

The Ritual of the Snake. Osomort-JAHD.

Opening: Thursday, April 29th 2021, 12.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Exhibition: 29.04.2021 – 30.06.2021. Tuesday to Friday from 11.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. and Saturdays by appointment

Following the stele of Aby Warburg with the last project *Pathosformeln*, Estrany-de la Mota Art Advisors is pleased to present a work-in-progress project by the artist José Antonio Hernández-Díez (Caracas, 1964) which will be developed over the months April, May and June. The artist will enter into the imaginary of his artistic production, altering it, reorganizing it and creating his own *Atlas Mnemosyne*, just as Aby Warburg did.

Within each population, the idea of the snake arises from a dualistic conception of opposed subjects, the good and evil, as we could observe since Ancient Greece and throughout the entire Christian tradition. Therefore, the snake appears to us, until today, as a mysterious and ambiguous figure, a *phármakon*, as the Greeks would have called it, capable at the same time of providing life and condemning to death.

Throughout history, the snake has not only been associated with the opposing poles of good and evil, in many occasions its initiatory character and its relationship with knowledge have been highlighted. In fact, the snake that appears in the biblical episode of the "Fall" (Genesis 3:4–6) induces Adam and Eve to sin, but it also opens the door to knowledge. At this point, there is an affinity between the animal and another organism in the natural world: mushrooms. Several examples certify the veracity of this analogy, for example, in the frescoes found at the chapel of the French abbey in Plaincourault¹, at St. Michael's Church in Hildesheim (Germany), reaching our territory with the wall paintings of the apse of the church of Sant Sadurní de Osomort, in the region of Osona. In the three sites we could find the representation of the figure of Eve next to the Tree of Knowledge, just before allowing evil to conquer her. But in the examples of the three churches mentioned, the fruit of the tree is not an apple, as popular tradition indicates, but it represents with absolute and definite clarity a mushroom, an *Mmanita muscaria*.² In the exhibition, JAHD has been able to cross the centuries, reproducing in graffiti, the scene of the apse of Sant Sadurní de Osomort.

The consumption of hallucinogenic mushrooms is a widely extended practice within different cultures since the narcotic power of mushrooms is considered a way of access to knowledge and higher worlds. In fact, in China and Japan, according to an ancient tradition, there is a divine mushroom considered the source of immortality, while in India, according to a certain doctrine, after eating this kind of mushrooms, Buddha immediately plunged into Nirvana.

Another emblematic example is recounted in his day, the vice president of J.P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated and former American journalist, Robert Gordon Wasson who, in May 1957, published an article in *Life* magazine about the intake of hallucinogenic mushrooms during rituals practised by the Indians of the Mexican region of Oaxaca.

1 Marchand M. & M. Boudier, Bulletin Société Mycologique Française, vol.27, pp.31–33.

2 González J.A. *Eva y la manzana*. Revista Murciana de Antropología, nº2, 1997. pp. 17–39

3 GORDON WASSON, R., *En las sierras de México, un banquero neoyorquino participa en antiguos ritos practicados por indios que acostumbra a masticar raros hongos alucinantes*, Life Magazine, 13 de mayo de 1957, págs. 100–147.

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Wasson himself personally witnessed two rites officiated by the healer Eva Méndez and, speaking of the hallucinatory state caused by mushrooms, he affirms:

“The visions seemed more real than any object I had seen before with my own eyes. [...] I saw the archetypes, the “Platonic ideas” that underpin the imperfect images of material life”³.

Wasson’s journey was soon emulated by internationally successful public personalities such as the Rolling Stones, Walt Disney, and John Lennon¹, who contributed to turn the consumption of “magic” mushrooms into a mainstream phenomenon, far from its folkloric and ritual roots and filtered by a capitalist and western gaze.

The multiplicity of discourses and cultural interstices that we have just mentioned leads us to the works of José Antonio Hernández Diez that are present in the project. These are pieces that follow the Warburgian concept of *Pathosformeln*, apparently neutral images, however, they have an emotional and gestural dimension that envelops the viewer, thus making them a direct agent of the artistic discourse.

The sinuous figure of the Snake that she moves through the room shows us the confrontation between the venerated and the demonized, two positions that coexist throughout history. A story that becomes an eternal cycle, the eternal one that Nietzsche theorized. The piece of the *Wheels* that move the infinite gears of the future and of human knowledge. The mushrooms that sprout from the ground initiate us to metaphysical worlds, to “Platonic ideas” as Wasson would say, also becoming aware of a cultural problem in which the ancestral is turned into a market object and a form of power. The same power and marginalization that we find in the covers of the television controls, objects that are unpopular, but which, in reality, are active participants in an authoritarian logic in which the holder of the remote has the power.

Each aspect intertwines and becomes a *unicum*, in an initiatory journey conveyed through a pop aesthetic in which each object becomes a simulacrum more real than reality itself, thus deepening the contrast between ancient archetypes and their assimilation by the consumer society.

— Curated by Míriam Villar, Cecilia Aranyossy.

With the collaboration: Adrien Held,



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4 Wasson, R. G. (1957, June 10). *Seeking the magic mushroom*. Life Magazine.