

Exhibition text: Lola Gonzalez, "Tonnerres," 2021.

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Tonnerres (Thunder). Lola Gonzalez

"One day,

WE,

Se vit,

*In a posthumous world,"*¹

The house has been shattered. Cut apart. Uninhabitable, now it hiccups, dismembered and disarticulated. What remains of its walls twists toward the memory of dreaded windstorms and insatiable cold rain. It was a tranquil house. Away from it all. A solitary recluse. Sensible. Spacious, proudly facing the Atlantic Ocean horizon. Elegant, surrounded by the sunny forests and undergrowth of the secret and silent countryside. Bourgeois, encircled by well-ordered classical gardens. It was a quiet house, sheltering, welcoming the enigmatic, hesitating human choir. Singular and collective. Enclosed and vigilant. Watchful and waiting for the winter to come, an undefined battle against a vague enemy. A close-knit choir, like a family, a group, friends, a clan, a sect, a community among uncertain communities. Inventor of rebellions dreamed and acted out, stammering resistances and useless suicides. The world – which deprived the choir of a liveable horizon and prevents the emergence of an extended we – was outside.

Not far from the Alpine crystalline rock slopes of the Vallée des Merveilles in the Mercantour mountains, the house was accustomed to standing upright, reigning over part of the landscape. And the landscape had accepted it so well that even without asking or making any compromises the building had become part of it, incorporated into the shadow of the forests of chestnut and ash trees, of larches and stone pines, moulded into the morainic rock cleaved by the capricious torrents of the Vésubie and Roya rivers, a seasonal fabric of low and high waters. The house dialogued with the landscape. Unseparated. Connected. A human touch. For generations. The idea of a certain everyday eternity in suspension. The individual and solitary idea of the landscape's sublime beauty. The contemporary idea of a transactional landscape in exchange for satisfying the artificial needs of a profitable tourist trade. The insane idea of an eternal, joyous now.

Then there was a suddenly, a change both in the course of human events and the weather. The suddenness of death. The melodic and perplexing flow of things just stopped. "That day, the unbearable became a reality," a woman says. We can pinpoint and visualize the exact date: October 2, 2020. The house could not escape history. Could not escape the atmospheric narrative, as implacable as it is unpredictable. Even if it enveloped imaginary insurrections and utopian impulses, invented languages. Even if it protected the anxious and dialectical cries of a common individuality ready to begin all over again or just begin. The European Western world is always astonished by what happens to it. It's astonished that anything can happen; astonished by the persistence of a stubborn, deeply-rooted and highly active reality whose existence can bear witness to the sterile new order. Astonished by its violent resistance. Disruption is not an option. This new world has no understanding of death, that sudden eclipse, it throws death into

¹ "Le siècle tombe", Marjorie Micucci, *Lost journey cantos 2*, The Contemporary Erratum Press, 2020, p. 217. Poem on view during the group show *Marcelle Alix ouverte*, galerie Marcelle Alix, Paris, October 30-December 21, 2019.

the babbling flow of passing images and decries, with false innocence, the tragedy of history's repetition. That world that laughs, insensitive or blind to the "terrible tidings,"² or, better said, responsible for it, has forgotten the very "dark ages"³ when the poets rekindled their urgent and imperative words, so ambivalent and yet so clear, so sweetly said and yet so terrifying. This new world detests ambiguity and enigma. But poets and artists keep speaking, they repeat and weave and sew, propose, record and show. They come back from reality and the way things are. They reinvent language and come up with images – powerful, exploded, frozen, mute, delicate, gaping, open to the senses and higher than life.

Today the house is a hollowed-out ruin, afflicted with a sudden vertigo, vomiting shreds of its deepest political convictions into the muddy current that was for so long a nourishing and fertile river, but "a long time doesn't mean always"⁴ as the elusive poet warns us. The house made of wood and grey stone is on the verge of collapse, of disappearing from the metamorphosized landscape now ridding itself of the traces of human activity and construction. The landscape has succumbed to an extratropical low pressure cyclone rolling in from the Atlantic ocean, a "weather bomb" *ingénéré* called Alex; it has absorbed the mad confrontation of the elements, wind and swollen rain caught up in an apparently inexhaustible circular dance, an explosive rush that disfigures the stunned bodies, knowing that nothing can last, that the Earth is alive, throbbing, trembling, burning, flooding, shaking and collapsing, that it is an equilibrium of fragile diversities and a maelstrom of all kinds of matter, of currents that clash or reconcile, of straining physical forces. The Earth reacts and does not want to die. It knows that it is being observed, closely watched, its slightest deviations and jolts measured, along with its slightest underground energies. It knows it has entered a young century that is already running out of breath and life, threatened and reduced. It dreams of resistance.

The Earth was surprised that fall morning in 2020. The valleys of the Roya and the Vésubie may have experienced an earthquake of Richterian proportions. The tectonic fault line is also restless. Temperance is a liberal illusion. A false Western dream. And we are blind to that. We're asleep in the face of that. Will the broken house remain in the *body* of the human choir now wandering through deserted valleys. Will it remain in the choir's blind eyes. The catastrophe is here. What will become of the choir that saw it? Will it speak of the landscape metamorphosized since the catastrophe? Beginning with the catastrophe? Will it be different after this catastrophe it has experienced? Will it act and move in the same way?

I am. We are.

*That is enough. Now we have to start. Life has been put in our hands. For itself it became empty already long ago. It pitches senselessly back and forth, but we stand firm, and so we want to become its initiative and its ends.*⁵

After the catastrophe... The bodies of the choir separate from the landscape. The battered bodies have tried one last time to keep what was once the cold tenderness of a rock, the summer caress of a clear stream. The choir looks at the house it has left. It sees itself as twigs left behind by the catastrophe. And it leaves the landscape. Now in a state of disordered alert. Lost, the choir tries to reassemble its narrative. But it's deaf. But it's mute. But it itself is cut off. The choir flees the posthumous world. Long closed off in its house, familiar only with itself, closed off by its own self-imposed, vain

² Bertolt Brecht, "To posterity", translated by H. R. Hays, Grove Press, 1947.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "The Blind Man", translated by Anthony Tatlow, Methuen, 1973.

⁵ Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, translated by Anthony A. Nassar, Stanford University Press, 2000. Written April 1915-May 1917.

clandestinity, it is orphaned from its only horizon of expectations, the countryside which it no longer knows how to inhabit. Expelled and under suspicion, the choir goes back to the Mediterranean city, wounded by another of the world's madness on July 14, 2016. What can the choir do now? Can it bear witness as heir to the event, and can it tell the story? Will it be able to speak again and share a memory and a present? In ancient Greek the word *choros* means dance. Suddenly, for a moment, the choir reconciles with its forgotten beginnings, dissolves into the immensity of a collective dance, the meeting of one generation with another, the equality of a "choral community"⁶ whose multiple bodies come alive with shared energy, dissimilar histories, troubled or satisfied emotions. The initial choir, the model, has disappeared into a movement that "expresses nothing but movement itself, movement for movement's sake, free of any goal to reach and any sentiment determined to express itself,"⁷ cancelling any "hierarchy of bodies, movements and temporalities."⁸ The possibility of a communality to ward off catastrophe, to "make a go at it"⁹ remains available. Everything absurd has been imbibed.

In the valley, the storm is lying in wait. The thunder is an unpredictable death-knell, still calling out. Thus, the artist strips naked the dichotomies, evasions and ambivalence of our times, keeping watch.¹⁰

⁶ Jacques Rancière, « Le moment de la danse », *Les Temps modernes. Art, temps, politique*, Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2018, p. 88.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Essayer voir*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2014.

¹⁰ François Hartog, *La Chambre de veille*, Paris, Flammarion, 2013.