

ENGLISH

Perhaps One Morning Walking

“To discover something is to make it”,¹ asserts Ursula K. Le Guin, discussing the uncounted creative possibilities that a simple shift in perspective can generate. And, in fact, the particular gaze that Wesley Meuris places on the world and the idea of the future makes intelligible the invisible forms of the present, not so much to anticipate the future as to discover its actuality.

Always dedicated to the mechanisms underlying perception and the orientation of vision, the artist explores that thin line, theoretical as well as formal, between the ordinary way of inhabiting the world and the need to define new means to experiment with it; between the daily use of devices and their social, individual and institutional reconsideration; between the linear perspective of a accustomed gaze and the heuristic standpoint of an eye that looks beyond. The peculiarity of his work lies precisely in the ability to embody the idea of *in-between* and make visible that particular gap between the uniqueness of a completed form and the partial nature of the apparatus it evokes. In front of his works, we never know for sure where we are nor how we should understand, look, use, and practice what is proposed to us.

Preferability, Wesley Meuris’s ninth solo show at the Annie Gentils Gallery, certainly deals with this creative approach, presenting in the form of narrative abstractions his fascination for cognitive relationships and logic mechanisms that regulate the entropic motion underlining the making and the unmaking of matter. However, these new pieces, conceived specifically for the occasion, stand out from previous works precisely by the use of other materials and for the definition of multiple new forms capable of detailing, like moulds, the premises for social dynamics not yet shared. Thus, assembling panels (connection pieces-like) determine relational structures inhabited by antipodes (order and disorder, stable and unstable, wood and loam, data logics and natural laws, high technological tools and human accidental condition) that coexist peacefully² with their own discrepancies. Watercolours and wooden panels transcribe possible diagrams, re-proposing, almost like a painting, the linearity of the landscape horizon. And archetypal architectural units suggest alternatives to the ordinary use of known materials. This new visual vocabulary, rather than dwelling on the logic which underlies the practices of looking, now seems to want to stimulate the mind and the gaze in order to suggest variable

¹ Ursula K. Le Guin, “World-Making” in *Dancing at the Edge of World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 46-48.

² Anne Cauquelin, *Paysage et cyberspace* (Louvain: Les pages du laa, 2007), 4.

directions for thinking about the future and see how and where the imagination can extend. As samples (applicable forms) of not yet explored archetypal shapes, Wesley Meuris' new works detail neither the research nor the outcome, rather they stand up, wondering how it is possible to think differently about the variables of knowledge.

What does the future represent?

How can we operate with it?

Neither proposals nor suggestions, but introspective forms defined by cognitive selections, malleable interrelations and experimental devices (simultaneously processes, tools, instruments and unique forms), these works feature the fortuitous encounter between incongruent conditions. Here, the matter acts, activated by a hybridization process that seems to rethink the concept of the environment, understood in its suspended, expanded, empirical, holistic dimension. Here, as nature becomes contradictory, the indefiniteness of soil, straw and clay meets the diagrammatic seriality of digital data, thus enhancing the possibilities behind the shapes and the uses of multiple configurations. Like hybrid alterities stemming from an affective syntax devoted to experimental assemblage, Wesley Meuris' works end up visually translating the current crisis of representation whereby non-textual media provide the tools to produce new knowledge and other discourses.

In this new visual geography thus defined, the artist positions himself in a precise space (physical and mental), between before and after, a during. "Neither here, nor there - would say Victor Turner -, but betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial".³ Thus placed within a fluid field of active and continuous relationships,⁴ Wesley Meuris stimulates the creation of an unexplored territory where "conventions are not yet established and still up for negotiation".⁵ This outlines a sort of gray area that has not yet been claimed, but which "reveals the prejudices and attitudes of our culture, as well as the way we practice architecture".⁶ Here we are ultimately dealing with the critical zone defined by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, that "has no settled meaning [and which] designates something of uncertain status, unclear delineation, unsettling atmosphere".⁷ In other words, these new works give a form to the *borderscape*.⁸ Like liminal⁹ structures, they act as thresholds (from the Latin *Limen*) that inhabit the interstices of social constructions not yet determined; as meta-spaces in which the ongoing transition is embraced both from a synchronic and diachronic point of view; as semiospheres in which both the result and the conditions of its development coexist. And so, if the border - as Jurij Lotman explains - can be understood as the "before the

³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011 [1969]), 95.

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 8. See also Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone", in *Profession 1991* (New York: MLA, 1991).

⁵ Claire Bishop, "Dance, Performance, and Social Media in the Postdigital Museum", in Malene Vest Hansen and Kristian Handberg (eds.), *Curating the contemporary in the Art Museum* (London, New York: Routledge, 2023), 37.

⁶ Giovanna Borasi, et.al., *The Museum is not enough*, (Montreal: Centre Canadien d'Architecture; Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 18.

⁷ Bruno Latour, Peter Weibel (eds), *Critical Zone. The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, Berlin: ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2020), 13.

⁸ Prem Kumar Rajaram, Carl Grundy-Warr (eds.), *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, *op.cit.*

place”,¹⁰ with the works of Wesley Meuris we find ourselves placed right on the threshold of new spaces to discover and invent.

Preferability (which is neither a possibility nor a predictability) finally resets and rearranges to then encounter and thus explore new logics, ending up challenging the material itself and building other frameworks where all the critical phenomena of ordinary life can be situated to eventually foster new ways of inhabiting the future. The exhibition details particularly a vibrant and flexible transition process built on the body/earth relationship, within which a series of negotiations between subjects (animate or inanimate, visible or invisible) determines the emergence of what not only lies beyond the border but above all lies within it and which Lotman would define as possible passionate and unpredictable enunciations that leave room for the “most varied discards and the most complex dialogues”.¹¹ Ultimately, with *Preferability*, the artist seems to have found where to settle his gaze: neither here nor there but in the tireless movement that goes between what Jean Starobinsky defines as “the overlooking gaze and the identifying intuition”, a gaze that is *in-between* and that does not reject either the vertigo of distance or that of proximity, but instead desires “this double excess where the gaze is every time close to losing all power.”¹²

Neither sculptures nor paintings, neither furniture nor architecture, the new forms of Wesley Meuris awaken the Freudian uncanny located in the ordinary and thus reveal the emergence of new formulas, still unknown, anchored to everyday life. No-man' lands. Preferably spots where one can feel connected, and settled, where one can reconsider the material and its multiple effects, and limits, where one can embody the interior design that lies behind every form and thus think about the future and further ways of looking at it, because, after all, “yesterday’s tomorrow is not yet today”.¹³

Pamela Bianchi

*Perhaps one morning walking in dry glassy air,
I will turn, I will see the miracle complete:
nothingness at my shoulder,
the void behind me, with a drunkard’s terror.*

*Then, as on a screen, trees houses hills
will advance swiftly in familiar illusion,
But it will be too late; and I will return, silently,
to men who do not look back, with my secret.*

(Eugenio Montale, *Perhaps One Morning Walking*, 1925)

¹⁰ Jurij M. Lotman, *The Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* [1984], trans. by Ann Shukman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2001), 140.

¹¹ Jurij M. Lotman, *Culture and Explosion* [1992], trans. by Wilma Clark (De Gruyter Mouton: Berlin, 2009).

¹² Jean Starobinski, *L’œil vivant. Corneille, Racine, La Bruyère, Rousseau, Stendhal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 27.

¹³ Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, David Lewis (eds), *This is Tomorrow*, exhib. catalogue (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), np.