

DAIGA GRANTINA

by Stephanie Seidel

Daiga Grantina's sculptures and installations are material experiments as much as they are associative formations. Subjecting collaged material to associations of bodies and landscapes, Grantina addresses human desires and longings as they become activated through the eye of the viewer. Grantina directs the view in manifold ways, both secluding and revealing, as she opens surfaces and volumes at one point and seals them through the amalgamation of disparate materials at another. Spanning between the poles of figure and landscape, her layered sculptural installations are at times voyeuristic, panoramic and archeological.

In her exhibition *The Mountain Guide* (2015), shown at Mathew Gallery, Berlin, Grantina set the exhibition space as a landscape, populated by sculptures, which acted as its "inhabitants." Winding up out from the floor, protruding from the walls as well as sitting heavily and slothfully on the ground, these sculptures amalgamate disparate materials into dismembered figures. Floating along a Plexiglas bell of a jellyfish, bright red textile bobbles wiggle along plastic encrusted wires. A glass marble is suspended in the wide throat of an extractor tube staring back at the viewer like the abject iris of Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. Another work supports a net of wire distended with transparent bulges of an anonymous, coagulated liquid, streaked with slim red strings like veins, summoning the female body as morphologically muddled and abstracted. A little crystal earring dangles coquettishly over the whole ensemble as if to lure prey into a trap.

Grantina's works are slowly grown ensembles that break down and metabolize their material like fuel or nutrients, mutating their matter by forces of heat, adhesion and the pull of gravity. They are not singular things in themselves but rather an aggregate of varied substances, flowing into each other, rejecting each other, merged forcefully and stringing into process-like narrations which are elliptical, irrational, sensual. Interference and overlapping result in barbed frictions. These shimmering, sticky concatenations evince the irreconcilable tension that results from deliberate making and a yielding to the unfolding of material properties, forces of forming and deforming.

At the center of Grantina's exhibition is the eponymous piece *The Mountain Guide*, both a figure and a landscape. In a wreckage of wire, plexi, plastic and aluminum enveloped by a floppy membrane of acrylic, the work suspends from the ceiling at the same time leaning on an askew crutch-like pole, dug in the ground. Its leg and poles are wrapped in cables bundling energy, while blue marble eyes vigilantly peep out of a multitude of folds and creases of plastic sheeting. Through the multiple layers of half-melted plastic, a projector throws a grid pattern, similar to a map, in splintered facets and at kaleidoscopic array onto the room, as if diagramming the position of the other figures in the room.

The sculpture's posture resembles the pose of the mountain guide in Balthus' painting *The Mountain* (1937). Here, seven scattered figures are depicted on an imaginary mountain plateau, unaware of one another. Their





SevereeD, 2015 Installation view, *The Mountain Guide*, Mathew, Berlin, 2015. Courtesy: Galerie Joseph Tang and Mathew (p. 203)
Buff in Red, 2016 Installation view, *Heap-core,,, kim?* Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, 2016. Photo: Ioan Vi-Huu. Courtesy: Galerie Joseph Tang (opposite page)

gaze is trancelike. Rendered in exacting detail, the realism of the figures and landscape seem at odds with the surrealistically contrived narrative. A young woman, stretching her upper body into the sun is subject to the desirous look of the mountain guide, who is kneeling on the ground resting on his hiking pole. While the connection between the figures is dramatically mute, there is a tight correspondence between the shape and posture of each person and the surrounding mountain formations. Here, the figures seem to merge with the mountains and become as inert as the rocks, while the landscape gains vitality through theatrical light. The distinction between animate and inanimate, body and place, seems to be suspended as matter in a state of phase change – the precise material condition of which Grantina induces in her exhibition.

Balthus' brother Pierre Klossowski describes this conversion of materials into one another, writing about the effect of light on the landscape:

“The landscape of Turin, the monumental squares, the promenades along the Po River, were bathed in a kind of ‘Claude Lorraine’ luminosity [...], a diaphanousness that removed the weight of things and made them recede into an infinite distance. The stream of light here became a stream of laughter – *the laughter from which truth emerges*, the laughter in which all identities explode [...]. What also exploded was the meaning that things can have or lose for other things, not in terms of a limited linkage or a narrow context, but in terms of *variations of light* (despite the fact that this light is perceived by the mind before it exists for the eye, or that a reminiscence emanates from its rays).”

In her compositing of aluminum tubes, Plexiglas, cables, plastic objects and wires, Grantina explodes functionality into a vortex of material and haptic properties which sediment into unstable bodies. Light here is treated as a material equally

destabilized and deformed, as it filters the manifold components of the installation. The works of *The Mountain Guide* oscillate between figure and micro-landscapes, gestalts, which shift in scale. These voluptuous, slumped characters, reveal mini-vistas within their cracked surfaces: mountains and valleys built-up of smoldering plastic and bent metal, suffused with projected light, marbled with stripped wire.

Grantina's sculptural approach to landscape continues in her solo exhibition *Heap-core,,, for kim?* Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, Latvia (2016). Building a second wall that frame the windows of the space in a dramatic angle turning them into light shafts soaring into the sky, Grantina manipulates the architecture of the exhibition space so that the walls seem exceptionally thick, giving the whole space a darkened vault-like enclosure which seems to be cloistered underground. Sculpting the light that is directed into the space *The Natural History of Tan* hits the skin of the figures inside the space as the latter becomes a secluded grotto. This motif of the skin continues in *Buff in Bloom, Glow and Thumos*, a group of sculptures shown in the frame of the group exhibition *Adhesive Products* at Bergen Kunsthall at the same time, comprised of resin-stiffened spandex, suspended from electrical cords, interspersed with luminous plastic strings and with gaping openings of bent metal ventilation pipes. The outer shell of the works is skin colored and leathery – “Buff” originally referred to the color of a buffalo's skin. They recall hollowed out nudes, reposing open-air, each bearing tiny traces of personality, such as the accessories of a grand dame: a fluffy garland and pouting aluminum wings; bright green curls and blue-ish veils. Yet, their cast-off skin bears no flesh. The skin is not substance but threshold, an interface that does not divide an inside from an outside but assembles contact, where light and surface momentarily hold shape before shape-shifting again.