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A Tribute of 4 × 10 Meters

Vanessa Beecroft

The first attempt to make an artwork, one I considered being able to belong to contemporary art, was my food diary. During a period of 10 years I recorded everything I ate daily. While drawings didn't seem qualifying for what I identify as an avant-garde tool, the diary and its immediate reference did.

At galleria Inga Pinn a group of girls dressed by me, were surrounding the diary, compensating, with their looks, the minimal shape and color of the now typewritten version of the book. The girls were the opposite of the book: colorful, loud, chaotic; they all had a relationship with the book due to the fact that most of them, if not all, had eating disorders and issues that I considered relating them to female saints or saint martyrs. They were beautiful, of a beauty that wasn't standard, they were melancholic but not depressed, they embodied what I identified as self-referents.

At the time I was a student and my thesis was the book of food (the diary) and another book on Miltos Manetas, my artist friend who I dedicated a large series of interviews to. The book title was "Referenti" (Referents). He was a male, I was a female.

While he was a referent for me I didn't feel I could be a referent yet. I had to find several more girls, an infinite group, to extend myself, my condition, my idea of beauty, of body and ultimately to create a form of art.



At the time, still in school, one important study I had been exposed to were the essays on aesthetics of Marx and Engels. What struck me was their concept of the particular and the universal which should have existed in a work of art.

That was a key for me to develop a work that belonged to me intimately, yet was represented by others, equal to me but separate from me, in unison.

For several years, I kept attempting referencing women in various configurations and colors. This led to various misunderstandings in which, rather than providing the spectators



with an emotional and visual imagery to observe, I presented images that triggered their fears, anger and taboos.

During this period, women in my performances changed color, their skin got darker, their status of "fashion models" as many wanted to call them, acquired controversy.

During this time I also worked on a project with the military, approaching the US Navy and realizing a US Navy SEALs performance, where real military were ordered to stand still and at attention in formation at the Museum of Contemporary art in San Diego.

They were real officials and my project was handled officials as a military operation.

I realized two of these and during the preparation of a third, who was supposed to take place in Italy at the Navy base of Pompeii, didn't pass the Pentagon approval.

Another instance in which my life became an artwork is the portrait of the *Madonna with Twins*. The encounter with two Sudanese newborn orphans at the Santa Teresa's sisters orphanage in that town, and my nursing relationship with them over the period two years became the subject of a photograph. This portrait served



me primarily as a compensation for the loss of proximity to them at my return home.

The fact that I used live bodies as a substitute for paintings and classical drawings is due to my dissatisfaction with my representation of the nude model.

Replacing the drawing with the model herself, led me to reiterate the exchange over and over again, enforced by the reaction of public who immediately attributed social issues and values to the performances and distracted me from the formal pursuit I was trying to attempt and dragging me to a realm I wasn't en-

tirely prepared for: the world outside of the art world.

At that stage my interest became “punishing” the outside capitalistic, colonialist and imperialist realm of consumerism, luxury, and racism, through the imposition of performance of women, which would evoke their own guilt. I was always referring to the art world formally and aesthetically, yet I had left that world of safety to enter a world that was no longer intellectually safe, no longer kind or experimental.

More recently, after a series of works using live casts of my models and live models in a few performances,

made of plaster and marble, I decided to mold the bodies myself, with the same intent, but using my own hands to create them.

These figures are reminiscent of the performances, but they are closer to me and unexpectedly closer to the original drawings that preceded the performances. They are distorted or characters—like, yet again self-referential.

Before this new production of heads, and drawings on clay and large classical deconstructed figures, there is a very large mural made of bodies of women of color, bodies that have been pressed on fresh clay and cast

with plaster. A mural that is like a performance that took place and has been printed in stone, forever to be remembered by the imprint of the women's presence. A monument, a battleground, a “bassorilievo” of a limbo where the bodies meet, separate, break, or show fine details of hair and body fragments, a breast, a pube, a mouth, breasts.

The women walked away and we are now left with this tribute of 4 × 10 meters.