

Between Myth and Fact, Wonder and Disillusion

On the work of Adéla Součková for Chalupechy catalogue

Michelle Levy, October 7, 2018

Adéla Součková is a woman who does not communicate for the sake of mere politeness (there is no time for that), but rather for the genuine purpose of human connection. Her words behave like multi-dimensional transmissions that hover around you, some not even reaching your ear before entering your subconscious. You may find yourself listening, with poise, to the liminal space between her words as you work out the puzzle of ethics she spreads before you. This may sound more like a legend than a person, but who are we, if not a composition of legends?

Human nature compels us to simplify and classify our experiences to make sense of what is beyond comprehension; we create and adhere to world-defining narratives that give our existence meaning and purpose. Similar to when we enter adulthood, we mourn the loss of childhood-wonder; in the information age, we mourn the loss of a sense of unity that we found with earlier faith in higher powers. But if we are honest with ourselves, we know this faith hasn't really vanished, it has just changed form. When we stripped away old, "unenlightened" beliefs to get closer to the rational "truth," we replaced these tenets with new systems of rationale that contain (as they are human-made) their own biases and fictions. Technology, facts and data--serve to help our civilization, but also to harm it, as these systems are also used as instruments of power without the greater good in mind.

Adéla Součková strives to highlight our vulnerable position when we adhere to any established system of knowledge religiously, no matter how infallible it may seem, as it makes us ignore our own intellect informed by experiences, perceptions, curiosities, and intuitions. Granting voice to a cosmos of reimagined signs and symbols, Součková plays the role of a post-humanist oracle for this human condition. She creates environments that suspend between myth and fact, wonder and disillusion, weakness and power, challenging us to recognize that in order to survive and persevere with decency, we must negotiate within the continuum of these states of being. Součková's art-making practice is holistic and epic in form, manifesting in multiple media and frequencies. A major theme or character that appears throughout her work is *time*. We find ourselves at a point right now between the middle and the end of our existence on the planet, frantically driven by the urgency of current plights. We have to race to keep up, and yet, we need to take a step back and slow down in order to comprehend the eons that led to this moment.

Součková's environments combine still and time-based work, often anchored by drawings in sprawling scale, made across walls and other surfaces. The drawings, primarily made with charcoal, are quick and not precious, with visible erasures and changes, conveying an autonomous fertility and dynamic living urgency through their scale and proliferation. Employing a suggestively naïve, prehistoric style of image making, Součková spins a unique, quirky cosmology mixing ancient and modern symbols that, imbued with irony and playfulness, seem to have a life and consciousness

of their own. In *Virtual Cave and Golden Cage* (2016), the artist sets up a conversation between primal religious worship and modern reliance on digital technology. Immense hands reach down, shooting roots out from their fingertips, or reach upward as they morph into waves being channeled into wifi signals; GPS drop-pins appear interspersed with pictograms of eyes; and a human figure has been erased and replaced with the form of a pixelated prehistoric Mother Goddess figure. The repeated eye symbols could represent the ubiquitous superstitious evil-eye, the “third eye” of intuition, or the ever-watchful eye of a divine being that has become interchangeable with modern surveillance. The goddess, the earliest human-made deity object intended to be used as an anthropomorphized, worshipable form of Earth, now has reincarnated itself in a digital register to deliver the message: “I ate all your ancestors.” The image and quotation comes off as comical at first, but there is a sobering aftertaste: we have severed our original connection to the Earth, and now must pay the consequences.

Building on the theme of Mother Earth’s fury, the pixelated Mother Goddess figure expands and multiplies in Součková’s synthesizing exhibition, *On the Earth Awakening from a Restless Dream* (2017). Here, a series of manifestations of these digital-esque Earth deities appear as large-scale potato prints on indigo died fabric tapestries, hung in a circular formation suggestive of sacred space for worship a la Stonehenge. The potato print, one of the most recognizable elemental forms of mark making taught to children across time, and derived from a root vegetable of the Earth, is used to create each pixel, an ironic symbolic gesture of the cannibalizing cycle from organic to synthetic. In a generous one-liner gesture by the artist, the tapestries are anchored down by real sprouting potatoes—the sprouts may be perceived as the Earth’s disciples, showing their resistance by rising up in the opposite direction of a download.

The use of potatoes as a tool and symbol in the *On Earth ...* installation is just one example of Součková’s purist theatrics; another is her use of indigo dye in the tapestries in this piece, and also in future iterations of her work. Indigo was originally extracted from plants, and was one of the oldest, most common dyes to be used on textiles. The color is believed to signify intuition and truthfulness, a harkening to the return to ones own instincts and devices of perception. Indigo has gained greater significance within the New Age movement, which believes in the recent appearance of an indigo aura for the first time in human history. Indigo Children born with this aura, represent an evolution of consciousness, exhibiting unusual cognitive abilities and gender fluidity. This theory places children in a sacred realm of wisdom and authority that is realigned with the universe. Whether Součková subscribes to this as theory or myth, *On Earth...* yields its power through the voice a savant child – representing both the future, and betrayed innocence. The soundtrack that fills the space, giving off an ambiance of timelessness through Indonesian inspired gamelan music, is anchored by the recorded orated poem of a child who speaks on behalf of the Earth. We pay close attention to this prescient voice with both respect and fear. The child’s tale moves from the Earth’s creation and the development of its relationship with humanity, to its feelings of anger and disdain toward human behavior, to full-on violent threat. The Earth has been misused and forgotten, and has decided to reclaim itself:

You—Children of rationality [...] with information without wisdom, [...]

You see my hands as your hard-drives, my flesh as your data, my bones as your wires, wires under my oceans. You see my hair as neural networks feeding your virtual needs [...] I have returned [...] to gather my body parts visible but unseen, raped by your misconceptions [...] I shall devour all your generations [...] all that has been and has is yet to come [...] to freshen my air to purify my fire, to fertilise my land. My waters will rise.

Most adults have experienced the humbling effect of a child's brutal directness that sheds light on our own complicities and bad behavior. Souckova's power of communication comes from her ability to dance between the prescience of innocent childhood play, and adult disillusion, using humor, lightness, and the appeal to our own inner child to draw us in deep enough to the theatrics of the work that we experience its bite. These works mentioned are key to Souckova's greater practice, characterized by a tension created by being seduced by the charm of the narrative, while also feeling gently scolded by it. Her chorus of symbols is innocuous enough, until we pay closer attention to our own implication within it. The real challenge this work sets before us then is, how do we apply this same attention to the world outside of the gallery space, where the stakes are much higher?