

“Comfort with thorns “

We tend to have a positive image of bunkers because they promise refuge, survival, a hiding place. A hollow, subterranean or not, for protection from the outside and the hostile other. Satisfied, someone shows his house and says “this is my bunker,” and the one listening understands because one can’t live without private corners. Everyone, even people that live in the street, finds a way to construct a protective skin, an armor of cardboard or whatever to provide a minimum of intimacy.

In her most recent installations, Paula Toto Blake develops the notion the bunker from another angle, signaling that tendency towards isolation – that evidently marks and strengthens us– but also looking for the other, darker side of that protection.

The scene that she proposes in this exhibition is eloquent: the comfortable and predictable space that is the living room has grown thorns; the armchair, the small table, the lamp, and the clock are petrified and covered with a rugged texture, organic reminiscences of the some strange vegetable or animal state.

In that nature, the beings grow thorns, needles and pins as tools for their own defense. In the work of Toto Blake, the sharp points seem to be a somewhat suspicious mechanism that saves and kills at the same time. Confined in our small paradises of self-protection, we try to ease the suffocating presence of the public world without completely losing contact. Filtered by the mass media, reality might seem a little less aggressive. Less certain, more fictional.

The furniture in Toto Blake’s bunker includes a telephone and television, which take on the paradox of contemporary homes: more and more entrenched, more and more wired. The fantasy is that these networks offer the possibility of communication. Loneliness persists despite the networks. The thorns seal the latent weight of the threat and the risk, that in spite the shields still linger.

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