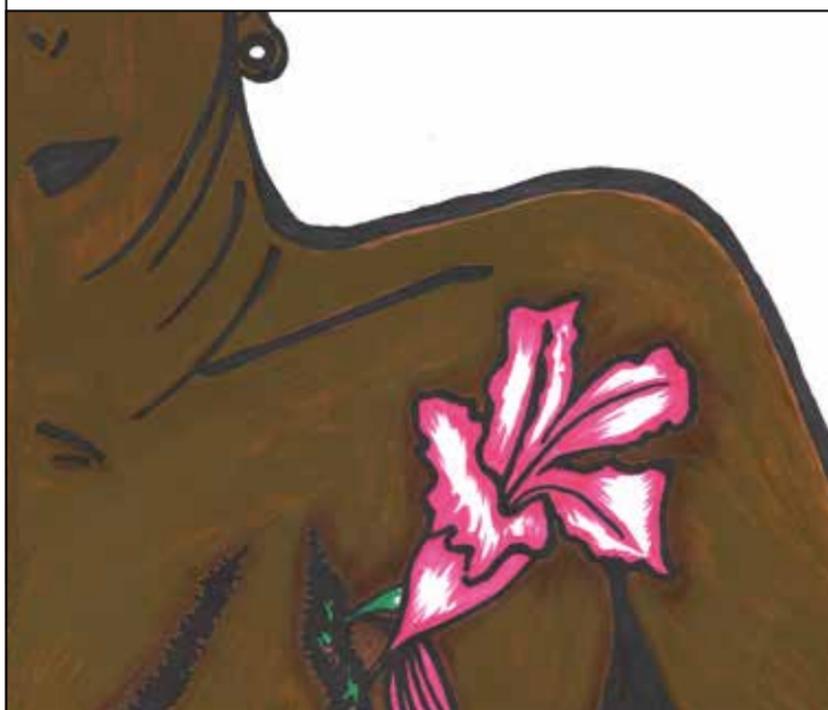


Duen Sacchi

ORGANOLEPTIC

In this piece, Duen Sacchi (Aguaray, Argentina, 1974) narrates the metamorphosis of nine characters whose bodies are questioned by a series of forces that exorcise time, eroticism and shared freedom. Conceived as an exercise in utopian imagining, the project also explores, hence its title, the nature of the shocks that colonial materials effected on the Western history of organs.



07.11.2018 – 17.02.2019

[LA VIRREINA]
CENTRE
DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



Conceived as an exercise in utopian imagining, this project by Duen Sacchi (Aguaray, Argentina, 1974) uses fetishes or charmed objects, drawings, wall prints and an artist's book to narrate from various perspectives the metamorphosis undergone by nine characters whose bodies are connected with certain transformative forces, as well as the physical, spiritual and emotional changes these forces effect on them.

The term 'organoleptic'—from which the work takes its title—comes from Michel-Eugène Chevreul and more particularly his study *Leçons de chimie appliquée à la teinture* (1829; Lessons in Chemistry Applied to Dyeing), in which the scientist identifies a series of cognitive properties only observable when bodies are in immediate contact with our organs. This same word is also used with another meaning to refer to certain substances that encourage sensorial excitation and, lastly, to a technique to study the characteristics of soil that does not employ quantitative systems of measurement but instead assesses it by means of the senses of touch, smell, taste and sight.

With these references as its starting point, *Organoleptic* rifles among the shelves of the invention of the Western anatomical body, taking an interest in its pathological figurations, its fantasies and obsessions. It also delves into the history of the invention of human organs and the records of the systematisation of the flesh, while exploring how inventories of colonial materials have shaken these codes of typification and genealogy, the way they have conjured up those conditions of the time, the eroticism and the shared freedom that go hand in hand with them or aid them.

To this end, Sacchi uses the clinical account and decolonial epistemologies, testimony and the narrative fantasy, scientific jargon and the body as grammar in which to found de-identifications, through which to rethink the meaning of certain binary antagonisms, among them the notion of externality and internality.

ORGANOLEPSIS: PARTS OF THE WEST INDIES

Duen Sacchi

M.q said goodbye and entered the US embassy in Buenos Aires. At the metal detector they obsessed over her turban, then over the shells in her hair, recently braided at the home of a newly arrived sister from Senegal. M.q had spent a few years in Chicago: Ernesto Laclau had invited her after being impressed with her criticisms at a conference

on populism, during a winter as grey as the walls in the public university's philosophy department. At that time M.q was breaking in her passport, visa and diagnosis all at once. A pompous photo from 2010 shows Obama signing the resolution to lift the US's twenty-two year entry ban for HIV positive individuals. But it wouldn't happen this time. The woman in charge of the visa questionnaire would say no. M.q had named a sister; she had said, "my sister is expecting me", and that had decided the refusal. M.q left convinced that it had not been her slip referring to her comrades in arms as sisters that had left her without a visa but the name of her research, which stood out on all the certificates she had attached: "Processes of Colonialism: Viral Extractivism and Emancipation".

The first time a group of Spaniards roaming the regions of the Gran Chaco saw the floss silk tree, they thought it was a giant cotton plant. Seeing cotton in the trees confused them for days. Soon thereafter they realized that their size would boost production. Was this the promised land? The trees were scattered and their laden treetops filled the sky with clouds. They did not know that this had already happened sometime in the 14th century when another group of wanderers came across a plant they thought was producing small clusters of sheep. They were only familiar with animal wool. For a few long moments, i.e., the time it took for the voices of the languages and their translations to travel, they thought that all of the classifications of the animal kingdom had crumbled before their eyes: plants bloomed animals. This time the wise floss silk tree regaled them with its shade and sounded its trunk to give notice of the earth wanderers.

"I didn't get in", M.q wrote on her telephone with its screen split. On the other side of the world we know together, my phone vibrated in my pocket. I saw her message. That night I dreamt of drought. A flock of birds with long beaks and legs picked up the ends of a lake and carried it away. Then an immense expanse of still wet clay opened up. The small footprints left before lifting the mantle of salt water were woven with crystals. I looked into the footprints: between the threads, in the depths, the wind now whistled. Now I am in this gallery, in front of this disjointed body. The surrounding space simulates a theatre or a library. Maybe it's a music box. Maybe it's a reliquary. Maybe it's something more.

There is no body without an image, I pronounce without blushing, and cross through the great door of the Turin Cathedral. It holds one of the most famous sumptuary shrouds. I'm followed by a group

of students who aren't all that interested: they're moved by suspicion. This church is a giant reliquary, the elaborate version of those sold in the street shaped like hearts or burning flames next to *bamsas*, I say with a smile. Suddenly I see us as a group of industrious ants, each one carrying his notebooks and pencils as if they were green leaves being collected for the winter. One of the students is an expert in triangulation, and she uses me as the tip of the iceberg: she seduces another student, keeping her distance and flattering me every time her object of desire speaks to me. I would like to tell her that the Holy Trinity she's evoking is the normative family that exasperates her. And that I'm not available. Instead I say: "This is another type of idiot box". We walk inside the chest that holds the obsolete relic of the image of a body. The blood makes the figure. I explain: for a body to exist a principle of hybridization is necessary whether via resemblance or exclusion, then an image, and finally a form of reproduction of the image, because it is the proof of its order among the things of the world. The sacred shroud is an artist's edition. They laugh.

That night there were a lot of mosquitoes in Tucumán—full-on cholera crisis. I had just been vaccinated for yellow fever because I'd passed twenty. George W. Bush has become president of the United States. I stand motionless in front of a television screen hanging from the corner of a wall at the entrance to Cines Coliseo: like a tropical oxymoron it's there for the entertainment of the box office staff. With my ticket in hand and my mouth agape I see green flashes like fireworks on the concave glass screen; I hear breathy sighs like in a VHS porn film. And there's a repetitive fade-out like in video games: it's the invasion of Iraq. The ticket seller motions at me from behind the glass to get a move on; he points with the remote control and turns up the volume. The bursts of light fall on a black and yellow background. Oceanica is in the cane fields. There's no way to communicate until the shift change: we'll see each other then. I have blank cassettes and have obtained a video camera that is easy to hide.

I take out a series of photocopies and we sit on the benches to pray, to look at them. I enjoy the dislocation for a second and then I feel like a mere trader: I don't know whether to blame the moral impact of the building or boredom. It's a series of woodcuts from *Feldtbüch der Wundartzney* (Surgery Field Manual, 1517): you can see that instruments take over from orthopaedic machines to repair broken bones, and the incisions of typical war wounds give way to blood-letting on the battlefield. I am fascinated by the hands and feet that appear in

the foreground between the machinery of winches and tourniquets, instruments inherited from torture, their know-how with the body. This is “Wound Man”: the drawing shows a stabbed figure, indicating the common sites of wounds typical in pell-mell battles, and here, in the “Viscera Manikin”, you can see that the uterus, brain, diaphragm, liver, stomach, heart, tongue and larynx appear. It is an eviscerated torso with the fascinating genital indifferenciation of its time; the death mask is an old man’s face with a geometric uterus. And here, in “Examination of a Leper”, are the amorphous circles of leprosy. The emergence of an exposed interiority where the skin only seems to appear in the wound. The skin, a perforated mantle. We leave. I look to one side and think I see us, kissing each other and laughing on a trip a few years ago. As I walk with my troupe of young and mistrustful intellectuals, I feel your lips moisten mine, the touch of your nipple on my forearm, your green shirt folding like the Yungas themselves. The fold of your dark skin, deep, rich, restless on mine. I clutch at my phone in desperation, as if I could reach you. The physical movement brings me to the reality of the eyes that look at me expecting me to say something that surprises them, there it is. It isn’t the moral weight of the building that makes me a trader but the expectation that I sell them something new. And I do. I sit on the steps and read.

*O muse, beyond the columns of Hercules a new world claims thee.
Listen to those murmuring waves which call thee to distant shores.
Go, take thy impulse and celebrate in verses the foreign tree which
assuages our pains and places a limit to our affliction. And thou, celestial
Urania, put on thy medical purple, show to the peoples of Italy
thy brow crowned with the August branches of Guaiac, and relate the
wonderful prodigies of which our century is a witness.*

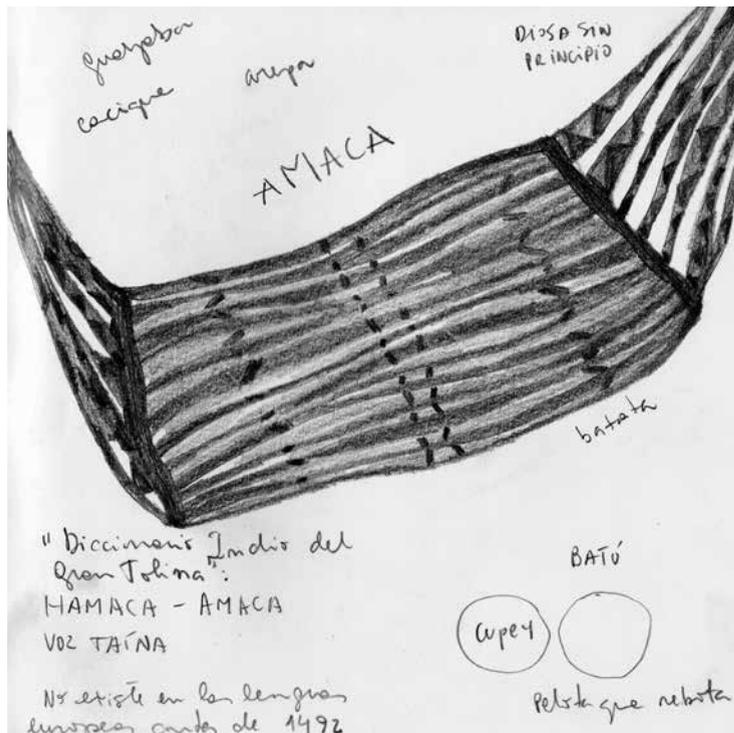
Girolamo Fracastoro, *La Syphilis (Syphilis sive de morbo gallico, 1530)*, Book III

I stopped teaching in the classrooms. I have claustrophobia. No one knows. They think it’s a pedagogical eccentricity.

They call it *guayacán* or guaiac. Guaiac is said to cure Cupid’s disease or the pox or lues or the French disease. In fact this is how many trees of the tropical lands, the Yungas and the Gran Chaco, are called because their wood is hard and their sap, curative: their fluids heal. So do their bark, leaves and flowers. With their blue and yellow and even furious fuchsia flowers, they were literally christened the “tree of life”



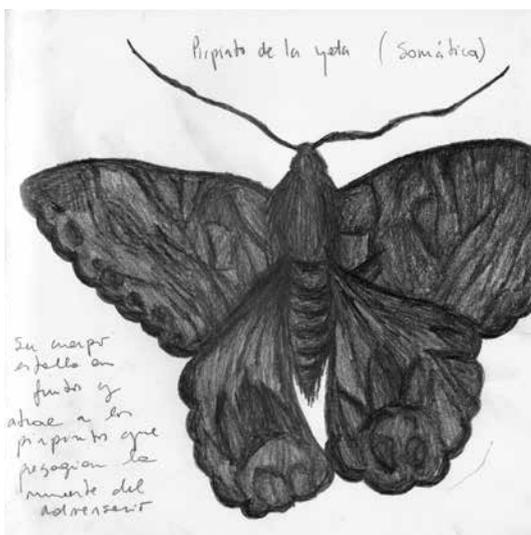
Oceanica, pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm



Amaca, llapis sobre paper, 21 x 21 cm



Somatic with Acacias, marker pen on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm



Oceanica in Immanence, pencil on paper, 21 x 21 cm
Erebid Moth, pencil on paper, 21 x 21 cm

or *palo santo* (“holy stick”) for their highly soporific effect. It is the tree extolled by the Italian poet, astronomer and doctor Girolamo Fracastoro in *Syphilis* (1530), the work from which the fragment I’ve just read to them is taken. I’ll finish and my heart will explode, I think. Fantasy makes its way through me like turbulence on a commuter plane: then I feel like my skin is opening like plush pyjamas, like your plush pyjamas, like your eyes and your smile. I make a gesture and cross the street seeking refuge in a bar. In the bathroom of a bar. I take a felt pen from my pencil case and write on the walls everything the message I can’t send you would say. I write about love, and I tell you the latest gossip, and I ask you about the food and about your mom. I ask you for sex, the kind we had. I tell you I can’t sleep. And I sit on the toilet to cry slowly so that my face does not give me away. I used my phone to write: “We have to try another way”.

When I come out, they are all sat comfortable and obedient around the table in the bar with their teas, their organic drinks and ginger cakes. I order a beer, another of the benefits of not teaching in a classroom, and I continue: perhaps the subsequent popularization of this poem written in Latin is the original source of all of the mythology of discovery. The effectiveness of creating a myth to explain an affliction is compelling. Figurative representations are poor but effective; the allegory of expulsion from paradise serves as a narrative motor: a dead blue and sacred bird, the breaking of a hospitality law, an evil that is in the air and affects all parts of the West Indies, an extraordinary contact, a divine punishment and the salvation of the holy stick. Syphilis is the foreign evil. Before the inhabitants of West Indies were blamed as the source of the scourge that plagued Europe in the 15th century it was already a sickness that they blamed on each other: the Neapolitan disease, the French disease, the Spanish disease and so on. And perhaps the depiction of leprosy was even also the depiction of syphilis. Diseases of the skin.

Guaiac, like the apple of Sodom, bears the mark of foreignness. That is, both belong to the order of dangerous foreign trade, to the order of contagion, to sterile union. It is curious how the punishment of the inhabitants of Sodom for breaking the laws of hospitality affects their fruits: *Malus* or the common foreign fruit, the apple—that of Sodom and the common apple—or by synaesthetic contagion, evil. The colonial imaginary says there is an evil in the air owing to the heavy climate. The heaviness of the air penetrates everywhere, exacerbates discomforts and contagion by exchange with dense, hot blood.

Until menstruation was subsequently established as inherently feminine in connection with the anatomical invention of the uterus, this “bad blood”, this blood from hot places—corporal or territorial—hot coloured, would be what infected the men who considered themselves the lords of a king. The threat of a “disease of the skin” that can turn us foreign, that can turn us into animals, sodomites, objects, items or pieces for the bonfire, or the museum, is what shaped the erotic exchange in all senses, in the obsession with hygiene as well as the compulsion to devour.

The skin reveals the visible mark of a source of prior contagion which is blood, more specifically “menses”, which at that time could come from any orifice and as much from the “menstruating Jewish man” as the milk of the wet nurse, or the prostitute, or the West Indies: in the case of gestating bodies the blood would be thinner and less white; in the case of the West Indies it would be a depravity of the sanguine humours since “in hot countries, and especially where they live on such bad food, the Women have unusually a very sharp, and in a manner virulent discharge of the Menses”, wrote Jean Astruc in 1772. In this corrupted paradise there is also a tree of life which can save the colony and especially justify compulsive extraction, the killings. The holy stick. The verbiage overwhelms them but is the only thing that calms me. I down my beer in one gulp while one of them pays my bill. I watch him closely: his pants a size too big hang from his body, which resembles that of a twelve-year-old girl, but he’s a cis guy, likeable, who conquers with smiles and a billfold. Socially responsive.

In Turin’s small Museum of Human Anatomy, the display cases are arranged as if to fill the empty spaces of the nave of a Romanesque church, but the impulse is Gothic: a dead maiden no doubt lies beneath its foundations, Negroni would say. As I walk I think about Jack the Ripper, possibly Virginia Woolf’s poet cousin. An educator, homosexual. His spectre contains the whole organoleptic imaginary of 19th century Europe: the barber surgeon, the body of science, misogyny as an erotic drive, the desire to exhume interiority, the sinuous paths from the exegesis of vice to the propaedeutic of madness. The Whitechapel murders, as the literality of the name indicates, mark the chaotic incision of passion for order, for the *organum*. We could say that the invocation of Jack the Ripper only revealed the proliferation of organic discourses—their poetics, we would say cruelly. I’m not saying anything like that. I am only dragging myself through the small corridors. I suggest they take notes and then we will talk outside.

On the right, after two or three steps in the great exhibition hall of the human body, there is a sculpture with the design and manufacture typical of Catholic altar virgins, an image by Botticelli made of lacquered plaster, of criminological prose. The torso is open, the uterus removable from the cavity.

The smell is nauseating. On the last row of glazed shelves, the insistence of repetition: dozens of dried brains. “The size of the head is small, but it harbours great mysteries: each particle demonstrates the art of the gods” can be read in the histotheque, the Renaissance cousin of the somatheque: a large piece of archival furniture where each cubby holds a sample of each part of the anatomical body, especially the brain. The smell of decomposing bodies alters some mnemonic trace I can’t put a finger on. A sort of alertness and drowsiness together, a paranoid anxiety, hastens my pace. Next are the two mummies. Under the light of the display case the bodies gleam in foetal position. They are from the “Collection from the voyage of the steam corvette *Magenta*” (1865-1868, a voyage on which “naturalist” Filippo di Filippi sailed) and the “Circumnavigation voyage of the frigate SMS *Novara* of the Austro-Hungarian Navy” (1857-1859). There is no body without the bodies of the West Indies.

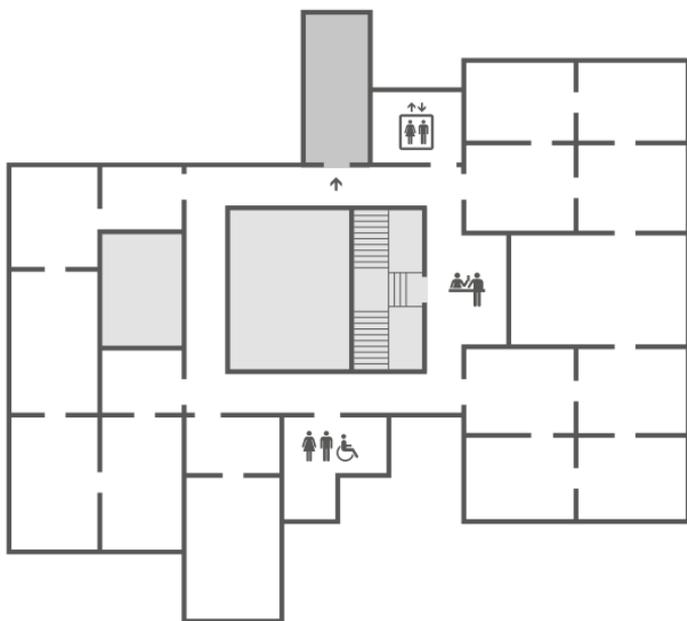
The invention of organs, plus the invention of race, plus the invention of sexual difference produced not only a series of images but required a space for its staging, I begin to say seriously. I see them bow their heads over their notebooks and take notes as I speak. The first few times I felt panic at the manual recording of my voice. Then, forcibly, I began to find an erotic-spiritual side to it. Something of the transmutation of ideas. M.q told me it could be understood as group sex. She said it to provoke me, but since then I have changed my tone of voice as if to mediate my own body sound. In Barcelona not only does one of the three anatomical theatres still stand but it could be said that in the 18th century the City of Counts had a sort of epidemic of anatomical theatres, not exactly the legacy of its select circle of surgeons but rather a series of exhibitions more or less related to magic, scientific expropriation, theatrical mise-en-scène, the cabinet of natural curiosities, the museum and the variety fair. One of the most famous was Francesc Roca’s anatomical museum. A corner of Avinguda del Paral·lel advertised “the stop for monsters, deformations of nature”. A series of wax dolls and robotic likenesses showed every kind of organic formation. A sort of popularization of the anatomical Venuses found in medical schools in the image and likeness of Clemente Susini’s Venerina. One

of Francesc Roca's museum's maxims was to publicize the ills that plagued the well-known *Barrio Chino* ("Chinatown"), under the aegis of the Red Cross, which was promoting a campaign advertised using the phrase "Crusade against venereal disease. Switch a light on in your brain". The relationships between Catalonia—Barcelona in particular— and the West Indies stretch back to the departure and arrival, or even the death and birth, of Columbus himself. This constant traffic in reports, fruits, images and fantasies also includes the invention of organs and, of course, the creation of States. It was probably from the very recesses of the anatomical theatre or its classrooms that Cosme Argerich (together with Miguel O'Gorman, who, while Irish, had a degree that was also certified in Barcelona) set sail for the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata to run the Protomedicato del Río de la Plata, a hospital and medical school in Buenos Aires. Its main functions were overseeing the slave trade and controlling imports and the possession of medicines. I say everything in one go and at the same time have a funny image of myself. In the sensation my body is thrown out of proportion: sometimes I see small hands protruding from a large ball; other times I perceive myself as a 1980s cartoon crushed by a bulldozer, finished off by a moving claw. At other times I am myself but my voice extends beyond me: I feel it becoming hard and dropping like a freshly baked brick. I feel admiration on some of the faces around me. I then exert myself to seduce: I don't like to move the rational, Oedipal passions since the stage is set for flattery, I prefer for it to be through the lower passions, for you to want to lick my brain and tits.

The body, matter, territory are always in dispute. The figurative representations, tropes, fictions we create to name them, delimit them, desire them, dream them, build them are powerful systems of invention. I finish. Finally. I just want to leave. To lie in the sun for a few minutes. I'd like to take my return flight home but I still have a few classes left. I'm surprised that most of the students are South American. I can't stop thinking about the leftovers of colonial capital as I watch them gather up the coins to pay. There are two Europeans: they have learned to speak last at gatherings. I've asked them to skip the apologies for privilege: I don't care for them and they're boring.

Curator: Valentín Roma

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La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

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