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ARTFORUM

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Martin Soto Climent

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Martin Soto Climent's objects are nominally ready-made: buckets and broom handles, a plastic tissue holder and women's stockings, a wine bottle and gloves. Yet their presentation here has entailed some

refashioning, by turns straightforward and lyrical. Folding, wrapping, and draping these things, Soto Climent draws out a poetics intrinsic to particular fabrics and textures—a poetics relentlessly, but subtly, corporeal. Composed simply of two nestled ballet shoes and some downy plumes, *Dorothea* (all works 2010), discreetly evokes female genitalia. *Moon Bouquet* features a cluster of large white balloons attached to a set of women's heels. Filled during a full moon just before the exhibition opened, the balloons slowly seeped air, gradually lowering the shoes to the floor—at once slowly deflating the work's literal buoyancy and inflating of its lyrical resonances. Employing only a bra and two screws, *Mrs. Natural* suggests, by virtue of mere folding and hanging, the buttocks of the eponymous lady; the pliant, skin-toned cloth conjures plump flesh.

Mrs. Natural also recalls the metonymical maneuver of Man Ray's camera in *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade*, 1933—a homing in on a woman's nude buttocks, bordered by an upside-down cross. The



Martin Soto Climent,
Luminous Flux
 (detail), 2010, video,
 tables, seven mixed-
 media objects, 3' 2" x
 1' 3¼" x 24'.

objects of, say, Valentine Hugo—whose *Untitled (Object of Symbolic Function)*, 1931, features two gloves on a gaming board in a clearly sexualized allegory—than the more aloof, almost clinical repositionings of Duchamp.

Perhaps the most fitting question to ask, then, is: From what position does Soto Climent approach the erotics of his objects? Whether irony informs his procedures is not entirely clear. A feminist subtext may reside in *Luminous Flux*, whose horizontal arrangement of seven objects evinces something of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, and its banquet table set with porcelain plates evoking female genitalia. Yet a video projected from one end of Soto Climent's work, the stripteaselike *Parable of the Cave/Shadow Dancer*, suggests that the female form serves more predictable ends here. And while the installation's deliberate allusions to the seven trials of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar and to the dance of the seven veils perhaps inflect it with a more recondite significance, the coupling of woman and myth conjures some of the less salutary chapters of the twentieth-century avant-garde's recent annals, and Surrealism's prominence therein. Soto Climent's facility with materials, and his no less striking lyrical imagination, would benefit from a clearer sense of perspective: not in the execution of his objects per se, but in their larger aesthetic, sexual, and even ideological upshot.

rhyme of these cheeky (as it were) framings raises the question of Soto Climent's rapport with Surrealism, and, more specifically, and perhaps worryingly, the movement's fraught sexual politics. The exhibition's main installation, *Luminous Flux*, partakes in the semantics of Surrealist eroticism unabashedly, including, among its seven objects arranged on a platform, a string of pearls suspended between two bottles. Likewise, the placement of a woman's wig on the end of a mop handle in *(The sweeping caress of) The Milky Way* evokes the imagery of René Magritte, whose dissections and condensations took the female body as their most common object. Also in the vein of Surrealism, many of the works call attention to the connotative (and fetishistic) resonances of their materials: eggs, faux-fur and leather boots, and the creases of felt hats. Soto Climent's work hews more closely to the

Less charged in its erotic energy, but no less striking, is *Intimate Ballet*, a set of nine large black-and-white Piezo prints. Although distinguished from the other works on view by their medium, these photographs similarly engage with Surrealist precedent, and deploy the readymade to new ends. Soto Climent has torqued and photographed a book of photos depicting ballet dancers from the 1920s, curling the page to create distorted forms without altering the original images. While remaining “philologically” faithful to the epoch of Surrealism and alluding to its subjects and formal strategies, *Intimate Ballet* carves out a mesmerizing presence of its own. The anonymous male bodies among the work’s doe-eyed divas are also a welcome sight.

—Ara H. Merjian