

it will not be simple, it will not be long

Ioana Stanca

Curated by Diana Marincu

26 April — 18 June 2023

Catinca Tabacaru Gallery is happy to announce this first solo exhibition by Romanian artist Ioana Stanca. This follows a multi-year collaboration between the Gallery and the Artist which includes a symposium and group exhibition in 2021. For this occasion we have invited Diana Marincu to curate and write a text for the new body of work.

Embroidery has always fascinated me, whether it was a monogram on a handkerchief or the more elaborate seams of colorful, textured textiles. Their tactility, their completely bewildering back sides, the hidden thread trails, the contour that “stitches” and caresses at the same time, all these observations turned working with the sewing machine into a territory where the drawing always had “two faces.”

In a book dedicated to the “threads” of contemporary art, more precisely the trends associated with embroidery, the author Charlotte Vannier recalled a passage from the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s aphorisms: “(...) life may be compared to a piece of embroidery, of which, during the first half of his time, a man gets a sight of the right side, and during the second half, of the wrong. The wrong side is not so pretty as the right, but it is more instructive; it shows the way in which the threads have been worked together.” These connections may not be the simplest, the longest, the most edifying, the most natural, or the easiest, but, to paraphrase the poem from which the title is taken, they are certainly pieces of our life, body, and will.

In this exhibition, Ioana Stanca brings together her most recent works, assembled and merged together in a story about fragility, strength and all the dualities that make up our existence. Embracing them does not mean fragmentation, but rather a magical cohesion, where the cohabitation with a mirrored, different, opposite, antagonistic, imitative, split or twinned self means a courageous act of facing one's own identity. In recent years, the artist has created a very convincing vocabulary of her own, in which she distilled her previous experience as a painter, but also as a woman who remembers everything – a woman who encompasses the experience of her genealogy, but also the ancestral myths of a creative condition par excellence. The power she thus acquired is reflected in experiments with parietal embroideries and three-dimensional objects that populate the Catinca Tabacaru Gallery space in Bucharest and communicate with each other as in a network of free thoughts and sensations – a cobweb, solid and ephemeral. The symbol of the spider appears both as represented within the embroideries and as a guardian, a soft spatial presence. Along with it, pansies are the indispensable symbols that burst out of all compositions, *La Pensée sauvage* like the French call them, the solitary flowers with an essential role in the most intricate Shakespearean love stories. And, the embroidery's allegory, inspired by the 15th-century Alsatian artist Martin Schongauer's *St. Sebastian*, perfectly summarizes the sacrifice of the artist (this time), pricked by two thousand needles per minute. This large-scale embroidery, *Martyr*, depicts another face of the artist, one crumpled to the ground at the feet of the heroically resisting self; between them the scissors, the symbol of rupture and halving. The reclining figure could be sleeping between the pansies donning upon her memories and dreams, while the upright figure, an awakening or elevation of the spirit beyond these worldly burdens. The two depend on one another, just as scissors make no sense without both their blades, and a butterfly cannot fly without its two symmetrical wings.

With these double figures in mind, we also look at the other two "sister" embroideries, *Painted Tongue Vertigo* and *Ever Sharp*, where the central female figure is portrayed in an endless fall, among the anthurium flowers, also called "fire tongue" or "flamingo." The fecundation of the female may occur during these chance collisions with the anthurium pistil, while the scissors may foretell the separation of the new offspring from the maternal body that created it. The fall into the abyss to which the woman is cyclically subjected can be associated here with the myth of Icarus, the one who flew too close to the sun, fascinated by the beauty of flight. And so, the damnation of the woman reappears in various ways within the works of Ioana Stanca, even when her salvation closely follows.

This exhibition may be best associated with another relevant poetic phrase, embroidered on one of the oversized, "tamed" scissors, taken from *Basket of Figs* by Ellen Bass: "Bring me your pain, love. Spread / it out like fine rugs, silk sashes, / warm eggs, cinnamon / and cloves in burlap sacks". This fig paneer (not coincidentally the most sexual fruit) contains all the energies, yields, pains and tensions of the female becoming and of human evolution in general.

- Text by Diana Marincu