying processes. On the other, the

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

strange, at once organic and lithic, figurative and abstract, natural and artificial appearance of her works, the long sessions the artist becomes absorbed in, the performative dimension of her work, reaffirm the mystery of this transubstantiation, of this encrypting of the raw world into a thing. Onira thereby carries out a permanent twofold work of constructing and deconstructing the trace.

Between flesh and stone, Onira's neo-grotesque creations evoke rocks, limbs, totems and fantastic creatures. Primitive art is never far from her work. It is there, *on the tip of the tongue*. The artist works like an archeologist. As a reader and producer of traces, she proposes an archeology of the self, or rather an archeology of the art within her, a productive and prospective archeology for which she makes herself available as an excavation site—everyday, she is present in the gallery, like an archeologist at a dig. Onira proposes a reading of the metamorphoses consisting of the various equivalences and analogies a sentient being creates between her mental being and her surrounding world. If modernity is, by way of the digital, entering an age marked by an intangible and information-based relation to the world, Onira's work reaffirms the importance of the analogue, which is built as a relation of equivalence to the matter of the world. The analog involves contact, a contact that makes the mind vast, beyond words and of which art bears witness in each of its existences.

Paul Kawczak