

BENCE MAGYARLAKI AT SATURN'S CUSP

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14.03—20.04.2024

On October 15, 1997 - September 15, 2017.

On the first of these dates, a six-ton probe called Cassini departs from Florida to the destination of Saturn. Its mission will last almost twenty years, ending on the second: 7 years of celestial crossing before reaching the planet, 13 spent in orbit around it, amongst volcanic dunes and methane lakes. In its last days among the stars, after years of companionship, Cassini running out of fuel, plunges into Saturn's upper layer. In a final atmospheric embrace, Saturnian Cassini disintegrates. It burns up into a shooting star, its six tons of metal, iron, plutonium suddenly bursting into a dust of diamonds. *Isn't this the queerest shit ever?* – Bence asks me.

There are magnetometers, spectrographs and stethoscopes; scanners, dissections and methods for soul-searching. Bence Magyarlaki has made an expertise of these tools for probing our inner selves. The forms they create are carnal, intestinal, sometimes molecular. They transcribe cardiac and affective disturbances, the insides of our stomachs if only we could see them. Bence's sculptures call for recognition through flesh, through viscera. Yet they are faceless; embodying what the artist designates as « abstract anthropomorphism »¹, they resist the usual taxonomies of gender, the captivity of definitions. They pick stellar expansion over a fixed identity. Bence zooms into a cell, and the whole universe is what they see. .

At Saturn's Cusp blends astronomical imagery with medical engineering. The exhibition establishes an analogy between the human envelope and celestial matter; between these unknowns that we examine and auscultate to better control them. At the entrance of the show, Magyarlaki greets the visitor with their grandmother's very own scalpels, placing samples of new skin at their tips.

The exhibition thus moves between things we inherit and those we brave; the void we explore when we become astronauts, departing from earthly norms and laws of gravity. After a first show on Uranus², Magyarlaki travels this time to Saturn, a non-binary planet of the Celestial Gender System³. They continue to trace « a certain poetic anti-anatomy of the body by turning it inside out »⁴ through inverted trajectories and reversible surfaces. *At Saturn's Cusp* unfolds between wounds, formulating its invitation through an open cut, with organs escaping from it. On its walls are different stages of plastic calcification, undetermined spheres, masses of pure potential. If frozen into sculptures, Bence's shapes pay tribute to impermanence. They speak of liminal spaces, transformations, endlessly moving and meeting entities.

At the heart of this exhibition is the encounter of these two seemingly antagonistic beings: the six-ton probe approaching the celestial body. Magyarlaki transforms the space expedition into an epic tale of love, told by Cassini herself into an audio recording echoing throughout the rooms. In it, the embrace resonates.

We hear the cracks of the silicone, that of the leather as Bence shapes them; the meeting of the material and the hand manipulating it into a form. *Stretching, drumming, twisting, bouncing, caressing, ruffling, dropping*: these are the actions – Bence writes me, listing the gestures they use to shape in a WhatsApp text message. Yet alongside collision and romance, the exhibition also features scenarios of separation. Some pieces strive to undo bonds. They tear apart medical transfusions, invoke transitional objects⁵ – like this breathless blanket, leaving behind the intubated pillow of the operating room.

At Saturn's Cusp sketches the passionate life of bodies that inform, inflame and sometimes reject each other; mechanisms of attraction where agents are reciprocally affected – like Cassini suspended by Saturn, overthrown by Saturn, stuck in its rings, trapped by them. In her reinterpretation of Darwin's theory, American biologist Lynn Margulis places "symbiosis" at the core of evolution, and defines it as any biological interaction between two organisms of different species – 'symbionts' – over an extended period of time. Cooperation can be dissonant, lacking harmony. It can be mutual or parasitic. Not all symbioses are benign; some come at the expense of one party, sometimes at the cost of its destruction. In any case though, transformation depends on collaboration and companionship, on this « long-lasting intimacy of strangers »⁶ – one that also shapes, in various places, the work of Bence Magyarlaki. It took 13 years for Cassini to finally leave Saturn behind.

Salomé Burstein

¹ Extract from an interview with Maxime Gasnier for The Steidz, published 06/03/2024.

² "Uranus, waiting room", organized at Martch Art Projects (Istanbul, Turkey) in 2021.

³ The Celestial Gender System (CGS) is a MOGAI [Marginalized Orientations, Gender Alignment and Intersex] system in which gender identities are "endowed with a 'gentle celestial energy' that associates each of them with planets, stars, the void and so on. None of the terms are aligned with masculinity or femininity, but they can be linked to them. There are two versions of the CGS, the original made in 2017 and the "updated" version that arrived only a year later." (source : https://the-mogaicomunity.fandom.com/wiki/Celestial_Gender_System; we translate here).

⁴ Interview from The Steidz.

⁵ The "transitional object", as theorized by the British psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott, refers to the first instances of differentiation of the world and the "self" that cuddly toys, toys, blankets, etc. represent in a child's understanding. Playing a structuring role, they enable the child to represent his or her parent symbolically, and thus to separate from them.

⁶ "The core of Margulis's view of life was that new kinds of cells, tissues, organs and species evolve primarily through the long-lasting intimacy of strangers". The phrase is from Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 60.

Bence Magyarlaki (b.1992, Pécs, Hungary) is an artist currently based in Paris. Magyarlaki graduated with first class honours from BA (Hons) Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, London in 2017 and has since been exhibiting internationally in the UK, France, Morocco, Portugal, Turkey and Australia. Their latest body of work has been supported by Montresso Art Foundation in Marrakesh. Their work was nominated for The MullenLowe NOVA Awards (2017), and The International Takifuji Art Award (2017).