

Vernix

palace enterprise

By Rhea Dall

There is an unapologetically sexy, seductive pull to Daiga Grantina's sculptural folds, be it from her grand-scale bloated spandex buffs, looking like enormous cocoons, or her draped, drooling textile compositions, dazzling like bling. Yet the more intimate scale of her new sculptural series—titled *Moth Mothers*—that hangs on the wall (as if they were “images” rather than traditional “sculptures” placed amid the space) makes her novel nine works blushing erotic. Maybe it's the proximity the works require; the in-your-face height on the wall. Maybe it's the faint colors; the soft white and dashes of pink, pale purple, coral, flush, fuchsia, rose, or salmon meeting dark brown that make their openings, their crevices, even more vaginal than ever.

I like them. A lot. I like Daiga. A lot. I've had the pleasure of knowing her since sometime back in 2015; we go, if not way back, then back a considerable seven years. We met last when her daughter, now three years, was only three weeks. I'm writing this as my own daughter is about seven months. There has been correspondence in between, a lot of making, and we've become mothers. In itself, this is almost as average as can be, but it is poignant because this show is a leap in creation, in making. If Daiga is generally molding and draping her works in a continuum flowing from one exhibition or series to the next, slowly letting the matter take the lead in the studio, then these motifs simply, suddenly occurred. Not as growing shapes coming about slowly via their oozing materiality, but they occurred as colors, conditioned through their dusty palette. In brief, they occurred as an image, or even, as a vision. And they could not be any different. They had to look like this; a little like a newborn simply occurring, without the creating (mothering) body having seen the layers happening. Past the unspeakable hardship of the labor, suddenly, shockingly, the little figure is just there, rough and flawed. Perfect to any parent. Curled up in odd fluids—blood, of course, but also the beautifully named vernix (vernix caseosa, a protective layer on the newborn's skin).

Maybe age, maybe experience, or maybe motherhood develops how one creates works. In any case, the evolvment turned Daiga into a wizard, channeling the strange vision of these works. Yet, I've known her to be one (a wizard, that is) for a long time. Already in 2015, when she spoke to me about wanting to salvage an old Parisian sex shop—a landmark in the 11th arrondissement—after its owner's departure, I knew that she would (through her artistic work), if not that particular shop, then at least, wizardly, sculpturally, channel a corner of the lushness and the erotic oddity (perfect and special) that genitals and gel make up; a part of our visual

regime that is so easily lost between the everyday hours of housework, sad internet PornTubes, and the dark dire times of wildly unnecessary wars, be they cold or current, as knows, if anyone, a Latvian by birth.

The nine pieces in this show occurred after Daiga had, for a considerable period, focused on peacock feathers since she was aiming to make an artwork of these for something else entirely. Having stared at the glowing colors of the male bird's iridescent coat for (too) long, these new works—the Moth Mothers—simply appeared, almost as if they were an afterimage. Her “blinded” eyes, haunted by the ferocious palette, were soothed by the softness in the shades of pink and suave vernix white alongside the deep brown surfaces. I imagine the latter functioning as dark holes absorbing all the (peacock's) colors; holes that in turn could be likened to a stronger earth or Gaia-like force, effortlessly soaking up all the sky's or bird's prismatic aggression.

As such, these nine works—the number itself mystical, recalling the nine of muses—occurred as images made in and of themselves, channeled through the (wizard) artist functioning merely as a non-identifiable membrane (not unlike the vernix softening the newborn's arrival). And in fact, this is, if anything, how I've known Daiga to have transmitted her material for a long time. Our grand, first collaborative project took its cue from the taffy puller, a bonbon-making machine that swirls sugar mass, pulling the sweet crystals apart so that they chaotically (literally) stay ruminating, alive, uncontrollable. This incessant organic movement of the material, in turn, keeps the little bonbons “soft.” Now, drawn from this, in Daiga's works the matter has an inherent “own” drive—unstoppable and erotic, and certainly reproductive. By studying the small, hysterically soft, and seductive pieces of candy, it becomes clear that in her realm any given sculptural “stuff” in itself pulls constellations, bodies, figures. This is the lineage leading to what's at stake here, in these new works. As intimate, even erogenous afterimages, antidotes to the peacock potency, or as soft holes of unfightable femme force—while certainly fun too, mind you: read the titles—Daiga simply channeled their occurrence, as they were slipping into the world still partly covered in vernix. And that's the cocooning or “lol” lubricant (inner)vision shaping these nine alluring muses.