

Opening:  
1 July, 10 pm  
(Performance with Laura Pante  
from 10:30 pm)

2 July –  
17 September 2016

Tuesday to Saturday  
2 – 7 pm

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**A conversation between Luís Silva and Anna Franceschini / June 2016**

LUÍS SILVA: The title of your exhibition, IN LIEU OF A LIANE, suggests ideas of replacement and substitution, even transformation; it also hints at things not being what they seem or, to be more accurate, being more than what they seem. When in your show, is there more than meets the eye?

ANNA FRANCESCHINI: Instinctively I would say that no, the show is completely about appearances, looks, surfaces, but I would tell a lie. Well, maybe telling little 'white lies' might be a key to understand the attitude of some aspects of the exhibition.

Let's start from the title again. It comes from the very beginning, when I was writing about the project, trying to find illustrative descriptions of what I had in mind. Basically trying to find very basic examples in order to communicate this idea of unveiled optical illusion, of an obvious *trompe l'oeil*. I used this expression, *in lieu of a liane*, to explain the use of other materials instead of a vegetal presence in the show. It popped out, so beautifully twisted itself, green and growing along the phrase I was writing. This is just to say that the impulse behind the show is not directed towards fooling somebody's eyes, but, more precisely, to make the viewer aware of the trick and the mock and let him/her fully enjoy that.

I practice a lot this procedure in my films and videos. In the show, this sort of technique is at the service of other media and of a general idea of displacement of space and time. The initial inspiration is a book, the *Drowned world*, a science fiction dystopia written by J. G. Ballard in 1969. A past, that is maybe now, as it can be seen in a couple of hundreds years, after a natural catastrophe that left Northern American and European cities submerged by water, by eyes that are only remotely connected with habits, codes, meanings that used to be *de rigueur* many many years ago (read: now).

L.S.: Would you call yourself a trickster then?

A.F.: Well, the figure of the trickster in mythology is a fascinating creature that seems to stay in between humans and gods. This liminal ambiguous nature is interesting, in so far as it is illusional and produces seductive distortions. Let's say that I could be a trickster that always leaves the possibility to discover the 'imbroglio', the visual scam. The truth, or whatever that may be, is there, maybe just a little bit in the background, behind some rotating objects, veiled by an opalescent PVC drape, but it's definitely there. Promise!

Everybody is free to be tricked, or not, it's just a matter of pleasure. For instance, a week ago I was at a dinner in a beautiful house where nothing is what it seems. The couple that inhabits this eclectic phantasmagoria showed me a still life of olives and eggs made from fine ceramic, totally credible, that were used to be put on the table, among real food, to mock the guests in order to produce amusement,

as when you tear the imitation of the olive it doesn't move from the plate... So, let's say that I'm a trickster in a 'baroque' sense of the word.

L.S.: What is, if it exists at all, the relation between seductiveness and being a trickster?

A.F.: I think it's related to the act of giving pleasure via illusions and distortions. This implies of course complicity by both sides, the trickster and the one that has been, or is going to be tricked. The pact must be clear: I am going to be a trickster here in front of you, will you like it or not? If you are, please stay and enjoy this condition, all the veils, the beautiful folds and wrinkles of the appearance. If not, well, maybe there's not much that a trickster can do for you. It also depends on the nuance that is given to the word trickster itself. My first reaction was to recall the divine trickster, so, of course I give a positive meaning to the word itself, and I'm almost flattered to be called such.

I think I've been rarely seduced by the truth, if there is one.

L.S.: Something that has caught my attention, not only in this exhibition but also in your practice overall, and seems to be related to what we have been discussing even if in an oblique way, is a certain preference for circularity, either as a very concrete tool (circular motion for instance) or /and as a rhetorical device. What interests you specifically in this?

A.F.: Circularity, repetition, loops are actually almost always present in my work. Even in the choreographic pieces that I make in collaboration with dancers, the pieces are always conceived as patterns that repeat themselves and it wouldn't make any sense to have them performed just once.

There are several aspects that interest me in that. I think, at the very beginning, when I was making only one channel videos, mostly based on the observation of a selected and recognizable space, the circularity was already present and intended to be a precise statement concerning cinematographic dramaturgy. It was an attempt to escape a linear narrativity, even though I never really succeeded. I started to work on repeated simultaneity only with installations. I think I'm interested in the effect that circularity provokes, as after a few loops, the perception of the piece might mutate. I think the level of attention is diversified by circular repetition, for instance, and this can lead to a secondary and different thought.

Besides this, there's also a pending wait implied in circularity, that is reaffirmed circle after circle, and I find it addictive somehow. As some sort of potential energy is growing and growing, never liberated by a cathartic END. No narrative resolution, no cognitive understanding.

Another interesting aspect concerns the construction of the show, that acquires a sort of vibrating quality, a controlled variabil-

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ity. Sometimes I also think about exhibitions as films, with different works as sequences of a possible cinematographic montage. Once I made an exhibition only with video works that had a precise duration. The videos were changing, following a scheme, for half an hour. Then the show was starting again. Another time I was intervening myself, changing the pieces in the show, during an opening, without any staged performative attitude, but while attending my own show, so to speak. So, change after change, the show, even following a 'theme', was completely different. I was interested in perceptual effects and levels of attention, mine and of the audience.

L.S.: What interests you in perception and more specifically in perceptual, i.e. optical effects? Is it some sort of legacy from op art?

A.F.: At the beginning it was an interest in revealing the abstraction hidden behind figuration. An effort towards framing reality in such a way that it would open up as a pattern, as pure movement, or a combination of colors. As I come from film studies, mainly, with my early practice I reacted to structural film. Watching Kubelka's and Paul Sharits' films, I thought that I would have liked to envision reality in order to obtain a similar effect of minimalism. So I started to film phenomena focusing on their formal aspects: color, movement, repetition of a certain perceptual event. Even when I was not producing experimental films, but documentaries, I was trying to apply the same attitude to spaces I was portraying. For instance, once I made documentation of a rest house for opera singers in Milan and for me the main concern was to find the perfect regime of movement that could translate the topology of the place in cinematographic language. When I understood that the travelling was the correct device (technically and linguistically) to analyze the space horizontally and the elevator already present in the house was the perfect vertical counterpart, I was really happy. I made the space becoming cinema language, I was basically using that place in order to analyze forms that belong to cinema, like the mentioned travelling movement. Even though the film is very 'moving', emotionally, and I looked for that all the time. I'm deeply convinced that they are two aspects of the same thing. It's like reading *Austerlitz*, or *Perec's Life a user's manual*. It's all about structure, or detailed descriptions of formal aspects of reality, but it's all deeply touching, and painful somehow. Structure as an antidote to pain. Perhaps.

Back to legacies I always felt closer to Hollis Frampton, instead. *Winter Solstice* (1974) and *Lemon* are probably among the most influential works of art for me. One is shot in a foundry, and it's all about flames, red hot liquid metal, sparks, a luminous retinal ritual, while the other is about a lemon and changing of lights. In a slightly ironic way, it analyzes film simultaneously as a presence and as an illusion.

There are words of a song by a band called Young marble giants that to me describe this condition quite well:

*Shape up your body "Let's be a tree"*  
*Visual dynamics for you to see*  
*Nature intended the abstract*  
*For you and me*

Now this research of moving images in purity, phenomena reduced to formal events, is becoming something else. For instance, I started to 'provoke' events, in the sense that I build sets, I create compositions with objects, I make things happen on purpose. But I'm still an observer, and I make use of what hits my eyes. This show, for instance, comes from a book that depicts the end of modernity, even of the memory of it, but it wouldn't have been possible without the existence of mass produced rotating displays for vitrines. The rotating displays function as the structural tool, while the book was the trigger that made me rethink about the links between modernity and spectacle. And spectacle is about showing something. There came the use of an object whose main purpose is to exhibit things. At the point that, in some images, it only shows itself.