

ALICIA MARTÍN - FILIPPOS TSITSOPOULOS

WHAT KEEPS MANKIND ALIVE? PHIE21

May 20 - July 23, 2021

This collaboration between Alicia Martí and Filippos Tsitsopoulos has its starting point in the painting entitled *The Librarian*, by Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593).

This work was interpreted as a parody in which books - symbols of knowledge - make up the portrait of Wolfgang Lazius, humanist at the court of the Habsburg Emperor Fernando I. Arcimboldo ridicules the figure of the collector of books, more interested in acquiring them than in reading them.

Alicia Martín, for her part, presents a barricade made up of books and broken glass, echoing those built during revolutions to defend and to block the way, forming an obstacle that both repels and attracts. It makes reference to the so-called *glass delusion*, a psychiatric disorder registered in Europe between the 15th and 17th centuries, a time when glass became widespread as a building material. This delusion is associated with a strange type of melancholy and those who suffered it thought that their bodies, or part of them, were made of glass and could break.

Filippos Tsitsopoulos, from his involvement in theatre and performance, presents a series of videos featuring the masks he makes out of living materials. He explores the mask as a form of protection, as a disguise, something that identifies and isolates, and that makes reference to human resistance. Arcimboldo has undoubtedly served as his inspiration. Both share the idea that art, culture and fiction are fundamental for the lives of individuals, for resistance, freedom and the development of a critical spirit.

In our current period, marked by the pandemic, Arcimboldo's work can be understood as a defence of knowledge, which serves as a necessary shield and armour against fear and social isolation. Towards these prospects, it is necessary to remain alert, and develop a critical awareness as spectators.

The title of the exhibition is a verse taken from *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), whose lyrics ask about what keeps humanity alive in a system that makes the world a hostile place, in which silence, fragmentation, isolation and constant production predominate:

What keeps mankind alive?

The fact that millions are daily tortured,

Stifled, punished, silenced and oppressed

Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance

In keeping its humanity repressed

And for once you must try not to shirk the facts

Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts.