

Cristina Schiavi

Mundo fofo

Cristina Schiavi: Mundos fofos y devenires radicales
By Sofia Dourron

Cristina Schiavi is a restless artist; she finds it difficult to remain still for too long, and so she constantly moves from one place to another. We don't really know why: it may be an exercise to prevent ossification in her thinking and in her work, or it may be the only way to dodge the risk of institutionalization in life and in subjectivity. Her movements can be inscribed within what philosopher María Lugones called "world"-traveling, a path for conceiving multiplicity and difference. In a society that demands increasing degrees of homogeneity and status quo, we travel to get to know the *world* of others through their way of seeing, and with any luck, to broaden our own along the way.

Like Lugones, Cristina does not move physically, nor does she travel long distances to reach a destination: instead, she moves through poetic and immaterial territories, from which she reconfigures scenarios of reality and imagines different ways of inhabiting them, always permeated by a rejection of stereotypes and the violence of normativity and all the dominant structures that regulate our lives.

Thanks to renovated artistic and epistemological genealogies, today we can recognize a series of rotund gestures in Christina's work that disarm languages historically associated with representations of the *political*. As opposed to the logic of purity—in material as well as symbolic terms—and always eluding the literal, Cristina appeals instead to tenderness and humor as the unexpected vehicles for constructing a world that is more just, more amiable and more democratic.

Mundo fofo (Fofo World) is not an anthology, nor does it aim to span her extensive trajectory. It is rather an encounter with a few of the territories that Cristina has explored over the course of her career, and an invitation to approach them more closely, from a perspective that is rooted in their present moment: to go beyond traditional ways of understanding *the human* as an essential part of a feminist project that is now also posthuman.

Fofo-ness

Cristina has always been dedicated to dissecting and reconstructing art history's legacies—their canons, their materials, and their figures—along with all the patriarchal norms and models that have

nourished the discipline over the centuries. In recent years, her work has ventured attempts at reformulating some of painting's most prolific genres: landscape, still life and the nude. *Naturaleza muerta* (literally dead nature, the Spanish term for still life) mutated into *naturaleza quieta* (still nature), thus avoiding the obituary and returning potency to the objects composed therein. Something similar occurred with her landscapes, which, once liberated from their requisite function of serving as a backdrop for different scenes, were emancipated in order to take on their own agency.

Even her bodies/self-portraits adopted different forms in order to become what she calls *cuerpos fofos* (puffy, spongy, pudgy bodies): volumes that are smooth, soft and spongy. It would seem that the things we call fofo are the ones that give way easily to the touch, and return to their natural shape once that pressure is lifted. That puffy sponginess—with its flexible and expanded quality, its warmth and generosity—is the scheme via which we propose to look at and experience Cristina's work today. In her recent works, the bodies have been disassembled; the forms—as if cushioned, but solid—become confused between one another, indicating the final stage of transformation for the human figure, but also the world, sensation and the senses that organize existence, especially that of women: their becoming.

The idea of *becoming*, offered to us by Deleuze, functions as a malleable and elastic common thread that runs throughout Cristina's work, allowing us to think about a fundamental process of transformation and difference, as opposed to beings' static forms. For Deleuze, becoming is not a change between fixed states, but a continuous flow that escapes identity and binary categorization. It is movement that destabilizes established identities—travel without destination—and in Cristina's work, it intertwines multiple bodies and worlds with ways of being that exude tenderness.

Becoming

The latest iteration of this becoming is that of Bañado La Estrella¹: both an example of indomitable nature and painting in a way that aims not to dominate, but to learn new forms. In the ground floor space at W, bodies—of animals, humanoids and humans (including our own)—are seen to be enveloped by the power of a boundless wetland. In this new group of works, body and

nature fuse together in the painting, which is more unruly than precise, and slightly urgent. In this fusion, some of the conceptual and material differences that separate the two are reduced. In Bañado, the human bodies and the landscapes they inhabit, or rather, of which they form an intrinsic part, are neither natural nor cultural: they find themselves in a continual ebb and flow between one thing and another. They constitute a multiform and fleeting assemblage.

This process of mutation in Cristina's work began during the eighties. In those early canvases and works on paper, human bodies and fish float in an indeterminate space, an amniotic fluid of sorts that hosts different life forms—human, animal and bacteria—all tangled together: like some primal cosmic-aquatic explosion from which life and work will emerge. In fact, those symbiotic ecosystems led to different configurations of the body, space and being itself, where the transformations evidence movements away from the old anthropocentric and patriarchal notions of *the human* that have given shape to our subjectivities.

Over time, Cristina's work came to be populated by rabbits, robots, plants and geometricized women, manifesting different embodiments of *the political*, permeated by universes of tenderness, childishness and the fantastic. In these figures, Cristina found ways to elaborate affective losses, State violence, economic crises and her own discontent. Armed with this arsenal of creatures that are as sweet as they are sad, she presents us with alternative modes and languages, for dealing with the course of contemporary life, and also for evading its demands for achievement, autonomy and happiness, which feed an out-of-control individuality. In Cristina's universe, then, tenderness is not a space where innocence takes refuge, but a political weapon, one that also allows us to begin to inhabit our own emotions as spaces of freedom, community and solidarity.

Although these characters evoke something familiar that we associate with memories of childhood games and stories, the affective potency of her images illuminates realities that are far more painful and penetrate us with unimagined violence. In Cristina's work there is a kind of animism—soft or pudgy—that does not aim to grant life to objects, but operates as a lens, to focus on untangling the origins of patriarchal modernity and its consequences on our bodies and in our lives. In her world, a sad bunny has the power to transcend the boundaries of traditional epistemologies and their categorizations of human-not human, nature-

culture or man-woman, in order to constitute itself as a way of thinking of ourselves that overcomes and goes beyond binary structures.

There is a correlation to this visual and discursive trajectory in her experimentation with materials, especially in the use of digital tools—an area in which Cristina was a pioneer during the nineties—which gives her work's power of critique even greater depth. Her early incursion into new territories led to a unique intersection, where soft animism and technology combine in a techno-animism engaged in dialogue with cyborg genealogy. It is an ontology—and a politics—that find their material manifestation in a technified, rarified world, where three sky-blue bunnies make up the average family and roboticized geometry is converted into an instrument for a profound search into transforming spaces and the ways in which we women are allowed to occupy them.

It may be that the primary force in operation in this process of becoming, in Cristina and in her work, is a politics of difference. It is an ongoing play—between the single and the multiple—and a non-agonistic attitude toward perceiving and coming to know the world. It demonstrates that humor and tenderness can be the soft, yet deeply needed, tools for exchanging a patriarchal and anthropocentric world for one that is more fofo and loving.

1 Bañado La Estrella is the name of Argentina's second largest wetland, located in the province of Formosa.