

Galería Elba Benítez



FERNANDA FRAGATEIRO

Escola Clandestina

14.09 – nov 2023

*Ó universo, novelo emaranhado,
Que paciência de dedos de quem pensa
Em outra coisa te põe separado?*

O universe, tangled ball of yarn,
What patient fingers of someone thinking
Of something else unravel you?

Fernando Pessoa

According to the contemporary branch of theory known as “Thing Theory,” when a functional object loses its function, whether through obsolescence, breakage or ruin, it is no longer an *object* per se, but has instead become a thing. Its shape, its structure, the particular material arrangement of its carbon molecules may not have changed, but its relation to human use has. In this formulation, an object is a thing that has been endowed with a human-related function; stripped of that function, the thing itself is revealed in its essence. One looks through a clean glass window; one looks at a dirty one and, in a certain way, sees it in a way otherwise impossible. In the words of Bill Brown, the leading proponent of Thing Theory: “The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject...”

Photo: Fernanda Fragateiro, *L.B. (floor plan)*, 2023 © António Jorge Silva

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“Objects asserting themselves as things” — the concept offers a useful way of approaching the work in Fernanda Fragateiro’s exhibition *Escola Clandestina* (Clandestine School), currently on view at the Galería Elba Benítez. *Escola Clandestina* centers around a series of sculptures that incorporate rubble from buildings demolished in Lisbon during the city’s current wave of construction and voracious real estate speculation; for Fragateiro, the traces of historical memory the rubble contains highlight the rupture, often violent, between past ideologies and present realities. Retrieved and repurposed within autonomous works of sculpture (among other compositional elements, some found, others newly fabricated), the functionless rubble can “assert” itself in ways it could not while functional, expressing its formal and material qualities as well as the social, political and economic themes it encapsulates. Moreover, the works’ rough-edged yet delicate geometrical abstractions overtly recall architecture plans — indeed, some of the compositions are based directly on floor plans by the German-Dutch architect Lotte Stam-Beese, one of the first women to study architecture at the Bauhaus and later a significant figure in the post-WWII urban development in Rotterdam — furthering the cycles of historical linkage and conceptual layering.

Other works in the show, while employing different types of source materials, follow a similar methodological pattern. For instance, in *Escola Clandestina* books (and specifically books dealing with art and architectural history) are repurposed into exquisite wall sculptures. These books have been relieved by Fragateiro of their original functionality, but as ‘things’ they assert themselves, they continue to embody meaning — but now as art. The history coursing through them has not come to end with their loss of original function; it has been redirected. And in fact, everything at some point loses its function — such is the nature of the universe, such is the nature of life. Like Pessoa’s ‘tangled ball of yarn’, everything unravels eventually. Thing-ness, however, persists.

George Stolz

The work of Fernanda Fragateiro (Montijo, 1962; lives and works in Lisbon) maintains a strong signature style born of an economy of means and a meticulous minimalist aesthetic of form, color and surface texture. Fragateiro’s primary media are sculpture and installation, although she also creates interventions into public space in the form of gardens, outdoor sculptures and collaborations in architectural projects. Drawing thematically on 20th-century modernist art and architecture, Fragateiro frequently repurposes already-existing and culturally-layered material in order to fashion new works that are criss-crossed by an intricate web of inner references to art theory, architectural history, feminist discourse and political revisionism.

Fragateiro has exhibited at Kestner Gesellschaft (Hannover, 2023); Centro Cultural de Belém (Lisbon, 2023); Cloud Seven–Frédéric de Goldschmidt Collection (Brussels, 2023); FCAYC Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia (Cerezales del Condado, 2022); Tampa Museum of Art (Tampa, 2022); Centre de Création Contemporaine Olivier Debré (Tours, 2022); Centro Botín (Santander, 2020); CGAC Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (Santiago de Compostela, 2020); Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen (Siegen, 2019); Museo Banco de la República y Museo de Antioquia (Bogotá, 2018); MAAT – Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (Lisbon, 2017); La Galleria Nazionale D’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (Rome, 2017); Fundació “la Caixa” (Barcelona, 2016); Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University (Cambridge, 2015); NC-Arte (Bogotá, 2014); Calouste Gulbekian Foundation (Lisbon, 2013); Casa da Música (Porto, 2007); Fundação Caixa Geral de Depósitos Culturgest (Lisbon, 2003); Museu de arte Contemporânea de Serralves (Porto, 2002) and elsewhere.

Escola Clandestina is Fragateiro’s sixth solo exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez and forms part of Apertura Madrid Gallery Weekend.

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