

Sinéad Spelman *Turba*

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*Of all the burdens that may befall
Our load is lightened by your ways to enthrall
And most of all we've got the will to go on
Cos love's afloat upon that black stuff now.*

*And should the burning leave but ash on the ground,
The dust won't settle cos we're moving around,
Tonight the animals are echoing our sound,
From all our fire comes some black stuff now.*

*There lies in memory in the pit of flesh and bones
The liquid songs of love to drown out the drones,
And seeping into mountains, there turns to stone
To make obsidian for black dreams now*

Sinéad Spelman, born in Dublin in 1978, is an artist whose practice focuses on drawing, or rather a highly specific way of understanding visual storytelling. From there, the drawings travel to other related forms of expression, such as sculpture or even sound—sound that is actually song, that is to say, sound that is words. Perhaps for the artist, the start of drawing project has more in common with writing than with the visual arts. Despite having no literary pretensions, there is something deeply literary in her way of making art.

This can be seen in the title of the exhibition. *Turba* (Peat) is an organic material that forms from an accumulation of plant matter in damp places, creating a spongy mass with various uses in agriculture and gardening. However, here this reference maintains a terrestrial connotation, connecting the artist to a specific place, to an emotional belonging. In Ireland, it has traditionally been used as fuel for heating homes, as a simple, self-sufficient energy source. It is a sediment accumulated over millennia that, when burnt, provides

heat for a while. And so the earth is destroyed to offer comfort. A few days ago, the artist spoke about how she likes the word for peat in Spanish: *turba*. If something *te turba*, it troubles you, it confuses you. All of this comes together in her drawings.

Sinéad Spelman's drawings seem to operate as a form of visible thought. There is something in the simplicity of the apparently carefree lines, however, that is loaded with meaning. You can imagine her brush sliding over the paper with a movement that seems more like a release than a decision. No looking back. It is as though an inner world spilled over from her insides, travelled throughout her body and sprouted on her arm before flowing from her fingertips as a fine thread of ink. The drawing situates us directly in the moment when it blooms, once again, evoking writing or poetry.

The dreamlike scenes that emerge feature a domestic, intimate surrealism that seduces and drags us closer. Though seemingly simple, these drawings make us want to decipher everything happening inside them. We recognise what we see, but it troubles us. It leaves us uneasy.

As is characteristic of Sinéad's practice, the feminine figure appears repeatedly as a unifying thread and an unstable identity. It is a dysfunctional, fragmented body that expands and branches out into other forms. Vulnerable, introspective, sometimes solitary, often passive and consumed by itself. This idea is directly linked to peat, an organic material slowly accumulated over centuries and turned into fuel. A body that burns without ever having been entirely productive, but that has been forced to drive production. And when we give in to the production, it turns out it can no longer be.

The dichotomy between acceptance and rejection, between function and dysfunction, is one of the main constants in her work. It is something slippery, that resists pleasure, or pain, to voluntarily remain half finished.

At Espai Capella, the line – the zero degree of drawing – expands towards other structures that, however much they try to escape the page, are still drawings. Everything seems to refer back to that black, slippery, continuous line of ink. Everything seems temporary. Nothing imposes itself, as there is no imposition at all. The most solid move to slender metal bars, while the least stable turn into wires that, despite their fragility, hold up other loads, other emotions. *Turba* thus shows us an installation of drawings where the structure is not a container that holds, but content that moves forward and tells a story, subject to the same unease – the same troubledness – as the drawings. It is therefore a space of perplexity, of altered serenity where everything converges without any need for justification. In fact, the installation becomes song, as though everything you see in La Capella were more like words, lines, chords, vocals. And that is where everything lies, in song. It is simple. There is love, ash, body, stone, black stuff and the now.

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La Capella's curatorial team