



Mario Melis *"IS THIS HEAVEN"*

Voiture 14 Solo show curated by
Myriam Mokdes

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Mario Melis builds her drawing, tattoo, painting, sculpture and publishing practice from a collection of analog and digital images. These images are archived in folders that are at once research instruments, desktop tools and fetish objects. This selection of patterns from various sources including magazines and blogs touches subjects linked to femininity and subcultures. This expanding iconographic corpus deciphers power relationships that affect them. She revisits social and cultural learning of femininity by collecting stereotypical images, highlighting identification mechanisms. Pornography holds a significant place in this corpus, for its possible impact on the development of feminine gender roles. In this pictorial archive, haunted by 1990s aesthetic, archetypal artworks aimed at young girls like those of mangaka Miwa Ueda are found next to demo pictures of hyperrealistic silicon dolls. Mario Melis reapplies these images in exhibition spaces and on the skin of those she tattoos. Her artworks are part of an attempt to rethink commodification mechanisms, to reconcile with perceptions and overcome predation dynamics. She takes Henry Darger's novel The Story of the Vivian Girls in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glando-Angelinian War Storm Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion as a starting point.

This story, that absorbed the writer for nearly thirty years between 1910 and 1930 and is carried on in his drawings, tells the eternal battle opposing the Vivian Girls - a group of brave and robust young girls - and the forces of evil personified by Glandelinian adults.

While gentleness and harmlessness are still required qualities to build oneself as a girl, boyish socialization can include violence as an accepted means of entertainment and expression. This educational paradox outlines a gap in how the unavoidable culture of violence is approached across genders.

Ten body armors, made of aluminum and fabric, draft a small army in keeping with the battle scenes depicted by Henry Darger. Her sculptures combine various garment typologies, smock dresses, protective gear as motocross and horse riding vests, breastplates and buffletins. Added to this are drawings from the artist's folders, displaying some of her iconographic stockpile.

All these processes defuse the fundamental premises of paternity and authenticity relating to artworks. She draws teaching tools from derivative practices, including fanart and cosplay, using them to imagine ways of approaching gender oppression and power struggles. While we learn to self impose limits to avoid the threat of violence, some narratives encourage us to confront brutality and the collective denial of its reality.

Written by Lila Torquéo