

Matthew Brown

Lila de Magalhaes
Soup of the Night
July 17–August 21, 2021

About 3,000 feet below the surface of most tropical and subtropical oceans, a cephalopod called *Vampyrotheuthis infernalis* can be found gently swimming, unfurling its eight webbed arms. Translated to “vampire squid from hell,” the Latin name suggests a Gothic fiend whose predatory tendencies blossom in the dark. The vampire squid is accustomed to darkness but it doesn’t hunt, feeding only on bits of ocean detritus. What it does share with its namesake is an extraordinary relationship to time—one that exceeds human histories and life cycles. While fictional vampires defy mortality, the *Vampyrotheuthis* is a living fossil. Its ancient anatomical form has persisted virtually unchanged for 300 million years. Through eons of ecological flux, a thick, eternal night has not only provided its home, but its survival.

It’s in a similar kind of night, one heavy with time and turbid with life, where Lila de Magalhaes’s floral and faunal protagonists collide. In her bed sheet fabric works, organisms and their environments become inextricably embroiled in a silky, elemental brine that both stages and subsumes. All manner of biomorphic forms—including worms, winged insects, paws, breasts, and mouths—forge what Donna Haraway would call “generative oddkin,” making and unmaking themselves and each other and in ecologies of drops, tufts, swarms, and clusters. The artist’s layering of dye in translucent bleeds and thread in sharp, dense lines is a fine-tuned alchemy. Everything has its place, but the places are wrought with effervescent tension, teeming with precarity. Here, erosion becomes nourishment. Nourishment becomes poison. Poison is a salve. All membranes are permeable. All holes are alive.

Human hierarchies and classificatory logics melt into entanglements in this metamorphic, multi-species churn, “an over-the-top bounty, a temptation to explore, an always too many,” in the words of anthropologist Anna Tsing. Submission to this exuberance is an acknowledgment of feeling without knowing, a death wish of the sweetest, softest order. We want to ingest and be ingested, to feel eggs on our tongues, claws on our faces, pricks in our fingers, flames at our lips. To be ensconced in soft cocoons, to be all senses, all body. The artist’s ceramic eggs harbor perpetual promise of this fantasy, gathered in quiet assemblages at edges and corners. The rhythmic comforts of a swaying crib and a rocking chair coax us out at dawn, in at twilight.

Convention teaches us that night is a space of monsters and villains. Nocturnal actors are aberrant disruptors who threaten diurnal order in its least visible hours. Like the vampire squid, de Magalhaes’s nightlife pursues orientations that undo these very human dualisms. It swells with all the pleasures, guilts, pains, and imaginings of just being alive. At the end of the day, night is all there is. We’re all making worlds of oddkin, swirling in the same murky soup.

Text by Jeanne Dreskin

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Lila de Magalhaes (b. 1986 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) lives and works in Los Angeles. Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include: Spank the Sky, Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico (2020); Palace of Errors, Deli Gallery, New York, NY (2019); Cupid of Chaos, Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2019); Remote Control, Abode, Los Angeles (2017); Broilmarie, with Brigham Baker, UP STATE, Zurich (2016); and Motorfruit, Blood Gallery, New York (2015).

Select recent group exhibitions include: Center of the Core, organized by Lila de Magalhaes, Deli Gallery, Brooklyn (2021); HU, Real Pain Fine Arts, Los Angeles (2020); From the Xmas Tree of Lucy Bull, From the Desk of Lucy Bull, Los Angeles (2020); Turn Back, Turn Back!, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA (2020); Lararium, Deli Gallery, Brooklyn (2019); Coalescence, Museo de Angra de Heroismo, Azores (2018); Liquid Dreams, Francois Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2018); and Another Cats Show, 356 Mission, Los Angeles (2014).

De Magalhaes holds an MFA from the University of Southern California and a BA from Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, UK.

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