

MALC. THINKING YOUR FEET, MOVING YOUR SUR- ROUNDINGS

17.09.2021–20.02.2022



LARA FLUXÀ

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING

Imma Prieto

Presence is not given to us. Being in a place means understanding that when we are there, we must be. The being means integrity; it is holistic because it is fused with the space where it is found. If bodies only occupy a place, we create an imbalance that splinters life's path. Making up part of the surroundings means situating oneself in a place from where it is necessary and indispensable for a dialogue to be established. Dialogue arises from an understanding of the other, or of what is other, from knowing that there are beings there too, which for this reason are fused into a shared atmosphere.

Being is knowing that, regardless of the elements or organisms that inhabit this common terrain, our immersion requires responsibility. The responsibility of knowing that every action has its consequences. The world we are part of is not integral; it is the symbol, rather, of the amputation perpetrated throughout history. The responsibility of understanding that freedom is not about exercising free will, but rather accepting that being free is intrinsically limited by collective freedom: "Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility."¹

Our presence can only exist on the basis of care, of the capacity to listen and respect. Inhabiting a space does not mean possessing it; it means transiting it consciously, being integrated into it through a permeable, dermal blanket. Contact requires proximity; it demands being inside the universe created after the only pact we should really make, the one involving life.

Lara Fluxà produces organisms; she creates and gives names, making the stimulus itself a creative act, a power.

Lara Fluxà, *Ruec*, 2019. Glass and motor oil, 15 × 47 × 22 cm.
Courtesy of the artist

1. Haraway, Donna. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, (1984). <<https://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/OISE/page2/files/HarawayCyborg.pdf>>

Verni, Triça, Lupra, Alump, Úra—these are just some of the organisms she has given life to. She gives life and she names, subtly following a long philosophical tradition that points to this capacity to exist starting with the name, with the recognition of being. Her beings emerge from out of extreme fragility, which is granted them through the material, namely glass, which they exhale on the basis of their very exposition in the world. This fragility gives rise to tension in space. Sometimes, to violence. Yet it exists because of our incapacity to inhabit. That is where the metaphor its landscapes announce is found.

Her spaces confront us with the world that humanity has created, one for which, so it seems, only the human being might exist in. Her practice presents us the matter that acquires presence and makes itself felt. Especially here she lets us know that our action counts: it cares for or destroys. Lara Fluxà's environments develop a scene, not out of an attempt at order and domination, but by making the fragility of the surroundings evident, along with the need for our comprehension and attention. Her places require responsibility and care; they demand us to think of the foot, of the column, of the gravity of our body. Exploring this already-inhabited space means sharing existence from difference. *Malc* is now a universe inhabited by organic forms that await our presence under a horizon of responsibility: "The term *responsibility* comes from the Latin noun *responsabilitas*, which in turn has its origin in the verb *respondere*, 'to respond'. Responsibility is the quality of being able to respond to a commitment, to fulfil what has been agreed upon, to assume the consequences of actions and the obligation to materially or morally compensate or repair whomever has been damaged."²

2. Herrero, Yayo. *Ausencia de responsabilidad y extravío de esperanza*, (20 August 2021). <<https://ctxt.es/es/20210801/Firmas/36967>>

THE BEHAVIOUR OF MATTER

Pilar Cruz

Lara Fluxà's work originates in water. Just as life on Earth, it begins in the sea, which makes up a part of her personal history, leaving its mark on her early projects and appearing recurrently in her work.

The keys to her work can be found in the materials themselves and their characteristics, in the behaviour and chemistry of substances, in the principles of thermodynamics. Fluxà not only experiments with the malleability and limits of matter, but also invites us to reflect on our relationship with the physical world and the idea that materials have their own agency, their own capacity for action beyond the human world.

Water, for example, has the capacity to assimilate other substances. Salt is one of them, and is also the main difference between sea water and river water. At first thought, one might think that fresh water, either from a river or a spring, is a purer substance, closer to the formula of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, while the sea is a massive high-density soup of many substances. However, it is impossible to find pure water in nature due to its great ability to dissolve and incorporate other elements, making it a medium in which life develops and on whose balance life depends.

The salinity of the oceans and seas influences the climate, and therefore salt is a key factor in the biosphere's balance and one of the main indicators studied by oceanography. Lara Fluxà appropriates the methods of this discipline in *Estudi de salinitat n° 2* [Salinity Study No. 2] and *n° 4* [No. 4]. In the first, she uses the ancient method of measurement, crystallising on absorbent cloth the salt contained in the water of the Aral Sea at two separate historical moments. The story of this inland sea landlocked between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is a sad one. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union re-routed two of the rivers that fed it to irrigate the strategic cotton industry. An environmental disaster with multiple

consequences that ruined the economy and health of the communities in the area, and which the artist reflects on in this piece.

In *Estudi de salinitat n° 4* [Salinity Study No. 4], on the other hand, she uses the current method of measurement, which is based on the level of electrical conductivity of the marine solution: the more saline, the greater its ability to conduct electricity. The installation features several monitors that are illuminated by means of the electricity generated by the conductivity of the waters of the Black, Baltic, Dead, Azov and Mediterranean seas. The dissolved salt, matter that is rendered invisible in the transparency of the water, becomes waves and thus passes into the visible spectrum. The sea is not a single and uniform whole, its diversity is thus distinguished, and proves how important it is to conserve that individuality.

This characteristic of water solubility is key in another of her pieces, *Dissolution is the Best Solution for Pollution*. For years, the ERCROS company committed the gross negligence of dumping toxic waste into the lower stretch of the Ebro river, specifically in the vicinity of the Flix reservoir, in the province of Tarragona. As the industry gets rid of its toxic waste by diluting it in the river's water and "no harm, no foul", the artist looks to homeopathy, a form of therapy based on the principle of healing through similarity, and stemming from the idea of water's memory bases her *modus operandi* on extreme dissolution.

Following these principles, Lara takes one of those substances, dilutes it to a centesimal degree, and puts it forth as a possible cure for the river itself as well as its inhabitants. She then elaborates capsules with doses that can be ingested, ritualising a homeopathic treatment against toxicity, signalling a parallel between toxic and curative dissolution, and basing its curative effect on the water's memory—and, by extension, that of the people it affects, with the memories that the consumption and exposure to mercury awaken in them—. These memories incite mobilisation, such that this installation/action not only operates on the level of the symbolic, but also on the level of the real, as an effective denunciation

of the pollution of the river and, therefore, as an environmental cure. The healing of memory through not forgetting that what dissolves does not disappear, even if it seems to no longer be there.

What transparency can hide, and thus the impossibility of transparency, appears again in another way in *Fata Morgana*, based on the refractive effect that occurs in complex forms of superior mirages. Lara places water-filled glass protuberances in the windows of the exhibition space. Due to the effects of refraction and diffraction, these cause the optical illusion of the inversion of the exterior landscape. Via these elements placed against the window pane, the qualities of both materials are put into question as neutral elements through which our gaze passes and accesses reality and knowledge, the external world the window opens up to us.

Yet, in addition, it highlights the deficiencies of sight as a privileged element of access to reality, and makes us consider the impossibility of a total understanding of the sensate world. The apparent transparency of both water and glass, lacking in neutrality and revealing themselves as the mediating agents they truly are, as entities in themselves. This leads us to the theory of our experience of the world as an illusion or mirage, rejecting the sensate world as experienced through our senses as the source of our knowledge of reality. And it raises suspicions about the belief that transparency can be offered in its purest form, whether in nature, politics or the corporate world. Transparency, as Fluxà already points out in *Dissolution is the Best Solution...*, is not synonymous with purity.

Another of the themes that run through her work is the concept of balance, and although it is present in more recent work, it is particularly clear in a group of pieces based on the spirit level. By means of an air bubble suspended in a liquid, said tool serves to accurately check the straightness of a surface, that is, its perfect horizontal or vertical alignment with respect to the plane. It is widely used in masonry and construction, and with the aim of creating right angles is essential for installing exhibitions. To the human eye, it creates a certain geometric perfection between planes of matter and

the illusion that the relationship between these planes can be totally level and static.

In *A nivellaments* [A_lignments], a series of glass pieces are suspended in mid-air. Even though its elements seem to be balancing in a fixed position, the fact they are literally hanging by a thread allows for the possibility of a certain movement, which evidences their attempts to maintain the balance achieved in a static position. Furthermore, one perceives the risk that any change in the conditions of the room, any unexpected movement, can alter that subtle position. In addition, the artist makes use of the blue colour of the liquid contained within the levels, once again alluding to the sea's horizon, which appears repeatedly in her work.

On the other hand, in *Nivell circular* [Circular Level] several circular-shaped levels with air bubbles inside them mark various positions, denying this measuring instrument's functionality and the very possibility of a single point of balance. While in the installations *Nivell dinàmic* [Dynamic Level] or *Nivells dinàmics de compensacions contínues* [Dynamic Levels in Continuous Balance], a motor imposes movement on the pieces, forcing them to try to find and maintain a balance that is being constantly altered and revealed as a non-static, movable quality. The air bubbles' incessant attempts to seek the central position, that which marks their resting point, illustrates how equilibrium is not a position but a quest. This constant search for balance is reminiscent of the planet's self-regulation by means of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis' Gaia hypothesis, which proposes that the Earth is akin to a superorganism that modifies itself in order to survive.

Therefore, the ideal situation of elements that make everything possible, from our own individual existence to the survival of all forms of life, is the result of a constant negotiation with entropy, and is based on all kinds of relationships with other entities, human and non-human, and cannot be conceived from a single and stable position.

This dynamic search for balance is strongly related to fragility, another of the leitmotifs the artist explores in recent series of works such as *Úra* or *Verni*, which point to gaining

awareness of the characteristics of matter and the false illusion of human control over the physical world. "Malc: Thinking your Feet, Moving your Surroundings", the installation that is now being presented in Es Baluard Museu, is part of this same body of work.

Malc, being a made-up name, subjectivises and proposes the creation of a place that does not yet exist, but that could do so from now on, just as the landscapes she recreates in *Verni* and *Úra*.

Verni (the Balearic term for 'tar'), however, is not a made-up name, it is very real, and is the word used to describe the residue that is left on rocks near the sea as a result of cleaning the holds of oil tankers.

In these series of work, Fluxà mixes two materials as ancient as glass and oil—although the latter is present here in its contemporary refined form, used motor oil—. As a residue of industrial/consumer society and unstable material, the correlation of its toxicity with the fragility of the glass forms places the pieces on the limits of the accident. This limit is further enforced by the placement of each element and its position in space, almost eluding gravity. With them she creates an ecosystem of organic-like forms that invade the space, creating a posthuman landscape. Despite this toxicity, or perhaps because of it, the resulting landscape is beautiful—in the sense of a sublime, catastrophic beauty—, an exclusion zone with an almost morbid quality, in which strange forms emerge, despite everything. A beauty that is neither life nor death, it is strictly peril.

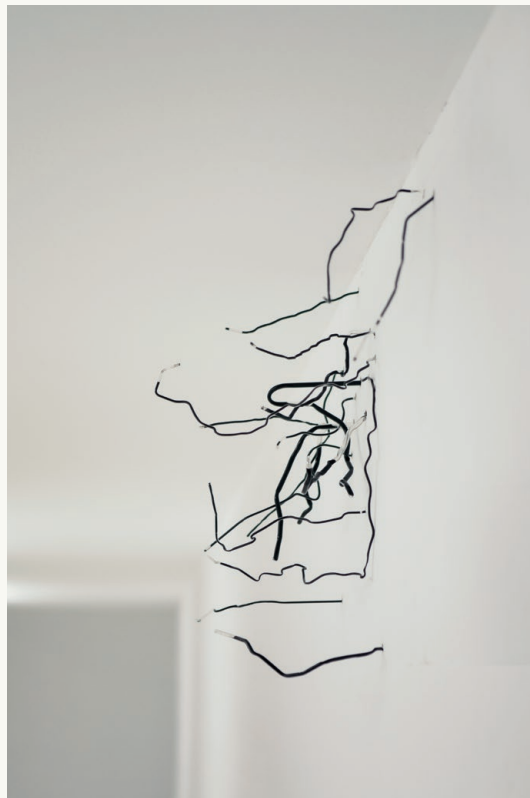
The pieces are bodies of different, unrecognisable forms. Although they possess a certain organicness, they may not be recognised as organisms, but rather as strange creatures that emerged in an exclusion zone, and whose form and content are the result of integrating the debris of an already extinct Anthropocene. Just as weeds find their way into a suddenly abandoned place, in "Malc" forms are generated that could well be non-human organisms or incomprehensible geographical formations.

The two main materials, motor oil and glass, establish a relationship in which one creates tension while the other gives form. The glass contains the liquid in its cavity, but it also contains it, in the sense of restraining it and preventing its spillage.

These creatures conjure up the imaginary of catastrophe. Not only do they invoke the accident, it is implicit in them. As Paul Virilio stated, every invention entails a new possibility of an accident, every technology contains its own category of catastrophe. The interaction of both materials, with the viscous toxicity of one, the tensions and resistances of the other, which even in their forms challenge stability, implies an imminent collapse.

Those who enter this landscape become aware of this possibility, seeing as through practice the body has been learning the behaviours these materials demand and thus adapts its movements to that knowledge. In this way, the choreography in the space develops in slow motion, with greater awareness of the pieces' limits and by measuring the range of their movements to the nearest millimetre. As spectators we have to control a natural tendency towards a curiosity linked to visiting exhibitions, which makes us want to get closer until we feel the vibration of the materials. "Malc" generates a tense approach, making the point where the safety distance is surpassed tangible, and making us aware that the slightest wrongly calculated movement could trigger the shattering of the containers, the spillage of the liquids, a disaster.

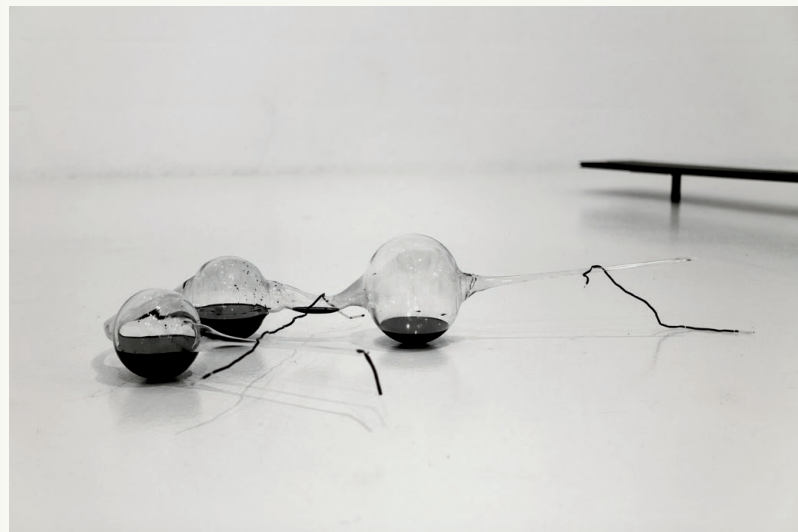
Our awareness of this ecosystem's delicate balance disarms us when faced with its fragility, forces us to be cautious, to not put a foot wrong, to control our body and its extensions, the gestures we make. To learn and understand this new spatial reality implies feeling totally affected by the idea of care, to materialise this concept and bring it down from the orbit of abstraction, to turn black and colourless the real danger of the collapse of a planet made up of industrial waste, barely contained within fragile glass filaments.



Lara Fluxà, *Zaluc*, 2018. Glass and motor oil, 35 × 130 × 68 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma Collection



Lara Fluxà, *Lupra*, 2018. Glass and motor oil, 45×130×89 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma Collection



Lara Fluxà, *Luprea*, 2018. Glass and motor oil, 40×150×82 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma Collection



Lara Fluxà, *Luprea*, 2018 (detail). Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma Collection

CHAOS, BODY AND LANDSCAPE

Héctor Sanz Castaño

Nearly a decade ago, in this same museum, I first came into contact with the work of Lara Fluxà, with the symbolic and conceptual focal points that organise her artistic practice. From the very start, the foundations of her work were already laid out: glass containers, found in a variety of forms and with various functions, associated with materials in liquid state. Back then she was centred on her series of dynamic or suspended levels, exploring the movement and behaviour of their components. I argued then that these early works could be inscribed within a clearly defined tradition in the history of contemporary art, where glass, liquids and circulatory systems have frequently been present. I was referring to Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Alfredo Jaar or Per Barclay, amongst many others.¹ These artists used glass for its symbolic qualities, or just as well built all kinds of circulatory systems where some sort of liquid played a central role. With the passing of time and the increasingly complex development of her work's corpus, we are called to reconsider some of those earlier impressions, while still being able to state that certain strategies remain present.

"Malc" brings together a set of glass structures spread out on the floor, emerging from the walls and distributed throughout the gallery: a white container enveloping them in an aseptically neutral atmosphere. The exhibition's subtitle is of particular interest, in that this "thinking your feet,

1. In this context, and without seeking to be exhaustive, we might think of works such as: *Air de Paris* (1919) and *Le grand verre* (1915–1923), by Marcel Duchamp; *Almadén* (1937) by Alexander Calder; *For Carl André* (1970), by Lynda Benglis; *Splashing* (1968) by Richard Serra; *Floor Impregnated with 50 kg of Asphalt* (1996) by Santiago Sierra; *Emergencia* (1998) by Alfredo Jaar; *Ayúdame Ribera* (2007) by Per Barclay; or the *Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz* (1977) that Joseph Beuys installed during Documenta VI.

moving your surroundings” reveals a lot about the artist’s creative process, precisely in taking on full on a project like this. It speaks to us of a notion of performance that directly involves the visitor, since the cautionary message is meant for whoever enters the exhibition: the need to calculate the consequences of each step in the world around us, since each action, each gesture, implies a reaction. Quite evidently, the installation has a hypothetical, invisible side to it. Just as in Marcel Duchamp’s *Le grand verre* (1915–1923), where a set of gears and mechanisms are at work (and some of them not represented visually) whose symbolic function explains the work and gives meaning to it,² we might imagine a kind of augmented reality in the space Fluxà here proposes, an existence/experience of the work of art that spills over and beyond the field of the tangible. The white ground these glass forms are set to rest amidst could just as well be a liquid surface, leaving them floating at the mercy of the waves or in the depths of the sea, setting them upon a lunar desert or the limpid, fragile esplanade of a salt flat. Some of these hypotheses have surely entered into play during the intellectual gestation of the project, although ultimately, for one reason or another, they have not physically been made manifest in the exhibition.

Fluxà’s installation places us in an ambiguous space/time that could equally belong to a post-apocalyptic future as a primal moment of the world: a sort of Chaos. Ovid begins his *Metamorphosis* describing the former state of the Cosmos as “a rude and undigested mass . . . the discordant atoms of things not harmonizing.” In this flowing, undefined time of materials and elements, “in no one of them did its present form exist. And one was ever obstructing the other; because in the same body the cold was striving with the hot, the moist with the dry, the soft with the hard, things having weight with those devoid of weight.” This vision of a primal world still

2. The most precise description, with an explanation of the processes at work in this fundamental piece by Duchamp, is found in Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Duchamp. El amor y la muerte, incluso*, Madrid, Siruela, 1993.

waiting to be ordered is conjured in “Malc”, in tune with the binary standards of classical thought. It offers a state of things where all possibilities of matter remain open and mutable, with their various contradictions, while, in this state, setting out a liberating, optimistic vision of reality.

We could say, in a simplifying operation, that “Malc” works as both landscape and body, with both concepts willingly understood in a diffuse way. First of all, the landscape/territory/ecosystem it constructs within the exhibition space is a true heir of science fiction in its filmic and literary manifestations, in the blend of apocalyptic sensations and opportunity it affords us. This is not solely due to the arid, lunar look of the exhibition space, but more particularly to the *creatures* inhabiting it. They seem at first sight to be inert materials; yet they adopt biological, vesicular forms, dragging themselves across the deserted surface on their *bellies*, charged with viscous fluids. They can be activated and enter into movement thanks to a reflex effect detonated by the visitor’s steps. They exist and evolve in a kind of lethargic life, over a long period that exceeds the limits of our perception as humans. Undoubtedly, glass takes up its place in Lara Fluxà’s practice for its qualities of transparency and fragility, although it would be a mistake to consider glass a fixed container, in opposition to the flowing nature of the materials it contains. Glass too is a viscous material that is unstable and, seen over time, liquid in character. The artist highlights this quality when her blowing models it into fili-form traces, allowing it to take on arbitrary forms imposed by her very breath.

“Malc” is also a form of open, transparent organism, which allows us to see inside of it and walk through it. Rather than a body without organs, these are organs without a body, or just as well a body lacking all visible limits. The result is a cluster of expanded organs, an enveloping vision that evokes the depths of the abyss or an extra-terrestrial world populated by polymorphic, rhizomatic organisms adapted to a menacingly fragile biotope. The visitor is offered the possibility of an encounter, of “being-body-with”, of *Simpoiesis*—and in

this context it is hard to avoid evoking the way in which Donna Haraway describes this term as something belonging to complex, dynamic and responsive systems.³ This concept would imply interaction going quite beyond collaboration between species or symbiosis, suggesting a fusion running even deeper, where bodies are confused and bind themselves together to make another being. In this chaotic magma (inasmuch as it resembles primal Chaos) where the artist invites us to immerse ourselves, we find a possibility to rethink and take on relationships with the world around us. In sum, as we have said, to embark on a reconsideration of corporeal limits and our own actions.

It could be thought, a priori, that Fluxà would have left behind the Cartesian logic of the measurements and balances she had begun to explore in her series *A_Nivellaments* [*Alignments*] (2011), evolving towards a much more organic universe ruled by other kinds of powers and values, and not necessarily gravity, salinity or the laws of physics. However, this is not entirely true. The question of measure has been included from a performative experience that directly connects it with conceptual art, and more particularly with the fruitful contributions of artists in Catalonia in the 1970s, a period when international experiences such as body art and performance began to feature in the Spanish context. I think most specifically of the figure of Jordi Benito and the way he turned his own body into a measuring object and instrument. If in pieces like *Equivalencia de medidas de distintas partes del cuerpo* [*Equivalence of Measurement of Various Parts of the Body*] (1973) he submitted himself to an assiduous cataloguing

3. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Cthulucene*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 58. In recent years this Haraway text has become a frequent and fundamental reference for many artists concerned about questions where ecology and our relationship with natural and animal environments move transversally. The contributions of the scientific community, biopolitics and science fiction are essential in Haraway's arguments, herself a fundamental contributor to contemporary thought since the 1980s.

of the sizes of his own anatomy, in *Peso y volumen de un cuerpo* [*Weight and Volume of a Body*] (1973) he inverted the process, making his own body (and his energy in movement, submerging it into a vat of water) the measuring gauge of a reality: the volume of displaced liquid. Surely this action is where the connection with the work of Lara Fluxà could be most evident, especially if we reconsider her earliest work. The question of energy is also crucial. Duchamp (once again) fantasised in some of his notes about "a transformer intended to use up wasted bits of energy."⁴ Benito put this into practice in his *Acción-transformación* [*Action-Transformation*] (1972), drinking a glass of water and waiting to expel it in the form of urine, after its passing through the organism. While performance has not come to make up part of her artistic practice, in her installation Lara Fluxà procures the participation of a multitude of forces and energies that might otherwise be *wasted*. These are not only driving energies, but also *caring* energies, efforts in attention and empathy with our surroundings. In this way the issue of level is picked up again, given that the objects arranged in the exhibition space are subject to a form of balance, even though in this case their stability needs to be negotiated with the presence of the other: the viewer. Each interaction, step or movement will have consequences on the arrangement, and, in the end, on the installation's perennial nature. As if this were a slowed-down performance, visitors to the exhibition will gradually move more deeply into the piece's material and formal landscape, in a *sympoietic* exercise requiring responsibility and heightened awareness. The fragility of the installation and the objects comprising it are left in the hands of an indeterminate *us*, where everyone carries out an unavoidable role. The possibility of accident (a notion the artist has put into play on other occasions, while going quite a bit further here) appears as a determining factor in this detailed, paused choreography that modulates the action of the bodies and their circulation in space.

4. Marcel Duchamp, *Notas*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1989, notes 176 and 187.

This idea of a landscape, which we have briefly set to the side, is what most unequivocally connects the work to the territory within which it is inscribed. As with many Balearic artists of her generation (we might mention, amongst others, Julià Panadès and Marijo Ribas Bermúdez), Lara Fluxà includes concern for environmental degradation in her work, especially from the perspective of marine eco-systems, which come to take on a literal presence thanks to various intrinsic components, such as seawater, salt and pitch. While not everything can be summarised with the presence of the materials, it is nonetheless impossible to not think of very specific realities of our time, such as catastrophes related to petroleum tankers in the Mediterranean, yachts and cruise ships spilling engine fuel and oil on Balearic shores, the remains of tar plaguing coasts and beaches, or those sadly famous “plasteline strings” that broke free from a freighter sitting on the bottom of the sea. I cannot help thinking that the filiform shapes in glass have something to do with them. The landscape built for us is not an easy-going garden, but rather a kind of minefield. Fragility and threat—fracture, contamination, disaster—are, in effect, two key focal points in *Malc* and other recent works by the artist, such as *Verni* (2019). As she herself has said, accident is something that projects us into the future. Over the white surface, symbolically identified with salt flats, beach sand or the bottom of the sea, glass volumes are placed, which from this perspective are set up as threatening objects, activated traps, inflated vesicles ready to burst in dispersing their toxically viscous charge into the surroundings; and here, once again, science fiction imagery comes to mind, tainting the discourse. I could say, come this far, that the reference to the thought of Donna Haraway, already mentioned, is not at all casual or one-off, but rather is one of the main points of inspiration for this Fluxà artistic project. It is also the reference that most clearly situates it within a reading related to ecofeminism, where environmental concerns are intertwined with an analysis of reality that affects the economic sphere and capitalist logics of production and value: whether the value of the materials used,

their function, utility and durability, or the value of the force of labour. It speaks to us of the importance of these energies dedicated to care, in contrast to the omnipresent development of activities dedicated to extraction and exploitation. It invites us to rethink our relationships with the environment while constructing new forms of existence that are fully assimilated and collaborative. It questions, finally, our ways of acting and our response to the environmental crisis, returning the viewer to a position where raised awareness and accentuated responsibility are no longer merely options.



Lara Fluxà, *Luprea*, 2018 (detail). Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma Collection

*Malc. Thinking Your Feet,
Moving Your Surroundings*
Lara Fluxà

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