

A MARGEM

Zoë Sua Kay

Galeria Belard is pleased to present Zoë Sua Kay's first solo exhibition, "A Margem" (The Margin), bringing together a body of hyperrealistic works in which the artist, of dual nationality: New Zealand and Portuguese, searches for her identity and history.

Sua Kay's nomadic heritage gives her both a sense of scarcity and a multiplicity - a dispersion - of origins, which has led her to cultivate a particular interest in those who stay, who take root in a place. Having spent her early years in Portugal under a slight sense of being on the margins caused by her parents' foreign upbringing, her view of the country and the Portuguese is like that of someone observing from the outside - familiar but somewhat distant.

Sua Kay's work stems from a large-scale analysis of the body's landscapes, as if to find any physical trace of space and time. By thoroughly observing the skin, the artist finds the mediation between the exterior and the interior, and the most evident and most subtle reminiscences of a life.

The lines that the artist registers create a map of experiences and extend the possibility of interpretation and relationship with the stories of the bodies. In the works presented here, the mapping is drawn from the skin and the sea - and the similarities of the landscapes they simulate -, there is a search for the marks left by these elements that are definers of a collective and, also, individual identity. The faces, hands, fins, scales, and scars give evidence of a deep familiarity with the sea. With the artist's reflection on these large-scale traces she allows herself and us an immersion in the bodies' experiences with the sea, almost as a way of filling what she feels is her own identity gap.

In the exploration of this which is the history of a country and the artist's relationship with it, her feminine perspective emerges and leads to a focus of curiosity on women who, on the one hand fascinate her and, on the other, make her wonder about a destiny she might have had if she had stayed or never left. The three faces we see, "Medusa", "Amphitrite", and "Thalassa" are simultaneously majestic and sensitive, they show women with an undoubtedly strong presence but who allow themselves to be known, to be closely observed, and to portray their features on a scale that leaves little or nothing unrevealed. The same happens with the work "Peniche": the hands are as much a symbol of work and wear, as of care and affection. On a scale even more disproportionate than the women's faces, through these hands we are taken to a paradoxical feeling of distance - a certain haunting - and of closeness, almost as if, with the experience they seem to carry, we wanted them to take us, to involve us. And this desire, a peculiar, somewhat voyeuristic curiosity, to look at the innermost and deepest part of the skin, without knowing what part of the body is seen and to whom it belongs, is given to us by scores like the two "Crest," "Paresthesia," and the set of four "Epidermigram".



Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca 103B
1070-239 Lisboa_
galeriabelard.com

The fish are inseparable from Sua Kay's main inquiry on several levels, visual, symbolic and even somewhat unconscious: they are from the sea and the markets, places of bustle and people but they are also from the depths, mysterious, cold, and alone. "What Are You Looking At", "This Way", "Follow Me" e "Escalading" come closer to the first sense by the small scale that allows us the perception that we could easily place them on a counter, flanked by others, almost as if that were their daily life and purpose, in a simple and tangible way. On the other hand, "The Three Graces (Catch of Day)" and especially "Triton" awaken the said depths, they are creatures much bigger than us, monstrous, complex and fascinating, from which we have to - and want to - distance ourselves in order to observe their totality.

In *The Margin*, the portrait undoubtedly plays a predominant role in Sua Kay's investigative and creative process. It is from the hyperrealistic painting of figures characteristic of a time and a space marked in memory, that the detailed search for a personal reference is expressed.

It is true that this return to figuration is a movement that is over half a century old, and which has already been succeeded by others, but, as Philip Pearlstein states, "there will always be those who want to make paintings of the human form (...), in spite of Progress"². What we see is that this tendency to express the "figure of Man", or His reality, is detached from the artistic tide, in the sense that it is intrinsic to it in such a way that it continually returns, or never completely disappears, only being influenced by time itself. Even so, just as the emergence of New Figuration in the 1960s filled a gap in artistic expression, the present moment seems to call for a return to figuration, as a re-approximation to the human, to the figure, to form, to matter, to humanity. And yet, abstract expression and its aesthetic advances have never been abandoned, but rather integrated and reconciled with the current zeitgeist.

The logo for Belard is a stylized, handwritten-style wordmark in black ink. The letters are fluid and connected, with a cursive feel. The 'B' is particularly large and prominent, leading into the 'e', 'l', 'a', 'r', and 'd' which follow in a similar fluid script.

Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca 103B
1070-239 Lisboa_
galeriabelard.com