

Status of the Dead Body, Shifting from the Conceptual to the Literal

*'What I am
is not written,
is not represented in man.
Man is simply an opaque block
moved by what is repressed,
rejected,
what is not revealed,
in which each gesture is spontaneous revelation.'*

Antonin Artaud (in *Identity and Alterity, figures of the body*, Biennale Venice 1995)

There are many ways of addressing issues of the body. Myself, being interested in the realm of the flesh, identity, sexuality, and introspection; found a certain pleasure in leaving the heavy burden of the conceptual humanity for a simpler concept.

In the series of drawings **Status of the Dead Body** the figure is understood as a material and nothing else. There's no story, no ancient goddess behind the black silhouettes portrayed on big sheets of paper. It became clear the shape of a hip and the texture of hair weren't meaningful this time as feminine or racial objects of interest. Like Kiki Smith said: *"I just want to talk about the generic experience of the body without it becoming specific to specific people."* It is purely about the figure or a generic way of showing the figure without getting into issues of gender, race, and personality.

As mentioned before, I became interested in different concepts of body and its physicality. In the research for images a medical concept called 'proprioception' stands out. Here I allow myself a long explanatory quote:

"Proprioception is among the body's fundamental senses (also known as cenesthesia and tactus intimus): it is the body internal sense of itself. (...) This sense names the way we know how our limbs are disposed without looking at them or touching them. It is not equivalent to the sense of touch, since this only happens in the skin and outside.

In medical cases in which proprioception disappears, patients report a faint sensation on the skin (they can feel the wind or the light brush of objects), but there is a general helplessness about the body. These patients have to learn how to look at their limbs to remain seated or to walk. If they lose sight of their bodies, then they tend to collapse, so they can only walk when they look down

or learn to sit by the tedious expedient of memorizing the motions and places of each limb."

Contrastingly, the 'phantom limb' concept became the initial inspiration for the series, despite the fact that it is the counterpart of loosing the notion of being 'there'. The idea of 'dead body' was coined from the many stories I've heard about people still feeling their amputated limbs. I thought of the 'dead body' as an absent existence...not an empty shell, though. Not anything metaphysical or psychological, but a mass constituted by millions of cells. It is difficult to think of a human body without the immense implications of being alive. Vitality or LIFE, understood as a force that makes this millions of cells want to group into organs and then work together towards complexity, is something I consciously tried to avoid while working on the drawings.

The models for the series are images of actual dead bodies. I found them intriguing in the way death is evident in every gesture of these people, even more intriguing the way the photographers captured morbid scenes with such great interest in anatomic features and composition. To me it is evidence of an artistic need of representing the body as a corpse or as a vital human in the same status of importance; a human as it is, in its different states.

As the concept of 'dead body' developed, it seemed the metaphysical connotations were unavoidable. It's not in my interest to show different planes of existence (though some of my friends immediately connected the dots towards a ghostly or spiritual interpretation of the artworks). As I said, showing a different state of the body: alive vs. un-alive is the core... but life and death are still ideas that belong to the realm of metaphysics.

Who knows what the future will become?