

unique images for unstable times

"I was in you, O movement, and outside all things..."

Paul Valéry

At the close of 2023, Galeria Luis Maluf began celebrating its first decade of existence - to be commemorated in November 2024 - with the group show O Baile, a gathering of works by the artists represented.

There may be many reasons why different people come together, bringing together different interests, desires, fears, bodies, gestures, histories and knowledge in the same space and time. In times when uncertainty is continually asserting itself, twisting what we would previously have considered contradictory, dance emerges as a luminous metaphor, pointing to new ways of probing the mystery of what is announced. In other words, we are repeating the opinion of the early 20th century French writer Paul Valéry that dance is not just an exercise, an entertainment, an ornamental art or any other social activity; it is serious and, in certain respects, something very venerable.

Finding ourselves embedded in the single, univocal time of neoliberal capitalism, whose logic aims to adapt movement to the coercive orders of progress, it has become essential to think and produce other times, to discuss and occupy new spaces, to reveal that the order of movement is not just narrative, but chaotic, spiral, rhizomatic, anachronistic. Even if the dictates of utilitarian technocracy say otherwise, a gesture - and dance, in a way, is a repertoire of choreographically contextualised gestures - doesn't need to presume an end, other than in itself. It doesn't need to be intended for anything other than the pure pleasure of knowing oneself (in) movement. While the industry tries to formalise our actions, as revealed by the incessant repetition of tik tok dances, selfies on social media timelines and Leandra Espírito Santo's distorted emojis, the works presented here act in the opposite direction, revealing the singularity of each expression.

To dance is to negotiate with gravity, whether it's the force of attraction or the measure of the effects of our own actions. Above all, you have to give vent to every gesture, even the most intimate, seeking the reciprocity of touch, even from your own body, questioning yourself at every moment about the shape of the void, about that which, when displaced, causes dispersion or encounter. But a ball, whether it's a masquerade, debutante or graduation ball, or even if it's just a reminder of a carnival ball, or a funk ball, or a baile charme with a sound wall at the weekend, is always a fruitful meeting of bodies. Like the different materialities that shape each other in Márcia Pastore's sculptures - the artist, it's worth remembering, recognises the agency of her instruments - these bodies embrace and repel each other, recording their gestures - albeit in memory - of what they touch, making cold and hot coexist, form and formlessness. In the bodies that lean against each dance, some more restrained, others friendly, boundaries are drawn, territorialities are traced, of a different order to those addressed by Edu Silva, but no less important. What are the politics of a dance floor? Which bodies occupy its centre and which remain on the margins? What pacts are drawn up between bodies that clash, disputing space for their own movement?

In any case, dancing is a way of inhabiting space and time. It's a way of establishing oneself in the here and now, understanding that presence is not watertight, but that one must, as a whole, make oneself move. And if the body manifests its mechanical power in dance, it redistributes the same will in the constant opening of the mind to enquiry. The encounter evoked in our dance raises several questions: What moves you? What drives you? What gestures do you resort to when desire reverberates in your body? And when astonishment manifests itself? Do you get up after falling, or do you struggle on the floor before getting back up? What supports you? Your own body, or another? What leads you to the encounter?

We hope that the works gathered here will become a kind of dance partner. Summoning approximations, displacements, pauses. The exhibition begins like an antechamber to the dance. You have to step in with your right foot, even if you have two left feet. In the democracy of ballet, there is no right or wrong, only action and reaction. But if you're going to step on it, at least step on it gently, as Maria Bethânia warns in the ballad by Adelino Moreira and Enzo de Almeida Passos. The verse, as well as how many idiots live alone?, from the song Sua estupidez, by Roberto Carlos - which is felt more intensely in Gal Costa's interpretation - emphasise the musicality of the prosaic that coats Barbara Basseto's painting. Her everyday patterns reveal the rhythm of what surrounds us, enveloping us in a familiar musicality, like that of the songs that lend their verses to the titles of her works.

Paintings undeniably permeate the entire exhibition, as if to remind us that every canvas is also the spatial superimposition of a succession of gestures of greater or lesser precision. But it goes beyond this definition. Just as dance doesn't define itself, because it speaks precisely of movement, of the continuity-discontinuity of life, of what extrapolates every sign to make it communicable. In the gallery's third room, its radiating centre, a veritable pictorial corps de ballet announces itself in a myriad of different images, the juxtaposition of which creates chords, dissonance and rhythmic changes. Blessed be the dance and its wealth of metaphors for expography that remind us that more than eyes that absorb the world, we are bodies that affect each other, that contract and expand.

Our dance is a celebration of the continuous movement of our artists and of the joy that comes from meeting the public. And to close, before the next dance, I'll revisit Valéry and his sentence: Dance is an art derived from life itself, since it is not just the action of the human body as a whole, but action transposed into a world, into a kind of space-time, which is no longer quite the same as that of practical life. Even when in doubt, you shouldn't suspend the next step, but go on. Continuously.

Luis Maluf Gallery