

## Regenerated Elsewhere and Otherwise: Gaëlle Choïsne Ludovic Delalande

Among the works in progress by the Franco-Haitian artist Gaëlle Choïsne, *A Tribute to Agwé* (2021) is a sculpture hanging from chains in her studio in Pantin, in the Paris suburbs. A metal grid displays an image held by coins that have been perforated, the holes filled with a few diffuse elements, such as small metal links, a carabiner, a piece of ceramic. Printed on a semitransparent white cloth, its weave pronounced, the image has difficulty asserting itself. Choïsne probes the technical, emotional, and symbolic qualities of the materials employed in her still, unstable, and moving images with the aim of generating dissonance and contradiction.

The photograph used in this recent work is of a previous one. Before taking the place of its own image, *A la Sombra del Platano* was a sculpture Choïsne made in 2015 on the beach near San Rafael in Veracruz. This unusual site was chosen to make up for a lack of space to accommodate the exhibition intended to close the residency that Choïsne had planned with two other artists in Mexico. This was how a sculpture came to be erected on the sand only a few meters from the water, inspired by the spontaneous combining of forms, organic and inorganic materials, each of whose elements was found nearby, bought in shops, or picked up in the street. Privileging existing materials and what is available in her immediate environment is now a constant factor in Choïsne's oeuvre, a method that allows her to combine economy of means with ecological awareness. Beyond the (re)construction potential of scrap objects, their (re)valuation—which may begin by taking the form of a devaluation, as in the case of the pierced coins—echoes a reasoning that practices decentering as a necessary principle to reveal what is usually relegated to the margins or hidden in blind spots.

Once the installation was completed, the work was subjected to natural forces, in particular to those of the ocean to which it had just been offered. In fact, *A la Sombra del Platano* was not so much abandoned to its fate as left as an offering to Agwé, a prominent goddess in the Haitian pantheon, the protectress of the seas, its fishermen and creatures. Haiti occupies a major place in the myths, beliefs, rituals, and traditions of overseas and the West that invest the artist's work, incorporating a spiritual dimension each time boosted by the presence of amulets, charms, talismans, and playing cards that she collects here and there. The colonial history and enslavement past of her native country, as well as its rich and diverse culture and the challenges faced by its society, imbue Choïsne's practice. Beyond its address to spiritual entities, might this gift to the sea not also be a tribute to the memory of those swamped by the waves of slavery, colonization, migration, and exile? A monument or, rather, an anti-monument as precarious and fragile as the bruised and disappeared bodies that it commemorates? Isn't this gesture all the more symbolic on account of being expressed in the very place—Veracruz—where the conquistadors entered the New World before leaving once again for Europe loaded with goods?

Of this ephemeral sculpture, of which nothing is left today, Gaëlle Choïsne brought back only a single photograph, its framing simple and frontal, closely surrounding the

work that faces the horizon of sea and sky. Before finding its final place, for a while this documentary photograph lay latent in her studio. Whether an image or an object, form or material, the artist needs to take time to probe it, understand it. It is only then that she initiates possibilities by exploring several directions, sometimes simultaneously, following a creative process that has the aim of being experimental, intuitive, and instinctive. It is all developed on the spot, in an encounter with the materials that implicate her body in a succession of actions whose traces are deliberately left visible. Choïsne likes to deal with different types of materials—metal, concrete, plaster, ceramics, textiles, vegetal, et cetera—whose technical, emotional, and symbolic qualities she investigates, even going so far as to demonstrate a "materialological animism," as she calls it. The embracing of doubt and the unexpected, ambiguity and the irresolute, dear to Édouard Glissant's "trembling thinking," allows errors or failures to be embraced as happy coincidences. The imagination of the Martinican writer has had a decisive influence on Choïsne, who allows herself to be guided by a deep empathy with the world, whose tremors and upheavals sustain her open, pluralistic approach.

Through a series of successive transpositions, the sculpture she made in Mexico became an image before, in turn, becoming a sculpture. The photographic memory of the altar offered to Agwé is bound up with the tribute to the goddess that this new sculpture represents, the grid serving as a stele and the image as an epitaph, thereby creating a new monument. While her works have the capacity to regenerate themselves beyond time and space, to be "reincarnated" elsewhere and otherwise, it is on account of their inability to take on a definitive form, arrangement, or reproducibility. They gesture, relate, overflow toward each other, collide, amalgamate, graft, and juxtapose one another in tension, in a tumult of dissonance and contradictions. These vagabond transformations give rise to a polymorphous work, of a "chaos-world" in which "cultural shocks, disharmony, disorder, and interference become creative."<sup>1</sup> Traversed by a multiplicity of voices, presences, signs, meanings, sounds, accounts, and geographies, Choïsne's works attest to the complexity of grasping a world that offers itself only in fragments.

1 Frédéric Joignot, "Pour l'écrivain Édouard Glissant, la créolisation du monde est 'irréversible,'" *Le Monde* 2, 2005.

241 Gaëlle Choïsne, *A Tribute to Agwé*, 2021. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Gregory Copiter

242 243 Gaëlle Choïsne, *Mondes Subtiles* installation view at Air de Paris, Romainville, 2021. Courtesy: the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville. Photo: Marc Domage

244 Gaëlle Choïsne, *Hermaphrodite*, 2020. Courtesy: Site archéologique Lattara-musée Henri Prades in collaboration with MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain. Photo: Marc Domage

245 Gaëlle Choïsne, *Grandma's hands explain me how the sea kills us*, 2018–21. Courtesy: the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville. Photo: Marc Domage



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