

Tabula Rasa, Demi's Latest Personal Exhibition

by Janet Batet

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During the bitter years of confinement of Covid-19, in which the artist lives the loss of her two sisters, art again appears as the only space for salvation.

“All my paintings have to do with coming out of the darkness, but it is always - and above all - the light. Art as a possibility of redemption.” – Demi

Approaching the universe of Demi Rodriguez (Camagüey, 1955) is like entering a thick forest where dreaming and reality are confused by creating that feeling of disturbing fantasy that forces us to look inside ourselves. Demi's works are works that recall something of Bosch, and Klimt, and Chagall. We are witnessing a kind of inner bestiary where capricious compositions, the energy of color and symbolism open the way to a world to a fascinating and terrifying time.

Perhaps her stage name is the first key to entering this dark jungle. The term *Demi* refers to *half*, sometimes even minor and in the specific case of Demi, it encloses the two meanings. First, the sense of rupture, mutilation and uprooting that meant the execution of her father when the artist was barely five years old and, then, the separation of the family cloister, when two years later she is sent with her aunt to Puerto Rico and separated from her mother and her sisters whom she would not find again until adolescence. Migration is then also the culmination of this being divided into two, incomplete, whose existence takes place at a time in different latitudes, without being completed in the same being.

The infant (which in Latin means the non-speaker) is the recurring figure in Demi's work. That minor being whose voice does not count, whose concerns are silenced. A being who is all eyes and whose bald head alludes to the virginal state: beings who fly in their own dream, creating parallel universes that free them from a world that is hostile to them.

In her convoluted paintings, which are like complicated tapestries full of ornaments and filigrees through which we travel as if they were tunnels of time, kaleidoscopic visions dominate, where figurative and symbolic elements are transfigured into powerful poetic compositions. The typical celebrations of childhood (birthdays, baptisms, games), become childish hallucinations that look like the liberating door to another universe where, at last, redemption is possible.

Tabula Rasa, Demi's most recent personal exhibition, now open in Aliona Ortega Fine Art, includes a selection of ten recent paintings that masterfully summarize the universe of this Cuban-American artist based in Miami, for whom art has been sin and salvation. The title of the exhibition summarizes Demi's

approach to art. The Latin expression refers, on the one hand, to the newborn in his pristine state, without preconceptions or suffering; on the other, to the ability of the human to even in the most critical moments, to be able to start from scratch.

At the age of 27, Demi meets Arturo Rodríguez, also a painter, and it is through this magnificent communion that Demi discovers the painting that becomes a cathartic gesture. Since then, Demi has not stopped painting, of exorcising that self who is our inner child silenced with the passage of time and eager to come out and free himself.

Tabula Rasa includes Demi's most recent work, *The Fall* (2018-2020). During the bitter years of confinement of Covid-19, in which the artist lives the loss of her two sisters, art again appears as the only space of salvation. The lockdown restrictions forced Demi's work expand to monumental proportions. The arabesque multiplies in a scene where different dimensions and recurring themes of art history coexist (*The Eden*, *the Fallen Angel*, *the family portrait*, *the Pietá*). The masks that act as a kind of line of the horizon and unfolding of the self, is a bridge between the resignations that this piece encompasses whose intricate procedure - by addition and subtraction - in layers and motifs that proliferate everywhere, forces the viewer to the constant jump of the overexcited eye on the surface.

The exhibition also includes *Boticelli's Garden* (2017), *Offering to Goddess Flora* (2020) and *Light versus Darkness* (2020-2021), exquisite pieces in which recurring themes of art history become key to the personal liberation of the artist and each of the spectators who venture into this trip by the hand of Demi.

Tabula Rasa, exhibition of works by Demi, is on view at Aliona Ortega Fine Art, 2300 N. Miami Avenue, B, Miami, FL, until June 29.

Janet Batet (b. Havana, Cuba) is an independent curator, art critic, and essayist currently living in Miami. She is a former researcher and curator at the Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales (Development Center of Visual Arts) and a former professor at the Instituto Superior de Arte (Higher Institute of Art), both in Havana. She is passionate about contemporary art, Latin American art, and new technology. Her articles on art practices are regularly published in Art Nexus, Art Pulse, Arte al Día, Art Experience: NYC, and El Nuevo Herald, among others.