**Orchis**

*By Maria Claudia García*

During an aggressive winter night of 1913,  a group of women breaks into an orchid  greenhouse at the Kew Gardens in London.  This event is the departure point for *Orchis*;  Lucía Pizzani’s latest body of work.

 The word orchid comes from *orchis*; greek for  testicle, due to the shape of some of the plant’s  bulbs. The political and botanical connection arising from the demonstration at the orchid greenhouse, displays metaphorical elements that represent latent transgressions between women’s natural and social condition. The attack against orchids stands as the eradication of a life-giving essential masculine organ. The executors are the new subjects of the social environment that influenced the political consolidation of the British Nation: women, who had recently used her right to vote for the first time in history.

This intensely symbolic act – the damaging of such a fragile species – can also be seen as mirroring the condition of the woman; given that the exotic flower is highly manipulated, grown in isolating and overprotecting greenhouses, and removed from its natural environment.

The quaint orchid, native from certain geographical contexts like the tropical mountainous regions, has been studied by botanists for centuries. It has travelled to the dominant continents and it has been exhibited in sophisticated botanical facilities that try to recreate – inside damp glass showcases – the wild nature of the species. Lucía Pizzani, a Venezuelan in London, has undergone a similar path to her research subject. Her work has found an echo in various European contexts; it originates from an intellectual practice that unfolds in foreign lands, as her heritage adapts to alien situations.

*Orchis* starts as a fusion between the vegetal and the corporeal and it derives from a conceptual sequence Lucía Pizzani has been developing for many years. However, this set of works primitively displays social elements – concerning material and conceptual aspects – that act around the British suffragettes’ political empowerment and the destruction of the enticing flower at the prestigious greenhouse. The confusing generic content of the orchid – which shows protuberant shapes like those of male genitalia at the same time as its funnel-shaped column resembles the vulva – reflects from the biology upon society: An unresolved conflict between generic roles that the modern era imposed on men and women.

The research project for *Orchis* has the Victorian Era as a starting point; back then orchids were prohibited for women due to their exposed sensuality. Lucía exhibits formal and conceptual contents about gender relations through the flower’s metaphorical elements; they activate a botanical, hostile indeterminacy between the male and the female.

Lucía’s practice audaciously penetrates various processes and formats including performance, ceramics, photography, drawing and sculptural representations; these art forms link mental and sensory approaches that definitively have to do with a gender subplot. The works in this exhibition seem to derive from each other, and every single one exists as a distinct research process. From the botanical illustrations came certain drawings, which later helped the artist with the translation and transformation into ceramic shapes. These pieces were later used as a stencil for new ink drawings. The works mounted or made directly on mirrors, or other reflexive surfaces, activate the duality of the body and the being. Due to the the fragility of her image, the orchid projects the woman and the reflection of her morning.

Some aspects about the orchids’ historical evolution remain unclear: there are no fossil records of the species to trace back its origins. The flower was considered by the Catholic Church as an evil source pushing men into iniquities. Orchids were used by the Aztecs in their therapeutic rituals and longed for by Americans, causing the exploitations of their forests. Orchids return – in each of Lucía Pizzani’s pieces – to the “vandalic” demonstration at the greenhouse. Her works go back to the blood on the pieces of broken glass that revealed the identities of the intellectual and material authors of the destruction of these flowers that successfully grew at the British greenhouse; they also evoke the flyers scattered around the floor, inviting women to vote. One could say that these works also remind people of a self-destructive cycle in a complex generational dislocation, unresolved and ever changing, about femininity.