**Press Release**

**Martin Soto Climent – The Skin of the Apple**

**08 March - 06 April 2019**

**Opening Thursday 07 March 2019**

In Martin Soto Climént’s work, objects and materials travel on the metamorphic paths of alchemy. Having long worked with found objects, using their fragility and transience as catalysts, he subsequently started to work in a wider range of materials, many of them unusual, and endowed with a certain elasticity: translucent tights, slender rubber foam, smooth leather, and shimmering fabrics - the malleability and tension of these materials provides interesting tools to Soto Climént, who is principally concerned with the pushes and pulls of desire.

The Skin of the Apple, Soto Climént’s third solo show with the gallery, is indicative of this new phase and most recent chapter. Exploring the allegorical notion of paradise, the exhibition is composed of seventeen works that are arranged at different heights, either hung on the wall, or floating in the gallery’s main space. Notably, Soto Climént’s paradise is neither figurative nor idyllic, but instead abstract and energetic. Investigating mechanisms of separation and convergence, the artist worked with elastic fabrics, and by applying them onto canvas or wood he created sculptural tableaus that emit palpable dynamism. Setting foot in the exhibition space feels like diving into the sensuous inner life of a fantastic organism: everything is pulsating, each cell seemingly multiplying and melting with others.

Rebis Siber, like all of the works that are suspended from the ceiling, is composed of two panels that are arranged with their backs to each other. The front-drop showcases a process of division: on the canvas, a soft rose cushion is being split in two by a fierce black string that cuts right across the picture plane. While the cushion’s middle bleeds a glittering substance, its outer ends are seemingly morphing into a snake. On the backdrop, the cushion has disappeared, as if the black fabric swallowed it, leaving nothing but colorful residue behind. Inner Embrace, is composed of two large wooden panels that are arranged back to back, revealing a fleshy substance billowing out in between them. Venturing around it is like participating in a cycle of metamorphosis: a sort of egg is being divided, its juices spreading out and flowing from one side of the work to the other. In Inner Embrace, the glossy textures of the synthetic fabrics and the organic drawings of the wood together create a haptic incongruency, yet, both of those materials seem to be part of the same organism. Caduceus Suecudac is comprised of two canvases, hung high up in the space. The two panels are occupied by a green bulge of iridescent textile, which whirls around them, like a snake around a branch.

Navigating the exhibition, everything shifts according to perspective: two wooden caskets, if viewed from the proper angle, suddenly reveal a fragile inner life. Entitled Hidden Forest, these works are composed of transparent strings of tights that the artist spun together to form complex systems. But not only do the singular works appear like mutable dynamic entities, there also seems to be a sort of pull in between the different works. Indeed, the smaller works that are hung on the walls of the exhibition space and dispersed in the gallery’s offices function as sort of subsets of the bigger works. Predominantly monochromatic, these works bear the base colors that are contained in the larger and more complex panels.

Soto Climént’s version of paradise, thus, is one caught in a moment of active fusion in which every element is connected, bearing the traces of its components.

Indeed, The Skin of the Apple is conceptualized as a critical reflection upon two origin stories of mankind, both of them based on acts of separation or segregation: the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the Greek myth of Aristophanes. In Soto Climént’s practice, such myths play an important role because in analyzing Christian tales and in tracing them back to Greek or Pagan myths, the artist is able to recuperate the concepts of unity that are so central to his art. Notably, many of these ancient tales refer to the magical figure of the Androgynous, the divine unity of the sexes that Soto Climént cherishes throughout his work.

In conceiving of The Skin of the Apple as an allegorical representation of paradise, Soto Climént thus traced the biblical tale of Adam and Eve back to the myth of Aristophanes. According to this Greek myth, originally, there was man, woman, and the union of the two, the Androgynous. Those primeval humans were round, like their parents the planets: the sun, the earth, and the moon. They each had four arms and legs, and two identical faces, situated on each side of their heads. Their might and hearts were so great, that Zeus decided to put an end to their power by cutting them in two, just like an apple. According to the myth of Aristophanes, this is how our desire was born: henceforth separated, we would forever long for our other half.[1] Our greatest wish, if we could have it, would be to meld into one another, so that our souls could be at one, unified in an everlasting embrace.

Interestingly, in both of these tales an apple plays an important role: in Adam and Eve it symbolizes the forbidden fruit which ultimately leads to the expulsion from paradise, in the myth of Aristophanes, it is used to illustrate the act of cutting in half. As the title of Soto Climént’s exhibition indicates, the artist picked up on this commonality. And indeed, an apple is part of the show: it is clothed in the skin of a serpent and entitled Splendor Solis. Notably, the work’s title refers back to an illustrated manuscript by Salomon Trismosin, the teacher of Paracelsus, in which the different stages of an alchemical union are delineated. This ancient manual reveals important insights into Soto Climént’s fascination with alchemy and other occult traditions: in line with these teachings, polarities play an important role in his practice precisely because he does not conceptualize them as irreconcilable, but instead conceives of them as being in a constant flux, endowed with the potential for coalescence and unity. Concomitantly, he does not conceive of identity as fixed, but fluent. Furthermore, Soto Climént is interested in alchemy because of its correlation to the transformative nature of art production itself as a type of magical practice.

Based on such syncretism of ancient teachings and mythological tales, Soto Climént’s art detracts itself from easy categorization. In his recent works, the artist plays with the visual vocabulary of abstract expressionism, yet there are certain aspects to the work that are decisively organic, if not anthropomorphic. While Soto Climént’s work is generously open to anyone on the basis of affect, there are also enigmatic layers of meaning embedded in it, which only reveal themselves if we go back in time to search for their origins.

- Giorgia von Albertini

Soto Climént is currently being exhibited in Konkrete Gegenwart at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich and Groundings at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Later this year, he will have a solo exhibition at Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, New York. Past shows include Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthalle Winterthur; Kunsthalle Innsbruck; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; Cleveland Museum of Art; SculptureCenter, New York; and The Met Cloisters, New York.

Together with curator Chris Sharp, Soto Climént founded the independent project space Lulu in Mexico City in 2013 and presently collaborates with blogs and independent initiatives from the international art scene, while preparing his master’s degree on photography at the Academia de San Carlos, UNAM.

[1] Please note that according to the myth of Aristophanes, if originating from a divided woman, the woman would long for another woman, if originating form a divided man, the man would long for another man. Only if originating from an Androgynous, a man would long for a woman and vice versa. Notably, same-sex desire was accepted in ancient Greece, before the advent of Christianity.