

## PRESS RELEASE



*Beauté du Siècle #3*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 120 cm

### **Sofia Leitão**

*Beauté du Siècle*

March 22 – April 28, 2007

**Opening reception Thursday, March 22 from 7 – 11 pm**

Guided visit of the exhibition by the artist on Saturday, March 24 at 5 pm

### **Caroline Pagès Gallery**

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Opening Hours: Monday-Wednesday 12am-5pm, Thursday-Friday 12am-8pm, Saturday 3-8pm and every day by appointment.

Photographic legacies are the main theme of this exhibition and through this artifice the preservation of a myth becomes more visible. Sofia Leitão (b. 1977 in Paredes) presents a specific historical reference that points to a world imbued with the cult of narcissism, a cult that focuses on beauty and the aesthetics of appearance, and one that inspired the artist to do research that also focused on the accompanying psychological state. The works that she exhibits, paintings and works on paper, derive from a likeness to an Italian aristocrat living in Paris, Virginia Verasis, Contessa di Castiglione (Florence 1837–Paris 1899), and who in the 19th century was considered to be one of the most beautiful women of the Parisian aristocracy, the exuberant lady of the Second Empire and Napoleon III's lover.

After the fall of the Empire in 1870, the divine Countess lived as a recluse, only going out at night, dressed in black. With the help of the Imperial Court photographer, Pierre Louis Pierson, the Countess idealised and elaborated many of her photographs, bringing together around five hundred over forty years. They are essentially photographs that celebrate her image, her body, attitude and habits, according to a ritual that she defined herself. In spite of the era, they are surprising for their obvious formal modernity. The importance of the photographic testimony left by Virginia de Castiglione is found, mainly, in the visual impression of a reality that was part of the 19th century, and if we look at the number of times these same photographs were to illustrate various publications of the time, we can see that it was embraced.

In terms of production methods, the work of Sofia Leitão has demonstrated a technical diversity, both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally. As a trained sculptor, the artist does not leave out the spatial concerns that the notion of volume gives the visual experience. These are almost always works surrounded by their own luxurious light, one that defines volume and constructs delicate forms in a kind of game between light and shadow.

One of the artist's main features is her concentration on cinematographic language, which characterises her choice of representation. Each image appears as the coming together of specific elements that, according to Sofia Leitão, "[...] come from a process of synthesis", making possible the formulation of scenographic environments that explore the dramatic perspective of performance itself.

The capturing of different nebulous states is intrinsic in her work, the somewhat diffuse exalted construction that combines the participants and figures in the indeterminate suspension of time and space. The identification of details is possible, however, our perception begins to collapse when the meeting of technical, conceptual and visual language creates a clear suspension, making them so reminiscent of another time, as well as bursting with great modernity.

The technique that Sofia Leitão uses consists of the drawing of different designs in plastic stencils that she uses to create the image; then, she applies the colours with spray paint on the main support, be it canvas or paper. In these large paintings, colour is clearly the protagonist that functions as something that delimits forms and shapes, proposing a pictorial game in its overall monochromatic nature that is not only limited to visual perception but also has an underlying symbolic task. "The general aspect is characterised by the dilution of forms, as if it were a painting of a photograph, or a blurred still" (Sofia Leitão).

In 2000, Sofia Leitão finished her Fine Art degree in Drawing at ESAP in Oporto and in 2005 she graduated in Sculpture from the Faculdade de Belas Artes in Oporto. In 2003, she exhibited *Contra Péssimos Hábitos* at Maus Hábitos in Oporto. In 2005, she had an individual exhibition *Soirée* at Galeria MCO (S Museum), Oporto and participated in three collective exhibitions: *Anteciparte* Selection in Lisbon, the 13th Cerveira Biennial and *100 Desenhos* at Maus Hábitos in Oporto. In 2006, exhibitions included the *Auto-retrato numa lente convexa (Self-portrait in a convex lens)*, again at the Galeria MCO (Chez Duchamp) and *Gala*, Galeria MCO (Ground Floor), Oporto. In the same year she participated in the collective exhibitions *Young Giant Painters* at the Galeria MCO, Oporto and *Surrounding Matta-Clark* (curated by Paulo Reis) at the Galeria Carlos Carvalho in Lisbon.

Her works are found in private collections, particularly in Portugal and Spain, and are part of the PLMJ Foundation collection in Lisbon and the Ilídio Pinho Foundation collection in Oporto.

Rita Santos, February 2007  
Caroline Pagès Gallery

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