

Communiqué de presse

16 mars
27 avril 2024vernissage
samedi 16 mars
de 11h à 20h*I'm Going There With You*
Amy Bravo“*La encrucijada* / The Crossroads

A chicken is being sacrificed
at a crossroads, a simple mound of earth,
a mud shrine for Eshu,
Yoruba god of indeterminacy,
who blesses her choice of path.
She begins her journey.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera : The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, 1987.

Around the table to which Amy Bravo invites us, we are confronted with the large, somewhat hieratic figures, more or less avatars of the artist, who inhabit her works. These figures, whose bodies are sparsely sketched out, and which the artist describes as female, do not correspond to anything definite, neither in terms of gender, species or status: they wear braids, have nipples yet no breasts or are almost flat-chested; they have no genitals, their eyes are mask-like and their faces are sometimes hybridized with roosters. These bodies are in a state of metamorphosis, imposing figures like trees or monuments, sometimes endowed with multiple arms or wings; body-figures that navigate an indeterminate space, where the landscapes are reduced to signs and symbols. The works, in the same manner as these mute bodies with their pupil-less eyes, are not very talkative, yet they brim over with meaning, encompassing intimacy, myth and family history, set somewhere between reconstruction and fiction. The artist embraces a certain vagueness in the story of her Cuban roots, transmitted orally for the most part, and which she makes no attempt to explore in depth: memory and intimacy are conjured through objects, often personal in nature, while any archive material is either absent, dreamt up or fabricated. The archive feeds the narratives that unfold within her works and from one work to another in a subterranean manner. This willful vagueness, like her use of myths and archetypes (the figure of the ferryman transporting souls to the underworld, or the rooster as an archetype of dominant power) allows the individual to connect with the collective, the community of “*Shes*”: “*Shes*”, as in Monique Wittig’s *Guérillères* [Warrior-Women] (1969), but also “*Shes*” for all the lesbians, the gays, the transgender community, the Latinos, the Afros, the roosters, the bitches or the palm trees. For here, it’s about collectives and communities, genetic family and chosen siblinghood, love and fury, the unspoken and the shared obvious, living in the here and now, while also existing elsewhere, where magic takes place, where art is invented / created, and where the voices of the disappeared are heard.

Around the table to which Amy Bravo invites us, we are confronted with large-format, assembled, mounted canvasses, adorned with scraps of fabric, lace, hair, structures made of plaster, alters-installations-assemblages of found objects. Assemblages? The term is employed by the artist herself and is worthy of further attention. She cites the artist Betye Saar (b. 1926) as an ally, which opens up a whole chapter of Californian assemblage. It is perhaps less heroic than the East Coast version, but is clearly more political, connected to the African-American, feminist and anti-racist militancy of LA’s Black Art Movement, which in addition to Betye Saar, includes artists such as John Outterbridge (1933-2020), Noah

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1. In reference to Renate Lorenz, who contrasts recognition—the identification and perpetuation of normative systems—with contagion, where reproduction, engenders deviation and difference. She theorizes this difference in the form of what she terms *drag*: “drag can refer to the productive relationship between the natural and the artificial, the animate and the inanimate, as well as to clothing, hair or legs, and to anything that has a tendency to create relationships with others and with other things rather than just represent them.” These processes of “drag contagion” do not lend visibility to “people, individuals subjects or identities, but rather to assemblages— assemblages that don’t strive to categorize gender, sexuality and race, but rather to “undo” these categories.” *Art Queer, une théorie freak*, éditions B42, Paris, 2018.

2. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, 1987, p. 78-81.

3. *Ibid.*

Amélie Lavin has been the Chief Heritage Curator and Head of the Bodies, Appearances and Sexualities section at the Mucem (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisation) in Marseille since May 2022. She is a graduate of the Institut National du Patrimoine, a linguist and art historian, specializing in modern and contemporary art. Between 2008 and 2013, she was the head curator of contemporary art exhibitions at the Musée Rodin in Paris, before directing the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Art Contemporain in Dole between 2013 and 2022. She has curated numerous exhibitions including *Les Malassis, une coopérative de peintres toxiques* (Dole, 2014), *Morgane Tschiember: Taboo* (Dole, 2015), *Peindre, dit-elle - Chapitre 2* (Dole, 2017), *Who's afraid of Steve Gianakos?* (Dole, 2017), *Giulia Andreani, La Cattiva* (Dole, 2019), *Mathilde Denize, Haute Peinture* (Dole, 2019), *Prendre Sain* (Dole, 2022). She is the co-curator of an exhibition dedicated to naturism in France, which will take place at the Mucem in July 2024.

Purifoy (1917-2004), David Hammons (b. 1943), Senga Nengudi (b. 1943) etc. Furthermore, if we look closely, Robert Rauschenberg's (1925-2008) *Combines* might come to mind, or certain of Jasper John's (b. 1930) canvases. Not in terms of perceiving a direct line of descent—that would amount to teleological art history and would invoke models that have never been part of Amy Bravo's thinking—but in looking at them through the prism of inversion.

Amy Bravo plays with the heroization and a certain masculinization of some of her figures: a superheroine pulled by (flaming) roosters, warrior women planting their flag in virgin territory, mimicking an act of conquest seen so many times before, a woman becoming a rooster to decline / ward off in the same act the male ego. Appropriating the ego in order to better crush it. In *Elegy to the Moustache* (2024), the artist's grandfather's moustache, shaved off following his death, serves to expose, in a deeply erotic manner, the construction of gender and sexuality in the family's unconscious. Faced with this self-portrait with moustache—in which the artist has included her own razor and scattered body hair—one cannot help thinking of Ana Mendieta transplanting a friend's moustache, hair by hair, onto her own face in the 1972 performance *Facial Hair Transplant*, in response to Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) “sticking” a moustache on the face of the Mona Lisa in *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), playing on the androgyny of Leonardo da Vinci's model.

Through the incorporation of the great narratives of domineering, white, male art history, the grand narratives of her own family history and of those from the margins of society, of American and Afro-Latin American gay and lesbian cultures, through her attempts to bring her ancestors and her own community of guerilla women onto dialog, by trying to make the *Here* and *There* coincide and finally, by attempting to depict possible bodies that are by no means incarnations of normalized social bodies, Amy Bravo has produced a body of radical *drag* art¹.

Around the table to which Amy Bravo invites us, love and family ties coalesce alongside acts of nurturing, consoling and caring; but also, unspoken conflicts and occasionally, even the settling of scores. *I'm Going There With You*: the territories through which the artist leads us are those on the margins, those of hybridity and of contagion, of crossroads and lands watched over by spirits, goddesses and virgins—*La Cachita*, Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, protector of Cuba is, in the Santería religion of the Caribbean, syncretized with Oshun, a Yoruba deity. Territories haunted by black dogs, symbols in certain Celtic and Anglo-Saxon legends of depression and vulnerability, but which also have the capacity to connect with the beyond and with the invisible.

“Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems²” Amy Bravo's works are daughters of *la mestiza*, the “new consciousness” described by the Latino American author Gloria Anzaldúa: “*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. [...] As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland has cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I'm every woman's sister or potential lover. [...] I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races. I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural / religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; [...] I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that has not only produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.”³

Amélie Lavin