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**Text by Caterina Avataneo
about Amalia Vargas'work
GENERATOR #7**



Amalia Vargas, *Futur antérieur*, aluminum poles, polystyrene, plaster, reflective glass beads for ground markings, variable dimensions. Production GENERATOR, 40mcube/Self Signal. View of the exhibition *Tendres gravats*, HubHug 40mcube, may 2021.

Amalia Vargas

“FUTUR ANTÉRIEUR”, “POINTS DE RENCONTRES”
AND OTHER WORKS

Upon entering the show *Tendres Gravats* at 40mcube HubHug (Liffré-Rennes), the visitor encounters a group of four sculptures by Amalia Vargas under the title *Futur antérieur*. Solid and foamy at the same time, the sculptures present a pearly-white top made of polystyrene and plaster, standing on an aluminum pole in an intriguing constellation charged with mystery. Their shape is the result of an extensive research that the artist conducted as part of a seven months residency organised by 40mcube (Generator 7) during which she studied and mapped a series of Menhirs located in the proximity of Rennes and other locations in the northwest of France. The menhirs - from Brittonic languages: *maen* or *men*, “stone” and *hir* or *hîr*, “long” - are large upright stones, typically presenting a monolithic shape tapering at the top. They can be found both individually or in group arrangements and although they still remain wrapped in mystery, they tend to be considered among the first man-made artefacts appearing in the landscape from European middle Bronze Age. Menhirs have been found scattered around forests and other landscapes across Europe, Africa and Asia, but most numerous in Western Europe; particularly in Ireland, Great Britain and Brittany; often isolated from tourist attractions and in a rather synergic relation with nature which renders them even difficult to individualise. From burials, to human sacrifice, ceremonial, or territorial markers, their function is an utter enigma.

This is perhaps what made them attractive to Amalia Vargas, whose attention is often directed towards objects and artefacts belonging to daily collective and individual histories - be this folklore and tradition or mass culture and consumerism. Her sculptures and assemblages appropriate, combine, deconstruct and even destroy common ready-made objects. The copy and the original, the mass-produced and the crafted, the mundane and the eternal collapse together exposing the hybridisation of culture, together with a certain sense of absurdity. Vargas often works with items of varied realms, randomly encountered during her nomadic years travelling and relocating from Colombia, where she was born, to Corsica and other European cities. Plastic bottles functioning as pedestal for faux-antique vases, cardboard boxes displaying paintings and self-made tourist souvenirs, melted amphores in polyéthylène from Naples, liquefied columns of plastic coconut cocktail cups or broken ceramic vases wrapped in knee pads - to name a few - populate the artist's ethnographic practice, which looks at society, culture and the act of “making sense” while also producing an unravelling of certainty and a new openness for the significance of human artifacts, as well as a potential for re-interpretation of history.

Such potential for re-interpretation is particularly evident in the case of *Futur antérieur* where, after months spent tracking and finding various menhirs in the rocky landscape of Brittany, Vargas decided to map and register her encounters with these through the mediation of technology, and more precisely her smartphone. Talking with the artist, she mentions her interest in “Walkscapes, walking as an aesthetic practice”, a book by Italian architect Francesco Carreri in which walking is presented as a cognitive and creative act capable of transforming symbolic and physically both the anthropic and natural space. The book examines the history of perception of the landscape through the act of walking and proposes

“wandering” as an aesthetic instrument of knowledge and physical modification of the space. It is no surprise then that Vargas not only decided to focus on her wanderings and encounters, but also on how her interaction with the findings could potentially generate another interpretation of these too. Using a 3D scanning app - a very popular tool in nowadays archaeological research - she generated a virtual reconstruction of the analysed menhirs. It was by observing these glitchy images in her studio, that the artist produced her own version of these artefacts.

On the opposite side of the exhibition room, three large scale prints hang facing the group of sculptures. Here the solid character of the ancient phallic monoliths gets liquefied and flattened, letting more ephemeral qualities and alternative cultural interpretations emerge. Their fascinating almost abstract visuals - which are exactly the glitchy images mentioned above - become the background for a series of reflective symbols of a rather urban character that give the work its title: *Points de rencontres*. Building upon one of the alleged original functions of the menhirs, they are in fact illustrations used in street segnaletica for indicating a meeting point. The territorial marker function becomes an intrinsic quality of Vargas's works, contaminating the choice of materials too: retroreflective films for the prints and reflective glass beads for the sculptures, both typically used for road signs. And if the prints' reflective material suggests some luminescence presence in the space, trying to photograph the sculptures is revelatory. The pearly fake rocks produce a flash and, for a short second, a ghostly presence materialises between the camera and the sculptures opening a whole other (magical) dimension. It comes to mind Graham Harman essay “On Vicarious Causation” where he describes how objects interact without touching, suggesting a dense net of relations among objects which human cannot perceive nor imagine. He describes a world packed full of ghostly objects signalling to each other from inscrutable depths and different aeons of time. Suddenly it all “makes sense”: a sculpture in Rennes, a menhir hidden in the forest, a portal, a constellation on a clear night, a luminescent road sign... for a second the visitor is part of a strange, non-human net, just for a second before everything becomes object again. Not only Vargas is interested in the act of “making sense”, but she is able to produce one too with her works and her excavating of hybrid meanings, between past, present and future. For a second it all comes together.