



las aventuras de Volitia:

SUNTRAP

Melissa Marks

una instalación
para
Joya: arte + ecología

Marzo 2011

Cortijada Los Gázquez
Vélez Blanco, 04830
Almería, España.

www.losgazquez.com

SUNTRAP

Adventures of Volitia:

Following the success of Melissa Marks' 2010 residency at Cortijada Los Gázquez as part of the **Joya: arte + ecología** program, the artist now returns from New York to complete a 100 sq. meter hand-drawn installation entitled SUNTRAP.

The installation will begin on March the 8th 2011 and finish around the end of the month, 31st March.

There will be a gathering for the inauguration of SUNTRAP at 12.00 hrs on the 27th of March to which all are invited.

The event has been organised by **Joya: arte + ecología**. Cortijada Los Gázquez - creative retreat / eco-guest house is a sustainable, contemporary cultural and creative destination run by artists, designers and ecologists located in the Parque Natural Sierra María - Los Vélez. Almería. Spain.

"We believe this event to be an inaugural milestone in sustainable and cultural activities within rural Spain. Whether it promotes tourism or community action the contemplation of contemporary Fine Art in the natural environment is a unique opportunity and a force for change".

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a site-specific drawn installation by Melissa Marks at Cortijada Los Gázquez

“SUNTRAP...”

Trick or invitation? Volitia as bait. What's the catch? Preservation, endurance, tolerance. What else? Light, warmth, strength. Volitia is a live-wire, trapped energy, a viable seed. Her growth inside the enclosure is real. Performed, yes - also, real. It is her space to live in.

Always moving, Volitia aspires to symmetry. A steady, even balance - slightly out of reach. No wonder she repeats herself. She's too disorganized, she'll never make it. Natural entropy in action. It's something to strive for, symmetry. Agreement, consistency, equality. Hard to manage when there is only a way in, and no way out.

Reflection seems possible. It's everywhere inside the trap. That's where the power is - reciprocal skies - the bottomless surface she stands on! Vibrant, resonant, self-renewing. Use it, reflection, and find surprise; crazy paths, weird flowers, rocks carved by water, marks inside caves. It's not an ambush at all, captured fun, really. Sustenance in the fullest, grandest sense.

Context is opportunity, a starting point. So what if there is no way out, that is the beauty of the trap.”

march 2011

Joya: arte + ecología
www.losgazquez.com

What I see when I look at the work of Melissa Marks (from the perspective of another artist). **Simon Beckmann. Joya: arte + ecología**

She draws a fine line between abstraction and figuration, never transgressing the territory of one or the other. The drawings are in panels, the edges being the edge of the paper, a corner where the plane of one wall meets another. It's a 'drop down' panorama, an unfolded landscape, an expanded, sometimes exploded, fragmented floribunda of life form.

When coloured with pencil crayon, bitter orange, pink and the Florentine painter Uccello's red, I can see his Battle at San Romano. I see an element of his compositional devices, his playing with linear perspective. But Marks' work transcends the need to play with perspective. Marks plays with time, for this is like animation. Works on paper are long, detail can't be read in one viewing. Like the Emperor of China surveying a cartographer's map of the Yellow River, it's length necessitates the viewer to move from left to right. We move from one scene to the next and within each movement we have a lapse in time, a change of scene. Before we were warm, the movement aggressive, broad sweeps of colour crash through purple-crimson garnets casting explosive gravity defying splinters to the sky. Then next we are before frozen water, still reflection and the soft yellow light of dawn.

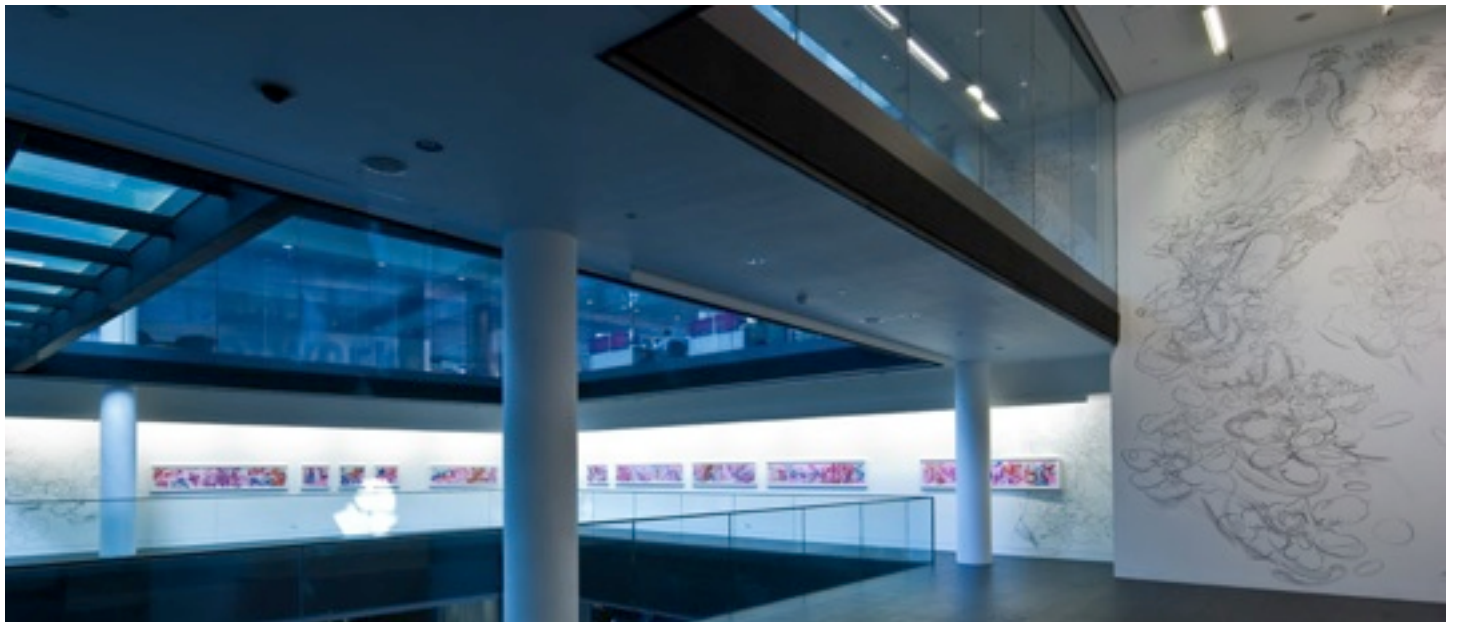
So Marks unfolds a story, a chain of events and like the work of Hayo Miyazaki there is no good or evil. Sympathies switch, there is no clear victory and the relationship between Volitia (the heroin of her work) and nature is cyclic. So here is another fine balance.



Suntrap manifests itself within an open but enclosed space within the body of a greater edifice, Los Gázquez. Volitia resides here in our roofless inner courtyard, an Andalucían patio, a place of shelter, a place of security both from the outside world, from those who might want to come in, and for those within who might want to get out. And at once this containment offers the opportunity to imagine other existences. Four walls, four sides of a piece of paper, four sides of a frame, a selected perspective on other worlds. The Brazilian artist Roberto Burle Marx created space within space. He used the living, organic world to create form and composition, colour, light and shade. His canvas was the

garden he designed for the Olivo Gomes Residence in São Paulo, and the passage of time in his work was the maturing of the plants and trees he planted there. But here, at Los Gázquez, we have the ecology of the pencil and brush, a monochrome ecosystem of the artist's imagination. The passage of light through our atmosphere giving colour nuance and hue.

There is much to admire in the works of Melissa Marks. I sub-titled this piece of short writing 'from the perspective of another artist'. That's me, the other artist, one who wishes his own creativity could take such a consistent and assured line as Marks. To have found one's visual and conceptual language so early in one's career and to be able to pursue this 'thing' for so long, the chaser never to be exhausted by the chase, is a very rare and lucky entity to possess. Long may the works of the imagination endure and define us, long may they sustain us and remind us of our place within this solar system.



Bloomberg SPACE. London. Solo exhibition.
Adventures of Volitia: Expulsion from Paradise



Expulsion - pencil and pencil crayon on paper



The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. Solo exhibition.
Adventures of Volitia: Heroic Burlesque



Volitia claps and flings - pencil and pencil crayon on paper (detail)

Criticism by **Susan Greenberg Fisher**. Executive Director of the Chaim Gross Foundation in New York City. She was until recently the Horace W. Goldsmith Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut.

Melissa Marks

COMMA

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Ripe

Paradise is a timeless ideal. It is a state or a place of contentment, harmony, and delight. In the book of Genesis, Paradise is the Garden of Eden, an enclosed, idyllic landscape where God created Adam and Eve. Their ejection from Eden, the Expulsion from Paradise, was accompanied by a painful psychic transformation from happiness to difficult self-awareness. The Expulsion was monumental in its tragedy. God even put a guard at Eden's gate to prevent their re-entry.

The psychic movement in and out of the paradisiacal experience is the subtext of *Adventures of Volitia: Expulsion from Paradise*, the current installation in Bloomberg SPACE by New York based artist Melissa Marks. Marks has chosen the Expulsion story as the organising narrative for the latest adventures of Volitia, an invented female character and alter-ego who has been the central protagonist of the artist's work since the early 1990s. The name Volitia comes from the word volition or "the act of making a choice or decision." Volitia's actions are not determined by some larger power but through her own choice and desires.

For this installment of Volitia's adventures, our heroine isn't driven out of Paradise; paradoxically, she is simply bored there and wants to "get THE HELL OUT," as Marks writes in her description of the project. "I never actually 'fell' out of Eden. I wasn't kicked out either" we are told. Volitia's subsequent journey is full of fits and starts, detours and U-turns, but it is of her choosing. Marks recounts: "Expulsion wasn't smooth, no one-way-ticket out." Volitia is born in the moment of Expulsion, for hereafter, she can act through her own free will and inhabit a world of her own making: "She began with a declaration of freedom, an attempt to live the idea of a self in constant state of remaking."

Perhaps this is why Volitia takes the form not of a person in Marks's imaginary world, but instead a state of embryonic formlessness. She is a mutable pink-and-white blob, like a cartoonish blown-up drip from a Jackson Pollock painting. Volitia is also hard to see in Marks's imagery, often resembling the rounded organic forms of the surrounding landscape—like Marks's signature flowering blossoms and bulbous blue ice formations—and merging with her backdrop to create a type of visual ooze analogous to a stream of consciousness. Sometimes she multiplies into several Volitias, who move around together like a school of fish. Unlike the showy male protagonists of traditional adventure tales—such as Superman with his red cape or Pinocchio with his long nose—Volitia is an elusive figure.

As an errant drip, a by-product of Abstract Expressionism, Volitia is also a comment on the tradition of post-war American painting. Marks's decision to create her artistic alter-ego out of the residue of this notoriously masculine

tradition enables her, through Volitia, to manoeuvre between its chauvinistic yet undeniable brilliance and her own contemporary practice. Marks reflects how "The drawn mark, or line, has been given superhero status and attributes, and yet, remains a basic reductive element—an anchor and building block with the power to elaborate fantasy." Through Volitia, Marks feminizes the masculine mark, perhaps implying that Abstract Expressionism, as historically described by its critics and creators, is more feminine than we have come to understand it.

Marks's visualisation in *Expulsion from Paradise* of the crucial moment when Volitia transitions from passive to active makes this particular installation a key installment in the "adventure" series. In Marks's earlier installments, Volitia's pursuits have already begun, starting in 1997 with *Volitia Bounces Off The Wall* (Art in General, New York City), followed by *Heroic Burlesque* in 1998 (solo exhibition at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut), *What is My Charisma?* in 1999 (solo installation at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York City), and *The Sorcerer's Swimming Pool* (P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York). Marks's additional installations in numerous group shows across Europe and the United States featured Volitia in *Battle Scenes* (2000) and *Water Scenes* (2001); followed by *Volitia Sees The Future* (2004), *Volitia Considers A Difficult Crossing* (2005), *Volitia Causes Meltwater*, *Volitia Uncorks The Glacier's Tongue*, and *Volitia Experiments With Latent Heat* (all 2006). Volitia sees, considers, causes, uncorks, and experiments; in the current installation at Bloomberg SPACE, however, Volitia begins. Marks's ongoing project of a non-linear, invented narrative featuring Volitia invites comparison to a number of contemporary artists who share her interest in this non-traditional approach to storytelling, including Matthew Barney and Ernesto Caivano.

In Bloomberg SPACE, Volitia's adventure plays out in an immersive environment of 11 colour-pencil drawings, each comprised of a varying number of 17 x 11 inch sheets, which hover around the balcony of the building. In conversation with these colour drawings is a monumental, two-storey wall painting, done in black acrylic and drained of colour. The oversized, turbulent wall imagery rises and falls in a full-on baroque mode, while the horizontal colour drawings enclose us in a petal-pink world. The landscape motifs of these drawings recall the beautiful realm of Japanese woodblock prints or *ukiyo-e* ("pictures of the floating world"), beloved by Impressionists like Vincent van Gogh and especially Claude Monet, whose own immersive *Water Lilies* serve as the ghost of Marks's installation.

Both the colour drawings and the wall painting feature Volitia(s) moving within an imaginary

landscape, yet diverge by offering up to the visitor two modes of viewing: the communal, shared experience of standing before a large-scale cartoon, as if in a Renaissance church or in front of a graffiti'd building on a city street, and the closer act of "reading" the sequence of colour drawings. Marks encourages this act of reading by appropriating for the colour pictures the conventions of the comic book, alternating between the long shot (using 7 or 9 sheets of paper), the close-up (3 sheets), and the extreme close-up (2 sheets). There is also a third zone in the installation where the wall painting and colour drawings overlap, mingling the categories of drawing and painting, colour and line, beautiful and sublime.

At the very centre of a long colour drawing, Volitia, now surrounded by a creeping blue ice formation at left and an elaborately embellished

orange tree on the right, does a double-take. She spins to the left and to the right, unsure of which direction to travel. It is a cartoonish, funny moment, like the whirling Tasmanian Devil. It is also the installation's *punctum*, or its core. For Volitia, life outside of Paradise is more interesting, despite its uncertainties and contradictions.

Susan Greenberg Fisher

Susan Greenberg Fisher is Executive Director of the Chaim Gross Foundation in New York City. She was until recently the Horace W. Goldsmith Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut.



COMMA is a dynamic new series of commissions enabling artists to experiment and expand their practice in relation to Bloomberg SPACE and its communities. Twenty of today's most outstanding emerging and established international artists will be invited to create new work, installations and architectural interventions in a fast paced succession of exhibitions. COMMA at Bloomberg SPACE reflects the core principles of innovation, engagement, adventurous creativity and education central to Bloomberg's reputation for arts sponsorship.

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www.bloombergspace.com

Recent projects and exhibitions by Melissa Marks...

An Exchange with Sol LeWitt - MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, USA).
January 23rd - March 31st, 2011.

http://www.massmoca.org/event_details.php?id=582



An Exchange With Sol LeWitt

*'During July 2010, I spent two weeks at La Cortijada Los Gázquez **Joya: arte + ecología** residency in Andalucía, Spain. I made drawings and explored an alpine desert made of distinct mountain faces and ancient patterns of cultivation, ascending rows of almond and olive tress. On my last day there I was invited to climb a mountain to a cave, a cave with a neolithic drawing. I was aware of the goal, but it wasn't an easy climb. I joked, "whoever thought drawing on walls was a good idea anyway?" I was making fun of myself, really, as part of my own practice over the last 15 years has been wall-drawing, the large scale performance of a drawn adventure on walls. Of course, Sol LeWitt flashed through my mind as well, the author of the first wall drawing I saw performed live at Wesleyan University, where I was an undergraduate'.*

At the end of the hot climb, after a tricky scramble up rocky shale, we found the cave. And after composing ourselves, we found the drawing. It was small, one figure or two. It was a bit hilarious to have sweated and suffered for no more than eight inches of old art. We argued about what it was. It might have been two acrobats, one balancing on top of the other. It might have been a man with outstretched arms being swept away by a swooping vulture. There was a clear gesture and it was close to the sky. It was beautiful and very old and it was drawing.

I made a drawing based on that gesture. The title is "Adventures of Volitia: THE REACH" and I would love to share it with Sol LeWitt. I have compared the drawn mark and it's "heroic" history to a superhero. As much as I believe drawing is "performed", I also believe that once a mark is made visible, it reveals something essentially human. Whether it is thought or comedy or fear or need - it is a reach. Although Sol LeWitt's wall drawings are temporary in nature, the concept has been around and will stick around (so elegantly thanks to him.) My drawing is an attempt to honor the great wall artist and further the conversation with him. My fantasy of that conversation is incredible!

Melissa Marks 2010

SCRAWL - ART SPACE New Haven, Connecticut. <http://artspacenh.org/galleries/gallery1>

February 9, 2011 - March 26, 2011: Artspace presents **SCRAWL**: Drawing Writ Large!

On February 9, 2011, from 6 pm - 8 pm, SCRAWL kicks off to a running start with Sprint-to-SCRAWL. For seven weeks, 48 artists will work individually and in teams to transform the landscape of Artspace with simple materials and their own ingenuity.

SCRAWL was conceived by Artspace's Curator of Education, Martha Lewis, and is inspired by the Surrealists' *exquisite corpse* games. Each participating artist or team of artists is assigned his or her own portion of Artspace's walls, windows, or floors to work with, which connect with other participant's spaces within the main gallery at 50 Orange Street. The artists and teams create their spaces without being able to see what the artist next to them are doing, ultimately collaborating on one giant collective work that unveils March 25, 2011, with a closing reception.

In conjunction with the [Yale Centre for British Art](#) and the [Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum](#)

Selected Biography

EDUCATION

1992 **Yale University School of Art**, New Haven, CT, Master of Fine Arts, Painting

1987 **Wesleyan University**, Middletown, CT, Bachelor of Arts, Honors

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2010 **Vassar College**, Poughkeepsie, NY ***Solo exhibition*** – *Adventures of Volitia: Paradise, Again*
Cortijada Los Gázquez, Andalucía, Spain *Artist's residency* **White Columns**, New York, NY
Curated registry **The Drawing Center**, New York, NY *Curated registry* **Pierogi 2000**, New York, NY
Flat file

2009 **Bloomberg SPACE**, London, UK ***Solo exhibition*** – *Adventures of Volitia: Expulsion from Paradise*

2007 **Pierogi 2000**, Brooklyn, NY *Traveling flat file*, Leipzig, Germany **First Run Gallery at Emergency Arts**, New York, NY ***Solo exhibition*** -- *Spring Festival: Ice Bridge with Blossoms*

2005/2006 Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK *His Life Is Full of Miracles*, Animation Videotheque

Cortijada Los Gázquez

creative retreat / eco-guest house

with **Joya: arte + ecología**



At a thousand meters above sea level, **Cortijada Los Gázquez** is an 'off-grid' destination for creatively minded travellers high in the mountains of Andalucía.

In the heart of the 'Parque Natural Sierra María-Los Vélez', this 'eco-chic' guest house and 18 hectare farm resides within a place of extreme natural beauty, profound peace and tranquillity and an awe inspiring wilderness, in one of Spain's most dramatic alpine deserts.

Cortijada Los Gázquez combines two of the principle ideas fundamental for people who love peace, inspiration and the natural world, ecology and creativity.

As a guest house Cortijada Los Gázquez has a benign influence on the earth making power from the sun and wind, cooking and heating with wood and recycling everything.

As a creative retreat Cortijada Los Gázquez is a place for the expression of art, design and creativity in all it's forms. It is a place where one can withdraw from everyday life and focus on one's creativity in a culturally stimulating environment.

Joya: arte + ecología is a 'not for profit' program for professional artists from all around the globe designed to encourage creativity around the issues of climate change and sustainability. Contemporary Fine Art has the transformative ability to possess these abstract concepts and turn them into conceivable realities and as a consequence bring these concerns to the popular mind.

A landscape character assessment establishes that this region, as with many other, is a managed landscape, wild as it is. And here in southern Spain we are on the European forefront to the consequences of climate change. This gives Los Gazquez / Joya: arte + ecología a unique opportunity to examine through the combination of contemporary culture and ecology a means to interpret change, preserve communities, live sustainably and exist as an integral part of an ecology system.

CULTURAL AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Within the context of tourism we are unique. We combine not just 'green' eco-chic accommodation with contemporary Fine Arts. We combine pro-active bespoke designed sustainable solutions for living ecologically combined with a creative atmosphere where guests come to participate and be witness to the thoughts and productions of contemporary art in a landscape of outstanding natural beauty.

Acknowledgements...

We would like to thank Melissa Marks for her hard work and unwavering faith in the Joya: arte + ecología project. Her dedication to our creative ideals has been a source of inspiration that will endure.

We would also like to thank Gonzaga Gómez-Cortázar Romero our communications coordinator for his hard work and patience in translating and promoting so much of our project.

Simon and Donna Beckmann

founders of Joya: arte + ecología and owners of Cortijada Los Gázquez creative retreat / eco-guest house.

