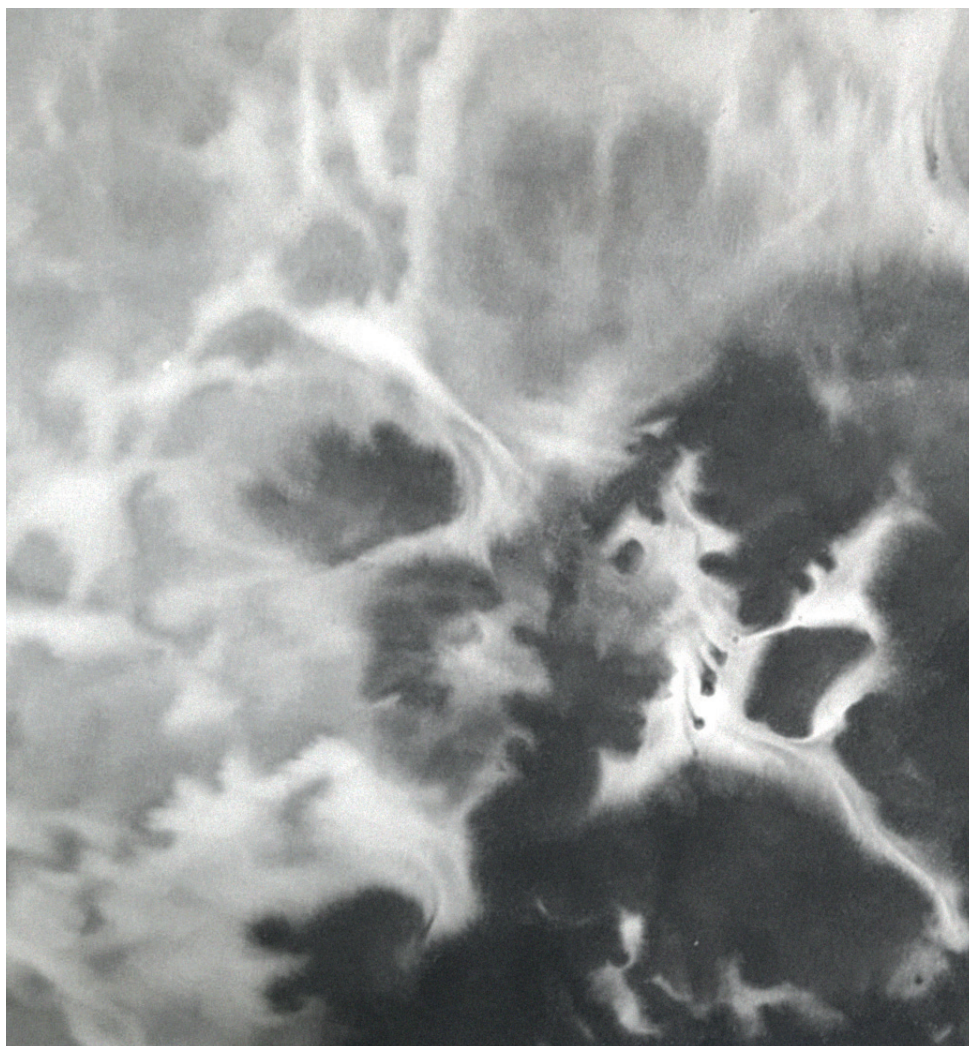




Patricia Belli, Storms, 2019, Detail



Ser, sin serlo

Patricia Belli

from 20/09 to 14/12/2019

Villa Vassilieff - Pernod Ricard Fellowship

Curated by Camille Chenais.

Opening : Thursday, September 19, 2019

Press visit from 5:00 to 6:00 pm / Public opening from 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Villa Vassilieff is happy to welcome the first exhibition in France of the artist Patricia Belli (1964, Nicaragua), whose artistic practice unfolds through installations including sculptures, drawings, and videos. For this exhibition, the artist chose to gather former works of her own with more recent productions in which symbols – from dreams and mythologies – evoke an unstable balance between domination and resistance, violence, fear and compassion. In the space, fragmented bodies spread out, without apparent sexual character, that one might think inanimate if a lingering tension or light movement did not come to betray this feeling. With those anthropomorphic forms, the artist aims to question various conditions that can alienate or weaken a body. From hurricanes to revolutions, instability and domination game are evoked through sculptures and their delicate physical balance.

SER,

SIN SERLO

by Camille Chenais

In the space of Villa Vassilieff, you can find a swing, representations of storms, a leg, heads, double heads, dust, a large piece of white fabric, grains of sand, a forearm, images of bodies floating in the sky, oloids, a falling stone, a rocking stool, broken pieces of glass, Xipe Totec, ... You can hear thumping noises or a lullaby hummed during a storm. You can follow the swing of a rocking stool, the oscillation of a swing, the undulation of a twirling oloid. Their cyclical movements rock us. By entering the space, we do not enter an exhibition where the works are restrained by their pedestals or display systems, we enter an environment where the artist's work is situated in the sculpted forms, the diffused noises, the movements created, as well as in the empty holes of the exhibition where the links between the pieces are woven, where the experience of the visitors is formed. One of the first striking things is the precarious balance, almost unreal, exuded by the works and their placement in space. Almost all of them are balancing. When they are approached, a tension is created, an impression of danger, of instability. The notion of balance - and its corollary, imbalance - is recurrent in Patricia Belli's work, reflecting the instability of our lives, the lack of control we have over our environment and the political, domestic, intimate or natural events that affect us.

Ser, sin serlo combines ceramic sculptures, wooden installations, metal, glass and textile pieces, with paintings, photographs, videos and sound pieces. Patricia Belli's work is in constant evolution, she moves from one technique to another, from one representation to another, with disconcerting ease and inventiveness. Through hybrid assemblages, she creates a plastic, poetic, enigmatic, sometimes disturbing language that reflects intimate and social concerns.



Patricia Belli, *Desequilibradas (Unbalanced)*, 2018, Detail

Her work is based on her visual and tactile sensibility; in her work process, the exploration of materials, their surfaces, their form, their vulnerability, seems to be her compass. «Above all, I'm a sculptor. My work with space is what motivates me. And later in the process there are other ideas and solutions that arise from my work with the material. I start with how those materials behave, and this generates a metaphor for me that in turn feeds off of my other vital concerns. Normally, that's the path. I see something in the street, I see something in my own workshop and I say, 'That's flexibility!' or 'That's vulnerability!' I see it! Then, what I do is to clarify that idea in something that's yet more abridged.'»

Patricia Belli's work always seems to emanate from a scrupulous observation of her environment, from the sky to the cells visible under a microscope, from the scraps forgotten in the streets, or even from her dreams and mental images.

However, Patricia Belli's language is not that of representation, but of metaphor. She does not directly translate her sensitive personal experiences, but questions, from them, common themes such as life, death, rebirth, systems of domination, balance and imbalance, the fragility of bodies, relationships of power, of desire. All her work is thus based on this entanglement of her emotions, her intimate processes with subjects that transcend them. She does it without grandiloquence, with simplicity, sometimes with humor.

I Juan Carlos Ampié & Patricia Belli «Nicaragua's Patricia Belli: from Tragedy to Rejoicing», *Confidencial*, April 11, 2017. Accessed on August 29, 2019. <https://confidencial.com.ni/nicaraguas-patricia-belli-from-tragedy-to-rejoicing/>

In *Sísifa* (*Sisyphus*²), a hand tries to carry stones while walking and balancing on two fingers, on a thin white rope. Several times, the hand gives in under the weight, loses its balance, and causes the stones to fall with dull noises. With subtlety, these images evoke the mental burden of motherhood that weighs on women's bodies. By playing with analogy or similarities, Patricia Belli's works act as a bridge between the artist's personal sensitivity and the visitors' experience. Inspired by Carl Gustav Jung's theories on the collective unconscious, the artist tries to translate her personal experiences into forms that would allow us to question human condition and the control we have over it.

The first pieces Patricia showed me when we started working on this exhibition last March were ceramic sculptures, still we, representing a forearm and a leg. Their apparent anatomical realism sparked in me a first impression of repulsion. They reminded me of pieces of bodies that had been ripped off. There was also a hand that broke while drying. Immediately, the images of hands being ripped off by grenades of the French National Police during demonstrations came to my mind. I asked her if these works evoked to her the dead bodies of the Nicaraguan demonstrators³. She replied that they did not. It was subtler than that. If the violence and repression of Daniel Ortega's government were very much in her mind when she was working on these pieces, they were not illustrations, quite the contrary. What interests the artist is not to make a documentary or journalistic chronicle of these events, but to evoke, from this experience, the forms of domination that our bodies endure, their impacts, but also the way in which they resist and subvert these constraints and oppressions. In the exhibition space, these fragmented and dispersed bodies do not appear lying on the ground, but are placed in uncertain balance evoking movement. These dislocated anatomies dissolve the boundaries between the living and the inert. They resist. They heal from their wounds. «It is impressive and tender to me the way in which the human beings try, and sometimes succeed, at repairing wounds, their own wounds. that of the body and the soul, and that of their objects.»⁴ In Patricia Belli's work, the body is therefore both a vulnerable, fragile and intimate space and a space of resistance, of power. This symbolic multiplicity is often reflected in the image of the body divided, dispersed, broken, fragmented. This dislocation highlights the impossible representation of an identity, a corporality or a subjectivity in a fixed and stable form. «It seems that Belli creates to be able to bring all her parts together.»⁵ writes Miguel A. López in the first monograph dedicated to the artist.

2 In Greek mythology Sisyphus was the son of Aeolus and Enarete and the mythical founder of Corinth. He is best known for his punishment, received after deceiving Thanatos (the god of Death) which was to roll an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll down when it nears the top, repeating this action for eternity.

3 In 2018, demonstrations were organized by students in Managua to protest against the reforms of Daniel Ortega's government. From then on, the regime implemented oppressive measures against political opponents. Many clashes erupted which have so far resulted in nearly 325 dead and 2,000 wounded. The majority of opponents have been put in prison while the rest have been forced to go into exile in neighboring countries.

4 Patricia Belli, "Relato" in *Velos y cicatrices*, Managua, Epikentro Gallery, 1996, n.p.

5 Miguel A. López, «Fragile. Works by Patricia Belli, 1986-2015», *TEORÉTICA*, 2016. Accessed on August 29, 2019. <http://teoretica.org/portfolio/fragiles-obras-patricia-belli-1986-2015/>



Patricia Belli; still from the video *Sísifa (Sisyphus)*, 2002-2015

On the walls, almost abstract paintings represent the heart of storms. These works symbolize nature in its most violent form: its destructive force. By blending with the anthropomorphic representations that also populate the space, they remind us that despite all our civilizing ambitions, we are insignificant in the face of the planet and its unpredictable forces. Elsewhere two heads seem to be in dialogue, one mounted on small driftwood legs, the other supported by a complex system of pulleys and ropes. The latter's face is covered by what appears to be a second skin, evoking certain representations of the Aztec god Xipe Totec («Our Lord the Flayed One» in Nahuatl). In Aztec mythology, he is the god of life, death, resurrection, agriculture, renewal of nature, fertile rainfall and goldsmithing. Like corn seeds that lose their skin before germination, Xipe Totec skins himself to feed humanity. This figure symbolizes notions that can be perceived elsewhere in the exhibition: those of the cycles of life, sacrifice, birth and rebirth.

The whole exhibition therefore oscillates between these two opposites, rebirth and destruction. The artist chooses neither one nor the other, but invents forms that make sense at the border of these binary oppositions. The complexity of Patricia Belli's works is based on this clash between happiness and disillusionment, anguish and empathy, doubt and joy. On two occasions, we meet two-headed ceramic sculptures in the exhibition. *Raices (Roots)* is on the ground, its two peaceful faces seem almost asleep. They appear to have been together for a long time, roots have developed on their skulls seemingly connecting them. They remind me of ruined sculptures of past civilizations which we sometimes stumble upon, on which nature seems to have regained its rights. The two heads of *Pesadilla (Nightmare)*, on the other hand, are inhabited by opposing feelings: one seems to be in a state of horror, the other shows a serene smile. They oscillate gently, above a pendulum foot. This motif of the double head materializes the hybridity and conflict of our beings, our bodies. We are both oppressed and oppressor, innocent and guilty, threat and threatened, wounded and powerful, cruel and gentle - ourselves and others. *Ser, sin serlo*. We are without being. It is therefore in this hybrid landscape, with its precarious balance, that visitors must find their place. They are encouraged to sit on a rocking stool or swing whose slight swings, intensified by a sound, lead them to question their own stability or instability. They are also invited to roll an ovoidal shape parasitized by a mixture of interlacings and to move forms on a table covered with sand, thus tracing the course of their movement. If, at first sight, these actions may seem playful or innocent, the artist, through amplified sounds that are triggered when the pieces are set in motion, gives these actions a strangeness that bothers and questions.

Translation: Alice Ongaro

PATRICIA

BELLI



Born in 1964 in Managua, Patricia Belli is a visual artist from Nicaragua. In 1986, she graduated from Loyola University of the South, in New Orleans, with a degree in visual arts. Ten years later, she graduated in Arts and Letters from UCA in Managua and in 1999 received a Fullbright scholarship to pursue a Master's degree in Fine Arts at the San Francisco Art Institute, which she completed in 2001. Upon her return to Nicaragua in 2001, Belli founded the Space for Research and Artistic Reflection, EspIRA, an association dedicated to the critical and sensitive training of emerging Central American artists.

Belli exhibits regularly in Central America, South America, the United States and Europe. Between 2016 and 2017, a retrospective exhibition of her work, organized by Curator Miguel López, through Foundation TEOR/ética, travel from San José (Costa Rica) to Managua (Nicaragua) and Guatemala City (Guatemala). In 2018, her works were exhibited during the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art.

In 2019, Patricia Belli took part of the Pernod Ricard Fellowship at Villa Vassilieff.

View of the Pernod Ricard studio at Villa Vassilieff during the residency of Patricia Belli, 2019, Villa Vassilieff - Pernod Ricard Fellowship





Principio de incertidumbre (Principle of Uncertainty), 2012
Escultura con péndulos y dibujos (Sculpture with pendulums
and drawings, medidas variables (variable size)
Colección Fundación Ortiz Gurdian, Managua

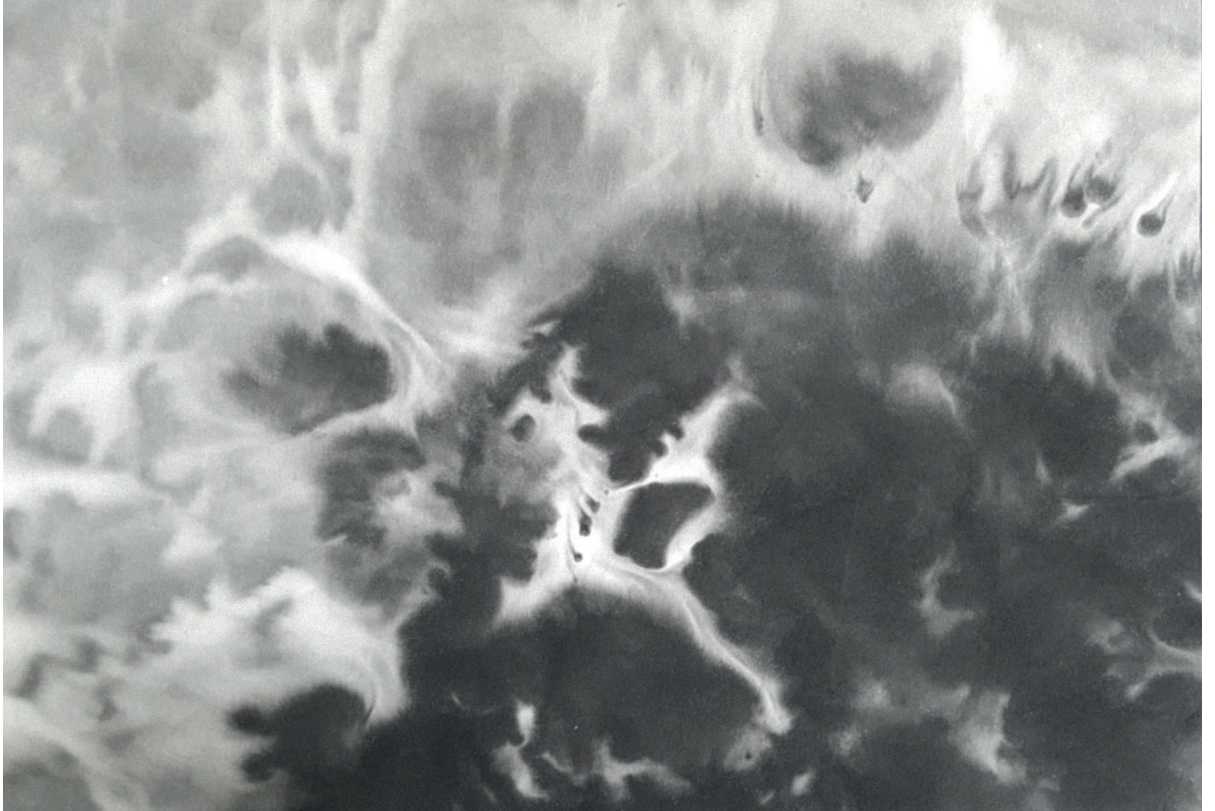
Patricia Belli, *Principio de incertidumbre (Uncertainty principle)*, 2012



Patricia Belli, *Raices (Roots)*, 2019



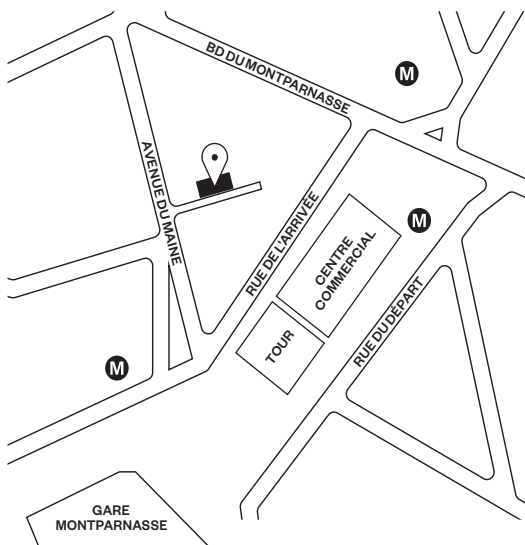
Patricia Belli, *Manospiedra (Handstone)*, 2001



Patricia Belli, *Storms*, 2018, Détail

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Villa Vassilieff, located in the Montparnasse district, in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, aims at reviving the history of the place as a former studio by inviting artists and researchers to take a contemporary look at its heritage. The programming of the Villa Vassilieff focuses on little-explored resources and aims at rewriting and diversifying histories of art. With the support of its main donor Pernod Ricard, the Villa Vassilieff proposes the Pernod Ricard Fellowship, a residency program that invites four international artists, researchers or curators every year. The Villa Vassilieff also collaborates with museums, like the Centre Pompidou, and institutions to offer artists research and residency grants.



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 from Tuesday to Saturday
 from 11am to 7pm

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 Subway lines 4, 6, 12 et 13 : Montparnasse - Bienvenüe (Exit 2 - Place Bienvenüe)

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