



ITE

GOVERNMENT

Anastasia Ax: Deforming Perception

Iliana Fokianaki, art critic and curator, Athens, April 2016

When first acquainted with Anastasia Ax's work, one feels a profound affinity to their own existential struggle. The artist treads in waters that question society, politics but furthermore our own power as individuals and citizens.

The work combines many practises: painting, drawing, performance, sound, installation and sculpture. The final result can be a very overwhelming and at times disturbing experience. The way the artist approaches her practice, is at times seen as sacrilege. Spitting, burning, tramping, spilling: destructive, disrespectful but also liberating, very much like a non compliant citizen that questions authorities, but most importantly very much like an artist that questions the role of the artwork and the artistic practice and all that they symbolize.

Ax from the very start expanded and elaborated her practice including installation and performance together with two-dimensional works. Through this practice, the artist investigates the connection of her body being part of the artistic process, via a ritualistic cathartic action, manifested in her first performances in 2006.

The political elements and references in Ax's work appear early on in her work of that period, her first performative installations being inspired by Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay stories of imprisonment, the duality of oppressor and victim being very interesting to her mainly for its performative element, but also the symbolisms emerging from a theoretical formation of the silhouette of power in the public discourse.

The artist, very much in a Foucault spirit, investigates how destructive power can be transformed into a creative paradigm. Through investigating nature itself, our inhabited environments but also art's traditional realm that of the white cube, Ax performs an act of reinstating through deconstruction. But the core of the work's strength is that she manifests a setting for power structures to exist in flux, where in effect, institutional powers, societal powers and our own innate power system, shifts its weight and at times is liberated.

It is a constructed nature that Ax is looking into, creating it but simultaneously recognising and reinstating its artificial entity. As if she is juxtaposing nature with society and how the human condition reacts to it. It seems like she is indeed making a political comment through manual labour. With materials and objects representing the power of nature in a very Kantian sublime way. The artist crushes and changes this constructed nature through her practice, recognising how nature but also society can 'swallow' and eliminate everything when they operate in excessive force.¹

All these questions and theoretical commentary together with the aesthetic elements are in her work from the very beginning, but in the work presented in this exhibition, Ax delves deeper into questions that have to do with our power or non-power as citizens. History and its remains enter the realm of her practice in the works *Kathimerini*, where the popular newspaper *Kathimerini*'s supplement of financial news is manipulated and transformed into a sculptural painting, engulfing the tragedies of current Greek economical crisis but also the almost uninteresting history of repeated news of failed economical policies.

In her sculptures *Copyright*, the artist is freezing in time the mundane manual labour of our everyday working reality, whilst giving the plain white paper a new power: it can transform from its official use of a document to a sculptural block, exuding immobility and weight.

The power of society, the State, the economy, as well as the validation of our existence through identification and bureaucracy is displayed in the very vehicle of this power's manifestation: paper and its use, as well as its decay when discarded. In effect Ax is liberating our own powers by deforming the perception we have on the manifestation of power.

1. As seen in the work *Pantheon*, 2012, presented at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, or her work *Paper Island* of the same year.