

JANAINA TSCHÄPE

DAMIEN SAUSSET

IS IT THE INFLUENCE OF HER DUAL GERMAN-BRAZILIAN ROOTS? Tschäpe's world is a skilful mix of the restraint in the means she uses, and a sort of exuberant baroque. Her works extol the metamorphoses of the human body. Each of her paintings, photographs, sculptures, watercolours and performances have a carnal feel about them, both in terms of the materials used, and as a means of accessing a dream-world beyond our normal faculties.

Her works appear the product of a state of altered consciousness, or at least of resulting from an imagination capable of seeing the labyrinth of our passions in the complex entanglement of foliage, tree-trunks and creepers in a Brazilian forest. Perhaps this also derives from Germanic culture, haunted by the ancient gods and goddesses who once reigned over the rivers and forests, and whose ghostly presence has always enchanted artists and musicians. This is what Nietzsche observed in his fight against Wagner, reaffirming how this age-old German background was but a means of fighting the Christian God – that master of goals, the subtle and incomprehensible weaver supposed to hold the meaning of life and leave nothing to chance. Yet chance is central to Tschäpe's approach.

Her exuberant subject-matter is not the same as a collection of vaguely anthropomorphic views. Nothing in her canvases suggests how they should be read. The brightly-coloured forms with their differing surface treatment, with their jelly-like consistency, have nothing special to say. Her figures are undemonstrative. They can just as easily assume the strength of ornamental forms as the indecision of a body quivering on the threshold of the visible. This ambiguity (and we could cite others) reveals its strength in the scale of her often monumental paintings, conceived to challenge our way of looking, lead it astray, and plunge it into the treatment of the surface, the linear circumsolutions, and the thousand fragments of hesitant colour spilling from the forms.

Obviously the cycles of life and death, and Nature's eternal process of renewal, are at the heart of her approach. Her paintings seem to have extraordinary strength, reaffirming that the power of Time does not consist in casting the forms peopling the earth into outer darkness. Instead, this boundless power remains that of an eternal renewal – the here and now, when some cycles end, and others begin. The frozen moment in time which she chooses to represent reveals a living entity that seeps into the world's every fold, and into the furthest recesses of our imagination. This is also asserted, albeit less emphatically, in her collages and sculptures, where activity becomes almost shamanistic and ritualistic.

Her performances involve girls clad in garish, often biomorphic costumes, in strange productions where the writing of the human body becomes eminently feminine, as if better to exorcise the unhealthy power of the masculine in today's world. Janaina Tschäpe's world is that of a promise: the earth's re-found confidence as it tears apart its forms and colours and renews its contract with the living. This attitude might seem naive were it not accompanied by an incredible ability to give these works the power of our most secret dreams.



Siroca 2011
Watercolor and pastels on paper
175 x 260.4 cm