

Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Presa, E

Title:

Theorem

Date:

2022-11-30

Citation:

Presa, E. (2022). Theorem. [Plaster, gold pigment, beeswax.]. MEJIA Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/336636>

Theorem

Comprised of a series of plaster sculptures that function more as statues, as if dislocated from a place of origin, the installation is prompted by *Statues: The Second book of Foundations*, by Michel Serres. (Rome, being the subject of his *First book of Foundations*.)

The roughly cast sculptures made of clay and plaster- materials dug up from the earth -reference icons and other figurations from low culture. Some have been inscribed with lines from Pier Paolo Pasolini's poems, lines which speak of the earth, poverty, beatitude and death. It's as if Pasolini and Serres, both shared a faith in an excess of spirit, an exuberance rising from Rome's ruins and decay.

Serres offers "a treatise on sculpture", a rare occurrence in the history of philosophy. He constructs a history of sculpture from the magma deep within the earth and volcanic eruptions, to the idolaters of ancient religions, and the destroyers of idols of the monotheistic religions.

He argues that the common noun "statues" and the proper noun "Hestia", the name of the Greek goddess of the hearth, together signify "immobility, fixity or invariance, stability." And that the philosophical term *episteme* or knowledge is part of this constellation of terms. For from its origin or root, the *episteme* identifies with invariance and stability, the fixed foundations on which knowledge constructs itself.

Thus, Serres' theorem could be stated as something like: Sculpture is an art on whose foundations religious, scientific and philosophical knowledge erects itself in the world.

My theorem could be: Sculpture is an art where the most fragile, sordid and tender of gestures forms a world, not of exactitude and certainty, but one that is as I need it to be.

Elizabeth Presa

Dr Elizabeth Presa teaches sculpture and art theory at the VCA, The University of Melbourne.

I respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the unceded lands of the Boonwurrung people and the knowledge systems that have sustained and continue to sustain their culture.

Notes on Sculpture

Look at the sculptures of children and young saints that Elizabeth Presa has produced in her recent work. They may appear to twist their lying bodies like joyous or tormented animals, kneel down on the

floor to inspect their toes, stand still against a wall in an absent-minded fashion, or stretch out their calm and perhaps sleeping bodies on the unpolished ground, on a ground that features the imprints of grass stalks and corn plants. Slender and crooked wings may grow from their backs and golden halos may enshrine their tilted heads. Open hands, inviting, welcoming, self-forgetful, may turn their palms to the beholder, inner surfaces that have not been smoothed out and that resemble the wrinkled skins into which liquids solidify. All these figures descend from the surprisingly well-preserved detached bodies, the bodies of a couple, possibly, that were surprised and immortalised, at the cost of invisibility, by the eruption of a volcano, Mount Vesuvius. In Rossellini's film *Viaggio in Italia*, these two figures are carefully dug up out of the dark soil. The film's female protagonist, played by Ingrid Bergman, feels so overwhelmed that she begins to cry and asks her husband to take her away from the archaeological site. The sculptor or the sculptress lends nature a hand. Or nature holds its hand out to the artist. This is just another case of liminality, a playful and humorous one though also one in which the difference between natural sculpting and sculptural art comes to the fore. Sculpture causes nothing. It does not give birth and it does not bring death, neither randomly nor intentionally. It does not even overwhelm. This is why it is not indifferent. For in order not to be indifferent – intentionality, or intentional activity, is perhaps only another, more recondite sort of indifference – one must be a sculptor or a sculptress who creates a liminality that cannot be wilfully intended, unless, of course, one seeks to showcase one's artistry. To identify Elizabeth Presa's children with descendants reveals itself to be a misunderstanding. One must consider them as liminal figures or images, as sculptures, for whom, in the very remoteness of their liminal condition, nothing is more remote than indifference.

Alexander García Düttmann

Prof. Dr. Alexander Garcia Düttmann is professor of philosophy and art theory at the Universität der Künste Berlin.