

APPROXIMATIONS, NOTES, AND AN INVITATION TO OBLIVION AND MEMORY IN THE EXHIBITION OF PAMEN PEREIRA

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The Whisper of Space

I will start with that which may seem alien to Pamen's works themselves—the space where they are exhibited. We should remember that, unintentionally, all space is absorbing; we are submerged in it without realizing it, it provokes sensations even if we don't look for them. As such, it is impossible not to acknowledge its presence in the whole exhibition, all the more so when there are artistic installations. The presence of space occurs even in that which we consider empty, as Lao-Tze says in the *Tao Tê Ching*:

Thirty spokes

Share one hub.

Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart.

Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose at hand, and you will have the use of the vessel.

Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room.

Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.¹

Pamen Pereira feels this as she and her installations take us on a journey to perceive the presence of silence together with the pulse of the objects. Chance and necessity, the heuristic and the programmed, form an enigmatic conjunction that the artist's process produces. At this point, it should be noted that the distance between each of the works and installations, as well as their height and specific location, are not haphazard and therefore not separate from or alien to the work. Everything happens in an almost natural way. The objects, the space, all that is implied in the installation,

¹ Lao-Tze, *Tao-Teh-Ching: A Parallel Translation Collection*. Compiled by B. Boisen. (Boston, MA: Gnomad Publishing, 1996), p. 23.

even the people who participate, are orchestrated by the artist with a result that is at once expected and surprising.

It is important to keep in mind that Pereira conceives her way of tackling each exhibition as an act of creation, as a new work drawn from the dialogued ordination of the works and their arrangement in a unique space. This conception leads her to do something that is crucial in the genesis of any artist's show or artistic installation—to listen to the space. To start with, the artist must feel the space's whisper; what it suggests. It doesn't speak to us, it whispers, and thus requires our attentive ear. Space does not tell us how to inhabit it; it invites us to populate it, to create a place. Heidegger, in a brief and beautiful text, writes, "We would have to learn to recognize that things themselves are places and do not merely belong to a place."²

Far from the abstract Cartesian space or the Renaissance one-point perspective, we stand before the conception of a live space. A space that pulsates, contracts, and dilates. It is the objects that configure space with their interrelations, their magnetizing power, and their visual impact. The space is thus articulated as a dynamic and multi-perspectival place. That is why it is very important in an exhibition to oversee the spot lighting of each artwork, so that from its uniqueness it may establish various connections with the others. All this leads to an interplay of suggestive, open gazes; gazes that generate routes, which in turn generate stories and narrations.

The Work as Archipelago

With the arrangement of all objects and lights, the works populate the space like a kind of archipelago. I use the term archipelago, and not constellation, because it is not located in an infinite interstellar space but in an enclosed space with limits, although it may be demarcated in different forms altered by the works, thus transforming the preexisting limits in a new spatial reality.

There are specular games in this archipelago, brought about by the materials employed or by the placement of the works. There are cross-gazes between the works, making them breathe. They are dispersed, granted the necessary space, but at the same time lines of continuity are established between them. There is also interaction between metal surfaces and mirrors, both of which are reflective. They are moons

² Martin Heidegger, "Art and Space," trans. Charles H. Seibert, in: *Man and World*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 3–8. Retrieved from <https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/art-and-space.pdf>.

that reflect solar pieces. Moons and suns linked to the sea and the earth, made from gold, copper, tin, zinc, or lead. Fire and ether are also present, but in a familiar scale.

All the works present a unitary base; they are in an ocean that traces back to one common source: Pamen Pereira's creative world. However, there is great diversity in this unity. Vital stages converted into material works. Each work tells us specific stories.

Thus, far from perceiving the works as formal elements, it is important to feel that which emanates beyond their appearance, that which evokes, provokes, and convokes: in most cases encounters and memories. That which has formed the works can be read for more than an evanescent moment, because they undergo a metamorphosis and are constructed by way of their placement, illumination, and relation to each other.

Ritual Communion and Communication

This journey through the works of Pamen Pereira can be understood as an initiation process. She invites us to participate in her creative process, but she doesn't do it by offering us a result that we can appreciate from afar. She wants us to experience it, to travel through the routes that the exhibition space opens up. As if we were Theseus wandering through an unknown labyrinth, we might even visit the different spaces with the great insecurity and intensity that all unexplored territories generate.

This may lead to an understanding of the famous Buddhist adage that the path is the goal. The genesis of this artist's production is a work-in-progress: Her works continuously feed back into the pre-existing, but at the same time invite us to travel, to actively participate—far from distant contemplation. We thus engage in a communion with the artist's personal world, a world that transcends the individual as it narrates the essence of our existence.

The Elements of Creation and Nature

In all the works of Pamen Pereira, special attention should be given to the materiality of the elements employed, but the senses must also be taken into account. We would be ill-advised to perceive her works only with audiovisual code, as there are tactile and olfactory components that are felt and that breathe in many of them. Without opening up all the senses, it is not possible to grasp the meaning of her works. Most of the time the art world deals with works that are presented as magical alloys,

as results that cannot be anything else, given their perfect conjunction. In Pereira's work, however, the process of a work's materialization or crystallization from an initial magma state to a sensible order is fundamental. Gaston Bachelard gives us an interpretation of the concept of sensible order: When he refers to closets, he narrates an experiential order that goes beyond any logic marked by strict volumetric capacity:

In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder. Here order reigns, or rather, this is the reign of order. Order is not merely geometrical; it can also remember the family history. [...] Memories come crowding when we look back upon the shelf on which the lace-trimmed, batiste and muslin pieces lay on top of the heavier materials [...].³

It is amazing to observe the moderation between will and intuition in Pereira's works and installations, between listening to matter and their poetic appropriation. It is not by chance that the Arcanum of temperance is present in her work. This Major Arcanum represents the balance of, or rather the continuous transfers between, blue sky and the red earth, ethereality and weight, transcendence and passion. When we see the exhibited works levitate, we must keep in mind that in many cases they are heavy pieces of furniture taken from Pereira's own studio. This awareness brings us to see metaphorically and physically how the everyday can be elevated if we are able to open ourselves to the threshold of dreams.

The everyday acquires a new dimension. The act of naming, of baptizing the piece, is always important in this process—not to fix its contents, but to trigger meanings.

Memory, Experiences and Cosmovision

The power and the strength of the stones, the metal, the remnants of living things such as bones, dried branches, and antlers, even familiar and personal traces, are activated and staged in each work and exhibition. It is far from random that gold and silver are so prevalent in Pamen Pereira's works. With them, she evokes and invokes the lunar or solar kingdom. Isis and Osiris. Demeter and Pluto. Pamen transitions like Persephone between two worlds, between Eros and Thanatos. She floats with ease, as do her levitating works, in which she perceives the materiality of a lived world, of the

³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1994), p. 79.

earth and water that are moved by fire and wind.

Displaying the beauty of a given object is not Pereira's ultimate goal, although it is certainly perceived in the work, but rather seeking the sublime and making sure the object's ritual task is carried out effectively. Immanuel Kant already pointed out that "the sublime touches, the beautiful charms."⁴ Furthermore, Kant insisted that "it is not so much a matter of what the understanding sees but of what the feeling is sensitive to."⁵

Moreover, the artist always surprises us with an apparent fragility, starting from the perfect equilibrium and static of something like a hat levitating with a lit candle. Pamen Pereira turns the hat as a symbol of the solitary traveler or walker into a symbol of the artist's solitude as well. Once more, our dear Bachelard shines through in this work and tells us that the candle burns alone, that we find in it our solitary dreams.⁶

Pereira's works are internal and intimate and open our eyes and consequently our imagination in such an overbearing way that they take flight with the intensity of a storm. Everyday objects are elevated around a vortex, impregnated with a mysterious pulse that envelopes and lashes at us, fluttering like a tornado. These objects and paraphernalia, turned and overturned with the passage of time, thus acquire a new life from their recreation or recontextualization.

Paradoxically, Pereira's works are at once memoranda and invitations to oblivion. They are memoranda insofar as they are references to the personal world that has been lived and lost due to the inexorable passage of time. Memoranda actively persist; they are the weight and sediment in our existence. The personal cannot be disentangled from the collective, from the roots that have fed our vision of the world. It is, however, important to remember that the local, the native land, ends up being the universal most of the time. So why are they invitations to oblivion? This exhibition

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 16.

⁵ Ibid, p. 33.

⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, trans. Joni Caldwell (Dallas, TX: The Dallas Institute, 1988), p. 10f.

invites us to leave behind all prejudices we have about that which we consider art in a self-referential sense. We are confronted with works whose nutrients are more closely related to the shamanic or alchemical world rather than with art proper. Oblivion here has a ritual dimension: A liberation from the cognitive procedure of jumping into hermeneutic comprehension takes place from a passionate point of view.

Full Stop, Next Sentence

Fortunately, the map is not the territory. With these notes I hope to have drawn maps for possible readings of the exhibition, but these are only some of the many possible cartographies. Furthermore, it would be ideal to put everything into perspective so that a healthy skepticism makes you seek other interpretations and experiential intricacies.