

"Infinite Vessel"

Dalila Dalléas Bouzar

"Infinite Vessel" is an immersive installation through which Dalila Dalléas Bouzar elevates an ancestry of art and humanity¹ surfacing into the present. The monumental, embroidered tapestry² is inspired by the rock paintings of the Tassili N'Ajjer site in Algeria. Setting out to this plateau in the Sahara located near the Libyan border, the visual artist encounters a Neolithic museum of extraordinary richness and a repertoire of forms from which she freely draws. A modular installation, "Infinite Vessel" serves as a space for reception, contemplation, or wandering. It brings together embroidered reproductions of human figures present on the site, which are mainly identified as feminine by the artist, as well as personal drawings (small beings, carnivorous plants, signs, and motifs) that respond to them, establishing a dialogue between artistic imaginations distant by several millennia, sealed by a central star. Inscribed in a cosmic and timeless landscape, the Neolithic bodies and artworks here constitute common goods of humanity that transcend ages and territories to channel a poetic and vital energy across generations. The deployment of textile techniques (embroidery, beading, sewing) that reveal graphs as testimonial as they are fictional forms the connection between the fresco and the framework, the latter working towards the discovery of a territory while constantly shifting the thread of its readings. The shifts between interpretations, bodies, and eras, sublimated in the preciousness of the drawings and ornaments, make "Infinite Vessel" a loom for weaving other historical narratives, open to the work of imagination, situated between free speculation and critical deconstruction.

Referring both to a container (from "vasculum" in Latin, meaning "small vessel") and to a means of exploring the world (the ship), Dalila Dalléas Bouzar's "vessel" directs attention within and beyond its boundaries. As a representation device, it presents itself both as a refuge, delineating a graphic space, and as an open window to the world, offering to contemplate drawings sheltered from view. The surfaces of the "Infinite Vessel" thus present a cosmic dimension, outlining a panorama that exceeds them on all sides, an overflow that is as much spatial as it is temporal. Spatial because nomadic, marked by Tuareg hospitality and the aspiration for free movement. Temporal because it allows the "primitivism"³ to engage with contemporaneity, to deconstruct Algeria's narrative by disentangling it from colonial stigmatization, and to reinterpret prehistory by integrating the Maghreb into it. These multiple dis-centering, embraced by the very form of the

¹ The site, **discovered** in 1933, brings together 15,000 recorded engravings dated between 10,000 and 5,000 years before our common era.

² 30 meters long by 3 meters wide.

³ Emerging at the end of the 19th century, "primitivism" is linked to the colonial, industrial, and scientific context, as an idea constructed with and against modernity, in opposition to what is considered rational and civilized.

tent, a mobile habitat inseparable from the body that occupies it, also have the effect of opening our eyes to the present, from the crisis of welcoming migrants that our liberal democracies are weathering to the murders of Zied and Nahel, victims of police brutality depicted on the memorial wall to those disappeared. By linking ancestry, a temporal regime witnessed by no one directly, to these tragic social facts equally rendered invisible, "Infinite Vessel" responds to the same desire to implement what we do not want or cannot see.

The iconography present in "Infinite Vessel" belongs as much to scientific realism as to mystical symbolism, faithful to a dual aesthetics common to cave art and Dalila Dalléas Bouzar. Without subscribing to the hypothesis of their domestic functionality or to that of a magical-religious usage, she primarily approaches these cave motifs as signs of the artistic imagination of the earliest humans, as complete works that she regards without exoticism or distance, but rather inscribes them into an expanded history of forms, styles, mediums, and techniques, conceived horizontally. The cave drawings, the radical simplicity of their lines, and the graphic modesty that characterizes them, can equally refer to urban graffiti as to abstract painting, to naturalistic wallpapers as to the schematic aesthetics of certain avant-gardes. This semantic and iconographic repertoire thus proceeds with a formal leveling that allows navigation between territories and temporalities conducive to the elaboration of new narratives. Some figures—flying, gigantic, half-animal—can thus fuel an extraterrestrial hypothesis about the origins of humanity or, conversely, appear as a sign towards a civilization of the future. Here we find Deleuze's assertion that nomadic cultures were built against the verticality of history. The nomads, he says, are those who leave indelible marks, indelible because they are moving, always reinvented, which, like the sand of the desert, fade here to reappear elsewhere⁴. "Infinite Vessel" offers to navigate between such elusive traces, without past or future, becomings withdrawn from the linear comprehension of time.

Like a nomadic atlas, a word that links geographical and anatomical meanings⁵, the installation connects the cosmic body to the organism, the infinitely small (the blood vessel, the DNA strand) and the infinitely large (the celestial body, the history of humanity). The vessel is thus this body that we occupy all our lives, this object that is both phylogenetic and ontogenetic, collective and individual, which unites us and distinguishes us. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar sees it as the site of a phenomenology of the affected body where the "flesh of the world"⁶, to borrow Merleau-Ponty's words embroidered on the tapestry, echoes that of the own body. The anatomical heart drawn on the carpet at the center of the installation says nothing else: "Infinite Vessel" is an invitation to take care of the other, to show gentleness and empathy. The affective body is also libidinal, charged with an eroticism that emancipates these desiring women, and for one of them, erect, mirror-figures of the predatory plants that adorn the fresco, the warrior nature that, in them, forms the crucible of

⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, « Traité de nomadologie », Paris, Minuit, 1980, p. 432 and following.

⁵ The Atlas is the name of the first vertebra.

⁶ This notion opens *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (Paris, Gallimard, 1988).

sovereignty. This empowerment also contributes, following the work of Françoise Héritier, Marylène Patou-Mathis, or Jean Guilaine, to rehabilitate them as fully-fledged artists in the history of the Neolithic, and to fight against their systemic invisibilization in meta-narratives about art and humanity.

“Infinite Vessel” is the fifth piece of its kind created by Dalila Dalléas Bouzar. Embroidered tapestry has imposed itself in her work for its ability to connect the feminine, the collective, and the ritualistic. Produced during workshops conducted with professionals and amateurs in Tlemcen, Algeria, the tapestry mobilizes gestures that transcend ideological or cultural enclaves—from embroidery on North African velvet to beading from sub-Saharan Africa—to turn their initiatory character, mostly linked to marriage, against itself. The inaugural performance thus relies on the activation of an attribute of power, a luxurious burnous⁷ including figures of animals (pig, dog, hyena) and giants, in a purification ritual that aims to liberate dominated bodies and free them from hegemonic narratives. In the tapestry, this emancipative act lies in the use of gold in the sewn talismans, a way, once again, to symbolically ward off the authority that seeks to subdue them. Made from melted gold coins, stamped "French Empire," and family jewels, they make it possible to transform the memory of colonization and patriarchy through an alchemical act. War booty, inherited treasure, the precious metal sheds its alienation to power (magical, political, economic, martial) to regain the pure gratuitousness of poetic form and ornamental design. Far from assimilating them to harmless finery, reducing the feminine, Dalila Dalléas Bouzar's "Infinite Vessel" allows these solar bodies, adorned with gold, to substitute the power of a world-making for the apparent lightness of their tapestry-to-become.

— Florian Gaité

⁷ Le burnous est grand manteau de laine sans manches, à capuchon.