**Jimena Mendoza: “LO”***Interview with Eva Riebová*

**Jimena Mendoza** (Mexico, 1979) studied at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado “la Esmeralda” in Mexico City and later at L’École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs, Paris, France. She finished her Masters degree at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design (AAAD) in Prague and was awarded the price of Josef Hlávka for her outstanding diploma thesis. She has participated in artist residencies in Banff Centre, in Alberta, Canada; Brownstone Foundation, Paris and in MeetFactory, Prague. Mendoza is currently employed by AAAD Prague and teaches an international program for Visual Arts.

**ER: For the past couple of years, your nomadic way of life has influenced your artistic practice and vice versa. It seems that with every movement you appropriate some aspects of the particular culture in your works, which consequently gain many layers. Is there something specific that you focus on whenever you stay in the different culture?**

JM: My projects draw much inspiration from all the different locations I’ve lived in but they are still quite continual. I’ve been following many topics along the way, but the basis of my works has always been connected with the research of cultures and anthropology. Also, I’m very interested in technique. I love handmade production – the process of making sense in the non-sense. It is interesting for me to observe how a certain technique is “soaked in” the culture and how it is a part of a common knowledge of a particular population. For example before I came to Prague I never tried porcelain or glass...and here I was learning how to cast, make mold, etc.

**ER: The project “Lo” which you prepared for Kostka Gallery draws inspiration from the stories about “original conceptions” that are taken from different sources; from the Greek or the pre-Hispanic mythologies through the biblical stories up to different cosmological visions. Can you introduce some of the stories that you had in mind while creating the project?**

JM: Well, there is one very beautiful when Jupiter seduces Io disguised as a black cloud. I’m interested in this transfiguration into a black cloud which serves as a mask. There are others, such as Mary virgin or the Aztec goddess Coatlicue. The constant element in all these stories is the seduction, which is represented trough the wilderness of the Nature - the transfiguration of the Nature in order to infiltrate the human reality.

**ER: All the stories we mentioned include a very strong feminine element – it is always a woman who is coming through transformation or bearing consequences. Do you see that as a part of the discourse of a new wave of feminism?**

JM: I cannot speak from a different perspective than my own. But for instance, when I created the Konstelovat project (*exhibition at Kurimanzutto, curated by Chris Sharp in Mexico City, 2016*), I created a room full of feminine sculptures. The myths are full of male figures! And I was more interested in feminine figures / goddesses in the mythologies.

**ER: Earlier you have mentioned the word “mask” while describing your source of inspiration. It is an interesting choice of word considering that some of the exhibited objects resemble masks. That leads me to the question on how do you translate this inspiration into visual object?**

JM: For the project I didn’t want to represent as a symbol of seduction a desirable woman lying naked in the forest. From this point of view the Jupiter’s black cloud is much more interesting. It is the non-obvious which makes the seduction very powerful. Look at the Mexican depiction of the goddess of fertility – it is an engraved black stone. Just a huge black stone. Maybe this is a strong contrast to the way of representation in Western cultures.

Also, I wanted to create a composition in the space with some kind of order or path to traverse. I am playing with the idea of sacral architecture with a clear hierarchy in the space.

**ER: The idea of the black stone being a representation of fertility – it is a complete opposite of the pre-modernist European way of representation, which for many years compensated illiteracy of the population.**

JM: Pre-Hispanics are crazy with the representation! Take Coatlicue for instance – she has snakes instead of head and a necklace made of hearts and hands. The iconography is very wild. By the way this monolith has an interesting story, between having been buried and later unearthed during the colonial times.

**ER: The exhibited objects – correct me if I am wrong – seem to me to be taking inspiration from the European avant-garde.**

JM: Sure! As we already mentioned – there are all these layers in my research. I cannot dismiss my previous investigations or encounters, like pre-Columbian art, brutalism, modernism.

**ER: I am really curious about the glass gloves.**

JM: (Laughs.) Sometimes you need gloves to touch a very precious object, but these gloves are made out of glass and you cannot wear them… there is something, which is untouchable – it cannot be reached by your hands.

**ER: What do you wish every visitor to get from the exhibition?**

JM: To stay, to contemplate.