

Beyond the face

Duo show Audrey Guttman - Jiri Kolar
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Audrey Guttman's figures inhabit the margin, the threshold on which the image is overturned, transcending time and space. Moving towards the imaginal dimension, they have discarded the meanings into which they had been confined, through the enforcement of a narrative that was too narrow for them. The empty space they occasionally leave on the page is merely the negative of a story - one reluctantly listened to at first, then abandoned. The image's white space that looks like an enigma, a relic in reverse, is but the faded memory of an oft-dominant narrative, one that's accompanied by a certain gaze on the body, full of constraints and conditions.

Beginning with the image, the figure literally shakes off the inhibiting talk carried by our gaze and disinhibits itself, creating a new configuration, an unexpected meaning. It's almost as if the page, configured as it was, was too small and needed an opening, capable of enlarging it. However, it doesn't grow in size but in depth - of both the sensible and the intelligible, at the same time.

When Audrey Guttman's images do not burst out of the page, emerging from the picture and exploding into space, they live on the edge, and work at the point of contact between the worlds they hold together, like a cosmos that incessantly creates its own constellations. Sometimes, the figure that has slipped out of her frame reappears right next to it, facing the other way, showing the reverse of the page on which it had been forced. The silhouette is filled with that which it unknowingly contained, the promise of a freer meaning. Fundamentally, it is chance that has dictated the coexistence of two images on two different sides of the same page, in the barely-there thickness of the paper.

The procedure applied by the artist recalls the composition techniques of Dadaist poems, whose authors had made chance their own compositional principle, except that Guttman adds a new awareness of the emancipatory role of the image. The chance that governs the inversive logic of the artistic gesture sometimes leads to a glimpse of the fragment of another body, also freed, at least in part, from the fixity of the stereotype.

Basically, what the printed image has, is a body of paper, and this body is often shared by another image. In *Human Theater III*, on the reverse of the silhouette of a woman lying on a carpet, a flat object of desire, we catch sight of a woman's face full of intensity and a story yet to be told. The image, relational importance par excellence, in saving one existence can only offer to save others. It is the possibility itself of a life that is not always caught up in the dictates of others but in a creative process, as if it were itself an image capable of going beyond the space-time limits of a society that instead asks for unison. *En proie à l'étoilement* shows a starry space in lieu of the prey aimed at by a camera lens. The figure becomes the cosmos, and in a simple inversive gesture embraces the entire universe. The imaginal relationship to the other is inevitably at the centre of Audrey Guttman's research. Her figures reveal others or accompany one other in configurations filled with a tactility that invites us to respect the other.

The contact between bodies as well as between images that Guttman's collages invent is in turn a metaphor of the artistic process like a 'feeling your way', almost the manner of being of which the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas writes in his essay "Totality and Infinity". It is in this philosophical work that the author shapes the concept of beyond the face as a means of connection. In front of the face of the other, Lévinas writes, we can do nothing but experience an uncontrollable emotion, an existence whose boundaries break up into infinite possibilities of being. The face of the other, in its vulnerability, asks us to respect it in terms of a diversity that cannot be contained, and that places us at the very origin of ethics. Beyond the face is the caress: a gesture capable of transcending the perceptible insofar as it escapes both personalization and objectification. The caress to which *The Inner Hand* seems to allude does not exist. It merely floats, just as the fragments of images encountered in the collages do. It seeks neither a person nor a thing, but gives birth to an intermediary dimension in which we are no longer totally ourselves but are not other than ourselves, either. We are perhaps the possibility of a relationship, a beyond the face that the image suggests, which art allows us to experience.

In the middle ground where worlds collide, poetry lives according to the same logic as images. A logic of contingency according to which every image, every poem defines its own principle through the encounters of life. According to Jiří Kolář, with whose works Guttman dialogues, a collage demands its own composition in the same manner as a poem. Life, too, Kolář wrote, is full of eruptions, crystallizations and landslides. There is always something in it that explodes or implodes, that steps out of the picture or withdraws in it. An unpredictable *je-ne-sais-quoi*, as in dreams, which are there to be dreamed as life is there to be lived.

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