

Frac des Pays de la Loire, 2017.

Ad Minoliti. Yes to the Future: Feminism as a tender utopia.

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Cita:

Nicolas Cuello (2017). *Ad Minoliti. Yes to the Future: Feminism as a tender utopia. Frac des Pays de la Loire,*.

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/nicolascuello/32>

ARK: <https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/p3sB/D1p>



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an ephemeral online journal
oct.2016 - jan.2017

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**YES TO THE FUTURE: FEMINISM AS A TENDER UTOPIA. INTERVIEW WITH
ADRIANA MINOLITI BY NICOLÁS CUELLO**

by Nicolás Cuello

Monday August 21st, 2017

Nicolás Cuello: It seems important to me to start this interview recognizing a potent process of investigation in your work that is sensitive to feminists modes of articulation and queer theory as transversal matrices of production and political

action in painting. In the beginning, from a historiographical character, you looked to intervene the systematic absence of feminized bodies in the system of modern art, especially in certain movements mistakenly called historic vanguards. But then to overwhelm that question toward the capacity to politically imagine new forms of life that disobey fictions naturalized by contemporary devices of sex-generic intelligibility from painting. In that sense, your work marks a territory of, at least, double articulation where visual politics of the processes of bio-political designation are explicit, and the inventive capacity of a feminist and queer fantasy to rewrite the history of bodies in their relationship with the environment. I would like to ask, in what moment and in which way did feminism emerge in your work?

Adriana Minoliti: Beginning in 2008, through my participation as an agent in the Center for Artistic Investigations (CIA) in Buenos Aires. I studied with Argentinian artist Diana Aisenberg, whom I consider a great teacher—her intuition and formation left a mark on me. We spoke about things that I would later give the name “feminist”. In fact, when she wrote the text for my show at Ruth Benzacar Gallery in 2005, we had already spoken about feminist problems but without calling ourselves feminists. Everything began with questioning the notion of the feminine in art and the absence of women artists.

During the origin of the *PintorAs* project, which we began with the artist Paola Vega, I'd begun to study the history of feminist movements on my own. We shared some questions with her about the relationship between nature and abstraction. Something that had been fundamental to my work up to that moment: thinking about the links between reason/chaos, culture/nature and organic/geometric. Those binomial discussions and



From the series Queer Deco, 2016, print on canvas. Courtesy of Galería Agustina Ferreyra Photograph by Adriana Minoliti

what remained outside of them interested me very much. We fantasized with Paola about creating an ideal exhibition during a time when we didn't have other invitations. When we made a list of how it would be for us, we realized that all [the artists] were painters. So we launched the project from there, from desire and a lot of personal fantasy.

Then when I was part of CIA, I met Dean Daderko who gave me material about queer theory. It was a great discovery, I felt like a world of possibilities has been opened. I remember that Mariela Scafati told me about the work of Paul B. Preciado. After reading *Pornotopía* (Anagrama, 2010), there was a radical change in the way I had been thinking about my work, above all in relation to design, the history of art and corporality.

Nicolás: Can what Diana Aisenberg denominated *Sexy Metaphysic* be thought about as the process of articulation that manages to unite these two critical focuses? That is to say, on one side sustaining a gaze that questions the canon of art history, but on the other understanding that the sensitive diagram of painting gives a possible space to alter the inherited language of the vanguards, and exercise even more estrangement.



Adriana: About the origins of *Sexy Metaphysics*, I should say that it was super intuitive. I wasn't studying metaphysics, because when I read references of the De Chirico brothers, like Giovanni Papini, I hated them. It was more of an investigation about what I liked about those images but it didn't have anything to do with the authors. Now I think it was about that: the erotic and loving feminine gaze that its authors despised, which will never be metaphysical in its macho "truths".

*From the series
Dollhouses, 2016,
toys with geometric
forms. Courtesy of
Galería Crèvecoeur,
Paris Photograph by
Adriana Minoliti*

By planting dichotomous characters (geometry and nature), I think that the first criticism was to add an otherness to that masculine tradition. In proposing a feminine counterpart, the masculinization of geometry and abstraction manifested through the vanguards. From painting I understood how we could reduce the western gaze into dichotomies or opposites, things that aren't presented together. My form of processing data was the collage of these opposites, without melting them down: the references are cited from different places, from *fête galante* painting to animated drawings, everything traversed or presented as metaphysic imagery. Geometry and jungles as maximum dichotomies emerged from that series, and also the possibility to make a collage with geometry or anything else that doesn't come with the privileges of the masculine vanguard (like the infantile, the animal, the feminine).

Then in series like *Queer Deco*, with *Pornotopia* as a reference, in which I was interested in producing replacements within human representations, I incorporated geometry in place of normal bodies. In proposing another format of the humanoid character the museum, the environment, interior design, decoration and toys also become others. The functionality of things for those geometric avatars is another; they can realize actions without those corporal parts that humanly correspond to them. They push to imagine new forms of the quotidian, modifying the naturalized projections of coexistence, so that we can think us outside of normality. When we talk about function and form we can't leave out the user; it is a love triangle –use, function and form– not a hetero partnership.

Nicolás: In your current production you can identify some new inquietudes with a deep sense of experimentalism that search for new languages for that sensitive estrangement of the body, the gaze and identity. Thinking about your participation in the exhibition, *Notes From the Future: a crossbreed laborer's diary* curated by

Dorothee Dupuis for *Frac des Pays de la Loire*, How does the proposal you developed in the exhibition dialogue with aspects of the local context? From where does your work get close to the utopian imagination of the future?

Adriana: I think the proposal of the exhibition has been able to interpret a very tense moment of militarization of public space, where police surveillance and repression have advanced. But the interesting thing about Dorothee Dupuis' curatorship was inviting us to think in the utopia and the design of futures, people who come from different geographies, creating a wide vision about utopia from science fiction.

Personally, I was working on certain images about the infantile, and I decided to exploit that inquietude for this exhibition. In fact, during the residency the idea to build a toy store came up, working deeply with that infant dimension that appeared in other series of my work. I took advantage of that difference in order to produce counterpoint within the show.

Nicolás: How do you characterize the representation of those infantile aspects, and in what way are they included in your proposal for this exhibition?

Adriana: Through the space that the toys occupy, and especially with the colored popsicle. Also, in the construction of a soft space. Everything began because next door to the FRAC the neighbors do collective garage sales, assembling big fairs that are called *brocante*. There the people sell what they don't use anymore. I was looking for clothes



From the series Dollhouses, 2016, toys with geometric forms. Courtesy of Galería Crèvecoeur, Paris Photograph by Adriana Minoliti



From the series Dollhouses, 2016, toys with geometric forms. Courtesy of Galería Crèvecoeur, Paris Photograph by Adriana Minoliti

and I found the girls who sold their toys for very few euros. I had been working with the idea of the dollhouse for some time, but this was a great opportunity to use them in a concrete way. I decided in that moment to work from what I found at those fairs. The rest of the installation was completed with a series of prints on canvas, where I digitally worked from two series of handmade drawings that I titled *Geo Sci Fi Cyborg*. It seemed to me that I could conjugate two-dimensionality and objects, to build another utopia with that cadence, far away from common aesthetics of

mainstream science fiction.

Nicolás: The relationship that the geometric forms establish is novel, the scenic structures of the dolls and the small animal toys in this installation proposing strange ways of coexistence: the functionality of spaces like the kitchen or living room look interrupted. It creates a relationship of company and of no domination with the animals, and there is a profound intervention in those objects as technologies of gender and corporal intelligence.

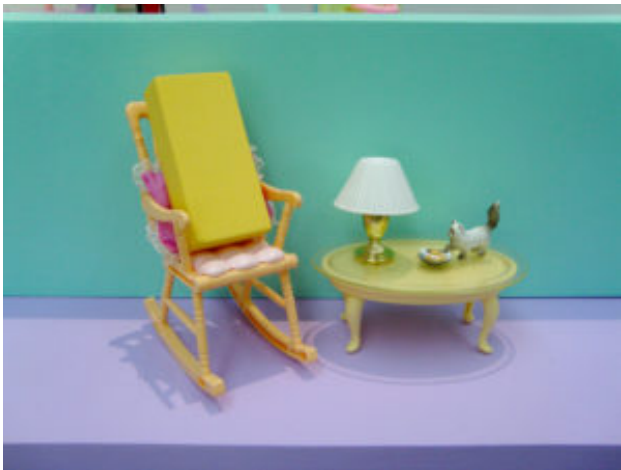
Adriana: The hypothesis of this work is connected with the *Queer Deco* series. At that time, I was interested in adding geometric characters to the images of decoration to modify their design, not from the form of the objects or the environment, but from the user of that environment and the



repercussions of the functionality of each object when confronted by the absence of the genderized human body. In this case, I continued to work with the same hypothesis but with the toys. It is about the same experiment: changing the human body figures for geometric figures, but now, not just in a photo in a two-dimensional format but also implicating a use of that geometric figure as an avatar. The possibility that someone would grab it and activate it also arose.

Playpen 3.0, 2016, view of the installation AICHI TRIENNIAL, Japan. Courtesy of Galería Agustina Ferreyra

Nicólas: Taking into account the central place that political potential has in the fantasy of this proposal, what potentials do you recognize in science fiction as a special language of the politic imagination in your work?



From the series Dollhouses, 2016, toys with geometric forms. Courtesy of Galería Crèvecoeur, Paris. Photograph by Adriana Minoliti

Adriana: For me it's an unending source of possibilities. As long as it's produced from a place that's free of prejudice, or is at least critical. It seems important to me to use toys because they are the first mechanism of normalization and regulation of fantasy. In general, mass products of science fiction are directed to people over 15 years old, or near that age. [This first mechanism] works in that limit of experience between the infancy and maturity; between the reason of maturity and the fantasy of infancy. I like to think about the place of toys as that instance of pre-science fiction. I think

about the dollhouse and I see that they are literally designing ways of coexisting. They are the avatars onto which we project ourselves. That's how they construct reality.

Nicolás: I think what you're saying is very interesting thinking about affective and visual cadence with which the majority of dystopian imaginaries are constructed in science fiction where the opacity of territory is abundant; the rotten thickness of the dead earth, the rusted ruins of the decayed cities, or the coldness of the minimalism of hyper-technologized reason as a hygienic construction of evolution that sweeps everything aside. As we see, the majority are images where tenderness, quality, pleasure, and the connection with the environment stay suspended for a sordidness that touches everything. We see how the traditional language of science fiction and fantasies of dystopian societies are, in general, determined by an apparatus of affective signification where the capacity to imagine a new world assumes a deep quota of terror. There is a principle of reality that never breaks: the reproducibility of the economic, political, sexual and environmental order that propose the capitalist regime. Even in the deployment of fiction there are pervasive structures of this type of contemporary production: the bureaucratization of power, relationships of superiority; the overactive exploitation of the environment and other non-human species; forms of corporal hierarchy and structural violence against feminism; the persistence of imperialism and colonialism as supposed power, etc. There is such a big level of internationalization of capitalism as a reality that the political potential of the dystopian imagination is limited.

Personally, I find that way of imagining to be problematic because it invites to fear, to feel anxiety about the material capacity to overcome our present. Your work plants a critical question about this order of sensibility. Do you think feminism is a potential transformer of sensitive language of the imagination? How does feminism affect science fiction?

Adriana: I think it is a tool to challenge a generation surrounded by images, personalities, histories and fantasies that glorify violence: a violence that is macho, speciesist, sad and with no room for tenderness. Whether from paranoia or from the epic, or in any of its formats, visual sordidness is left over—something that explains the success of zombie culture. I think that feminisms help to reevaluate other qualities of fantasy, offering violence as a strategic tool. Positioning other legitimate forms of defense in which a caress can be just as strong.

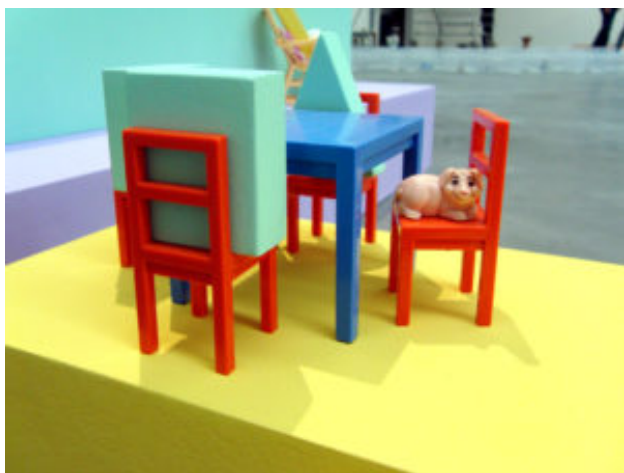
I think that feminisms save science fiction. They give it the possibility to think from outside of cultural parameters, without repeating available formats. Personally, I have always stayed close to science fiction in a weird way. A lot of my work has to do indirectly with manga, anime and other animations that I like. My references come from there. As a girl I copied comics and I invented personalities from my favorite stories.

Nicolás: Thinking about the potential for feminisms to push the limits of political imagination, and connecting it to what we talked about in terms of science fiction, the possibility opens to think about the limits of those who occupy the privilege of social intelligibility. But, above all, the visual codes that make those representations of the existent possible: gender and heterosexuality as principles of the possibility of a subject. So the idea to occupy those spaces assigned to human bodies with geometric forms, which are at once intervened with by layers of organic textures, in a sense, invites us to think about the condition of the life of a



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Dollhouses, 2016, toys
with geometric forms.
Courtesy of Galería
Crèvecoeur, Paris.
Photograph by Adriana
Minoliti*

body, in the ways this condition appears, if it is possible or impossible. The disputes of feminism and queer movements have been on that path for some time: working with the political limits of those conditions, disrupting the political functions of naturalism through action. In addition, the subjective transformations induced by the *queerization* of users of the worlds and objects that you work with. How to you tie your work to that premise of femininities?



From the series Dollhouses, 2016, toys with geometric forms. Courtesy of Galería Crèvecoeur, Paris. Photograph by Adriana Minoliti

Adriana: Within science fiction there is a ton of representation that maintains speciesist questions, the limits between subject and object, and many other capitalist values, where obsessive humanism is predominant. I'm interested in those breaks where the establish value between subject and object is diffused. The hierarchy and protagonism contained in humanity. That importance is reconfigured. In my work I imagine ideal beings living in ideal spaces. Including presence or entities that you can't say where they start or finish—that's why many are translucent or just

lines. I think that dematerialization appears to representations in many movies with beings whose origins are far away, much more complex or alien.

Nicolás: In your work you have developed instances of investigation and modes of sensitive approximation to the history of art, especially abstract geometric painting, metaphysic painting, and also the history of design, in a key that incorporates feminism, not as a theme, but as a matrix of thinking in a transversal

character. While many of those interests keep operating, some new connections exist. I'm especially referring to the animal question and the space that the environment occupies. How do they find space within your current investigations?

Adriana: There are a whole lot of things that interest me but aren't in my work. In a certain sense, I think because of prejudices. In general, you begin to work on something and that takes you to other things. But this year these discussions were deepened as a vital part of my work, especially the animal dimension. I began with dog diner and little cat stickers on the walls of the *Playpen* show in Buenos Aires and the later editions like *Playpen 2.0* in Panama and *Playpen 3.0* in Japan. But most of all in the series *Case Study Cat Houses* and *Play C*, created in Puerto Rico while collaborating with the *Save a Gato* foundation (www.saveagato.com (<http://www.saveagato.com>)). It started as a personal affection but turned into a necessity. It's trendy, and we see it more and more, to use animals in a cynical, cruel and violent way in work—there are apologies for mistreatment. That seems terrible to me and I think it is urgent to question. Now that the language of feminism is included in the best way in art spaces in Argentina and has space within the common sense—above all after massive phenomena like *#NiUnaMenos*—it is important to ask new questions and make inquiries about violence in all of its manifestations. The mistreatment of animals is intimately related to domestic abuse, for example. That's why I understand that the feminist fight also has to be animalist in its intersectionalism.

Nicolás: Do you understand you work as a possible political action that overcomes the thematic representation that the contemporary art market and academia proposes, to work within a regimen of personal and collective subjectivity?

Adriana: I think it is a way to build a shelter. Everything is difficult and cruel in the world. This is the way to open up something different and create a space where to exist. It was always a personal refuge, a whim, to do what I want. But also, with luck, on the

other side there is someone that what I do works for, who shares and does research after visiting a show. Like what happens to me.

It interests me that my work doesn't get associated with mainstream feminism that circulates in the market. That's why I talk about atheist feminism crossed with animalism, with non-violence. The art market has pigeonholed the "femenine" with certain versions of the feminist movement. But I don't want anything to do with that essentialist, white or transphobic feminism that sells, nor with the versions that prosecute sex work. I am interested in breaking from what art history limits to "feminist art" or "woman art": an apology of suffering representing victims of traumatic experiences without legitimizing other expressions and forms of reclamation. Personally, I want for feminisms in the arts to facilitate pleasure, tenderness and other utopias. That's why I think there is still much to do, and that not everything is deactivated.



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