

## Obsessions and constraint – Kalliopi Lemos

*“and covered her all over with soft linen”* [Sappho Frag 100]

*“And cold sweat holds me and shaking  
Grips me all, greener than grass  
I am dead –or almost  
I seem to me.”* [Sappho Frag 31b]

The poetess par excellence of the feminine, sensuality and desire, Sappho, offers to our contemporary thought a timeless reminder of the multifaceted forms of the way we communicate our feelings through our most elementary language, sensuality. The many shades this can take, its darkest sides juxtaposed to the longing for its warmest and brightest moments create in Kalliopi Lemos' work an incredibly inspiring force and tension. The tenderness evoked by the linen, soft bandages covering our bodies, creating a soft veil through which we mask our desires become an element of constrain that grips our body in a tight and almost cruel embrace. The same veil though, becomes the very object that shapes us, our thoughts, our presence in this world and through it the embodiment of our souls.

In each of the meetings we had with Kalliopi for the preparation of this exhibition, I faced the urgency of exploring this theme from her perspective; to be able to transmit and share this through words emerging from a distant past but still incredibly valid; to transform these feelings through the materiality of her works. Materiality and matter in their basic form have truly emerged as one of the core elements of Kalliopi's work. The inability to rid ourselves from obsessions, sticking to our bodies and letting only some undefined shapes emerge and escape, which I found in the warm wax of the *Deities*, was reflected and yet put in doubt by the candour of Sappho's verses. The feeling of constrain induced by the portraits trapped within the confined space of their box was complemented by the obsessive presence of their elements on the wallpaper. The bodies masked as much as protected by their veils acquiring their strength by the reference to an ancient frieze of a temple, a place of worship of the ancient gods, awe-inspiring entities who do not possess that thin veil constraining us, humans. Throughout my dialogue with Kalliopi, discovering the deep connection in her thoughts and thus in her work to all these topics has revealed the true complexity behind them.

To talk about Kalliopi's work is to talk about surface. Not as a simple and trivial first level of contact, a superficial and shallow reflection, but rather as a key element, as the membrane that allows us or constrains our communication. Surface, through her attentive reflection, becomes the substance of our feelings, the space allowing our desires to emerge as well as our inner conflict to be played out, made visible and shaped into communicative actions. The presence of the three black *Deities* is a central element in this regard. Governing our lives as external agents, in this instance they, their surface becomes an organic assemblage of thoughts that cannot escape and slits which trigger our obscure desires for knowledge of their interior. So what is left of our desires if we

observe the thin layer that constrains them? A beautiful and daunting image of our human condition, torn between action and thoughts, between a need to communicate and an inability to let go of the constraints that prevaricate them.

*All is to be Dared* is a poignant reflection on the fragility of these feelings and the thoughts generating them, on the ambiguity of the values we derive from them. But the demons recalled by Kalliopi are not just a reminder of our intimate space, in times of growing fear within our social and political spheres her works become a daunting reminder, a needed warning, of the dangers we face if we let our obsessions and individual desires loose.

Christian Oxenius