

Ad Minoliti

Monumento a una mariposa

By Sofía Dourron

Ad has always created spaces. Whether in or outside of painting, her focus has been on altering architectural shapes as a critique of the modernist tenets which had negated—by way of Le Corbusier’s Modulor, midway through the 20th century—the existence of non-hegemonic bodies and life forms. While in the midst of continuing research into *Art and Architecture* magazine’s Case Study Houses program, which was a determining factor in the course of modern architecture, she also worked at the local non-profit Save a Gato—which looks after the felines that have historically occupied the streets of San Juan—during her residency in Puerto Rico in 2015. Out of this encounter between the queering of architecture’s heteronormative principles and the need to create safe shelters for our non-human companions, the *Case study cat houses* project was born: little houses that exhibit the abstract-utopian fantasies with which Ad reimagines the world, in addition to providing the cats with refuge from tropical storms.

Since then, her pictorial and speculative practice has been intimately related to the ways human and non-human bodies are empowered to occupy space. Both her “stuffed toy” universes and her recent *Hotel para pájaros* [Bird Hotel]—conceived to host swallows, woodpeckers, treecreepers and robins in the Hanging Gardens in La Havre, France—combine painting, architecture, and now, environmental interventions also. With this combination of tools, Minoliti acts upon our surroundings to modify them, as well as covoking non-human audiences: currently, butterflies.

Some years ago, upon moving into a new house, she noticed that a group of monarch and passion butterflies would hover about the terrace. They were looking for the plants that the previous occupant had planted and had been their habitat until just a few months ago: a combination of host plants that served as their reproduction site, and nectariferous flowers that provided them with food. In these ecosystems, caterpillars transform into pupae or chrysalises and finally, into butterflies, to initiate the same life cycle once again, while they pollinate flowers, serve as food for other species and contribute to biodiversity’s resistance.

The need to reconstruct displaced butterflies’ habitat motivated Ad to create a new garden populated with bladderflower, blue passionflower and native sages, among other plants. Over time,

the small garden became a domestic nursery where Ad and their mom, Cecilia, cultivate native plants to be distributed in recovered plots of land and community gardens, with a desire to repopulate the city with the butterflies—like the ones from her old terrace—that have slowly been disappearing, along with the spaces they need to reproduce.

Monumento a una mariposa [Monument to a Butterfly] is a series of drawings and paintings where geometry takes the place of gender and species binarisms in regard to the life cycle of the Argentinean flag butterfly, known in Uruguay as the coronillas butterfly. Visual manifestations of the transformations these flying insects undergo, from egg to caterpillar, from caterpillar to pupa and from pupa to butterfly, and of their passage from individuality to grouping together during the caterpillar stage, bring us closer to manners of gestating life which, for our urban imagination, verge on the fantastic.

In this series, mutation imagery operates as a way of drawing us closer to what we have been taught to reject: the ugly, different or monstrous. Ad’s anti-adult geometricization, on the other hand, constructs shapes for an empathy able to bypass the reflex reaction of repulsion. While butterflies are a universal symbol of beauty, caterpillars represent the extreme opposite, the non-human: an absolute otherness that provokes fear, disgust and even extreme violence. In the Argentinean flag butterfly’s life cycle, Minoliti finds a visual and affective void that offers a possible approach to forms of non-humanness and of empathizing not only with their colors and shapes, but with the totality of their ways of life.

A coronillo tree, one that provides nourishment for this subspecies of butterfly—and after which it is named in Uruguay—was planted in the gallery garden. The ceramic plaque modeled by Cecilia to accompany it recognizes the need to rethink our connection with the environments around us, to develop empathy and solidarity, not just with butterflies, but also with all the insects that pester us, bite us and repel us, but are, nevertheless, essential in order for life on Earth to continue. For now, and while it grows, the little tree functions as a symbol, it is the sprouting of a monument that will one day be habitat.