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ARTFORUM

LISBON

Julião Sarmiento

CRISTINA GUERRA CONTEMPORARY ART

The first thing one saw in Julião Sarmiento's recent solo exhibition was *Two Frames* (all works cited, 2013), a diptych composed of a black-and-white photograph of Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*, 1921, and a simple schematic watercolor of Degas's *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, ca. 1881. Together, these images convey themes that have long been of great importance to Sarmiento: the history of art in general and of modernism in particular, and the representation of the female body.

Inside the first room stood, among other works, *First Easy Piece*, a sculpture of a young woman mimicking the position of Degas's *Little Dancer* placed in front of a gray wall on which seven framed pieces were hung. When Degas presented this work at the Sixth Impressionist Exhibition in Paris in 1881, it was met with scandal, as the public considered it too realistic; the sculpture was dressed in real clothes and was painted so as to imitate the color of the model's skin. Sarmiento's work further

amplifies these once-scandalous characteristics: The young girl is now a woman with developed breasts and a voluptuous figure; the sculpture was, in fact, made using a high-tech 3-D scanner to create an exact replica of the model's body. But Sarmiento manipulated her proportions, making the figure shorter than the average woman but bigger than a dwarf; the discrepancy is almost unnoticeable, but nevertheless provokes a sense of strangeness and uneasiness. Behind the sculpture, the frames contained, respectively, a digital print with Sarmiento's answer to Duchamp's question "Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?": "*Parce que Rose, C'est la Vie!*"; a hand-annotated print of a Wikipedia page on how to draw ellipses and ovals (the ellipse being a central element in another painting in the exhibition, *Thing White Plants*); a photograph of a modernist house; a small painting on paper with an architectural plan (repeated in another painting on view here, *House Plan White Plants*); and three monochromatic paintings that are off-white, light green, or grayish blue—the colors of the backgrounds of all the other paintings in the show.

The female body has been a motif in Sarmiento's works since the 1970s. Though it looks whole, *First Easy Piece* is a concatenation of fragments, since even the figure itself was made with a machine that scans the body layer by layer, and so the final sculpture is a reconstruction made of hundreds of thin slices. In *142 Silicone Leftovers*, the body of a woman, in the form of the silicone molds that Sarmiento used to make his 1999 sculpture *A Human Form in a Deathly Mould*, is also presented in pieces. Each part hangs from a hook like those found in butcher shops. The uneasiness provoked by *First Easy Piece* is augmented here. At first the sculpture appears to be merely a group of abstract shapes hanging from hooks. It is only upon closer inspection that one disturbingly recognizes various parts of the body.

The works in the show draw together different references and objects to create a juxtaposition that is conceptual but also literal. Each results from an accumulation of seemingly diverse elements—a fragmented collection of notes, thoughts, and objects—that allude not only to other pieces in the show but also to previous works by the artist. In a Duchampian gesture, Sarmiento takes these different elements as if they were readymade themselves and represents them almost as found objects. But is the body also a readymade—a leftover from some previous process of production? Sarmiento asks us to consider this possibility too.

—Filipa Oliveira

Julião Sarmiento, *First Easy Piece*, 2013, 3-D printed sculpture, ABS plastic, wood, chipboard, water-based enamel on glass, inkjet prints on aluminum, frames, water-based enamel and acrylic on paper, dimensions variable.



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