



**Stella Rahola Matutes**  
**THE SILICON DAWN**

Site specific installation (carbon tiles, fertilizer and silicon sculptures ) at  
Goldsmiths College, London, within MFA Degree Show 2019

From afar, the landscape built by Stella Rahola Matutes is an organised ultramodern, sci-fi-esque city in which the light, reflection and darkness of the elements delineate a rhythm of ups and downs. It's surprisingly easy to imagine these objects flattening and becoming a cityscape silhouette. It has indeed been built by a tidy eye, the eye of an architect planning an urban space with the precise alternation of solids and voids.

But what we actually see when we get closer disrupts our expectations.

In the middle distance, the shape of the objects gains life through the opportunity of appreciating the material from which they are built. There is a certain tension at first, the uncomfortable feeling of something that doesn't respect the rigour of engineering. Even the most extravagant of the new cities - say Dubai or Nur-Sultan - can't hide the regularity and modularity of their technology. In this installation, instead, there is something clearly hand-made, a taste of the artisanal revealed by the erratic uniqueness of Rahola Matutes's glass towers.

Stepping closer and closer, until walking through it, the city reveals more of its logic. The vertical tapered towers, that develop in altitude, are surrounded by paths of black hexagonal tiles, layered so as to reach in different points different heights, but nonetheless expanding horizontally. The towers are the result of craftsmanship and are all different from each other; while the tiles are industrially produced and are perfect copies of one another. The towers reflect light, thanks to a chemical leagun containing silver and making the glass reflective rather than transparent. The tiles, instead, painted by the artist with carbon, result of an opaque dense black and thus absorb all light.

Yet, this all-contrasts system, in which everything appears to be the contrary of everything else, is built nonetheless on a fascinating analogy. The Carbon (of the tiles) and the Silicon (borosilicate glass of the towers) are indeed among the most similar elements on the periodic table. Both can bond with four other atoms at once, form long chains (polymers), and bind to oxygen.

These and other properties are crucial to the development of our carbon-based biological system. And is then easy to understand how many speculative argu-

ments have been built on the idea that, somewhere else in the universe, its chemical cousin silicon could be an alternative basis for life. Several science fiction stories feature silicon-based life forms, e.g. sentient crystals; while the scientific community, although generally sceptical on this matter, keeps open the possibility that silicon-based life could arise on a planet that is too hot for carbon-based life, since silicon bonds are much more stable than carbon at high temperatures. For now, silicon is already fundamental in our life for its role in technology and nano-technology, and for its use and potential developments in AI; for example, robots that can learn and 'feel'.

*The Silicon Dawn* echoes these speculations and research leads. The black hexagonal tiles linking to each other appear now as an evident representation of carbon. The irregular, organic-like, dark crystals that seem to grow as a bacterial colony on the edge of the tiles and form corruptive spots on the towers, can be imagined as a primitive form of life in an alternative biochemical ecology.

A warning though: the work is voluntarily ambiguous.

While drawing inspiration from sci-fi scenarios, ultramodern architecture and robotics, it inevitably anchors us to its crafty physicality. The viewer instinctively grasps how technique favourably compares to technology. In fact, the first connection in the artist's work between the silicon and the carbon is in the material relationship of borosilicate (the glass of the sculptures) that when melted is shaped with graphite (carbon) tools. Craftmanship clearly put 'man' at its centre, although used in a scenario that reminds of aliens stories and 'living' robots. The future time implicit in the scientific and fictional speculations is also contrasted by the link of craft to tradition and collective memory. The black structure of the tiles is not just connected by a sequence of horizontal links, as in chemical formulae; the tiles instead stay also one on top of the other in irregular layers, reminding the philosophical model with which Foucault analyses the stratification and formation of knowledge and social spaces.

Carolina Lio

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