

MIFA GALLERY

ISABELLA'S DREAM- An immersive experience into her own world by artist and filmmaker Veronica Riedel.

Texts by curator Adriana Herrera PHD.

Can a film and a photographic series serve as a launching point towards other modes of perception and interaction with the world? *Isabella's Dream* is both a work of video art and a photographic record of a performance directed by Verónica Riedel herself in 2011. It stars a Guatemalan teenager with Down syndrome who was 14 years old at the time and who would go on to become the first fashion designer with that condition: Isabella Springmuhl Tejada, one of the BBC's Hundred Women 2016. The fact that today she is recognized internationally is only a reaffirmation of the conceptual vision of Riedel's work in two media, which turns the proper noun Isabela into a symbol for the dreams of adolescents with this syndrome in a world governed by profit.

Isabela dreams that she enters a grove in a way that, in principle, can connect us to the spiritual atmosphere that prevailed in the Pre-Raphaelite painting and its mirror relationship between women and nature. This dream depicts more of that continuity that seems to make the elements incarnate in the body, in a way similar to how summer is emanated in the translucent orange dress of the sleeping girl in *Flaming June* (1895) by Frederic Leighton. Isabela walks, barefoot, in her long white dress through the forest, and at times she hastens her pace or dances, turns around, and points out with infinite delicacy the branches that sprout from the trunks. She uses her hands to project dynamic shadow play on the leaves and also simply observes her feet on the vast green. She doesn't disrupt anything. There is a kind of celebration of being, immersed there in the forest, that one discovers by moving and stopping, and looking at everything as if your senses could recognize what Peter Wohlleben calls "The Hidden Life of Trees:" "... Forests hide wonders that we are only just beginning to explore... Trees experience pain and have memory," they are "social beings" that communicate with each other, and can share nutrients with the most vulnerable¹.

In the interaction between Isabela's feet and hands –visible signs of her additional genetic material– and the grove, a vital statement occurs that does not imply the undifferentiated identification of this adolescent with nature. Her dark-red painted nails establish the presence of the non-natural: she carries with her the burden of the culture of her species. So, what it reaffirms is the cultural value in a sensitive, attentive way, of relating to the Earth itself, which is not only an invitation for the minority population with Down syndrome in all regions of the world, but for every human being. There is a portrait in which Isabela holds the camera. She is the one who looks at the forest and simultaneously at us. Faced with invasive models and the dominance of what is devastating, there is a sensitivity to discover other modes of intelligence that could possibly enable us to relate to each other and each and every one with the other species on earth. The red enamel –culture– makes more visible the urgency of a pedagogy that, recognizing our differences, allows us to awaken our subjectivity and move us enough to begin to listen to the most subtle languages of the earth. The repetition of the game of silhouettes of her hands on the leaves in the polyptych is a reiteration of the touch on the world that nature offers us. The work presents a sensitive touch to all other forms of life, including the most humble, because in this mode of identification, humanity can find “the principle for all collective wisdom and action.”²

1. Wohlleben, Peter. *The Hidden Life of Trees. What They Feel, How They Communicate*. David Suzuki Institute, Greystone Books, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2015, pp. xii-3.

2. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. Basic Books, New York, 2009.

Verónica Riedel:

Multidisciplinary artist, screenwriter and film director , her works of art, photographs, installations, and videos have been awarded and exhibited in Biennials, Museums, International Art Fairs, and Galleries. She is also represented in important private and public collections. Her endless curiosity pushes her learn and carry through different disciplines as a way of renewing herself constantly, and her sensitive themes of justice and awareness are always present in her work. Riedel lives and works in Guatemala, U.S.A. and Europe.

