

Labels for the exhibition in the Heidelberger Kunstverein

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

Opening on the 26th of November 2010 at 19.00

Exhibition from the 27th November 2010 to the 23rd January 2011

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

FAMILY COMPOSITION, 1997

720 photographs, each 15 x 12 cm

The investigation of the family as an attempt to demarcate one's own identity is a recurring subject in the early works of Cuenca Rasmussen.

In "Family Composition" the artist has a photograph of her nuclear family, like those created in the same format across the globe on a daily basis, reproduced 720 times. The six family members, father, mother and the four children, including the artist herself, wearing a blue t-shirt, are photographed in the 720 different constellations that are possible for six people in the chosen formation. The number of possibilities that arise from these six people in the selected formation can be calculated with the formula $6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 720$. Depending on the "position", the individuals in a family stand in a particular relationship to one another, through which a specific identity is created. By working through every mathematically possible constellation, Cuenca Rasmussen creates a metaphor for the variability of familial constructions of identity.

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

FAMILY SHA LA LA, 1998

Video, 4:24 min

During the 1990s Cuenca Rasmussen continues to turn her attention to her family and integrates this into her artistic work. The artist uses the family to reflect on their complex impact on the development and construction of identity.

For the video “Family Sha La La” the artist rehearsed a simple choreographed routine to the global hit “Sha-la-la in the Morning” with her family, a song that was very popular in the Philippines in the summer of 1997. It was practiced intensively for several hours. The video documents the 16th and final run through. All of the participants are dressed in black and form a geometric figure, that suggests coherence and belonging, which is, however, reversed in the more or less divergent executions of the same sequence of steps. Through the simple construction of this video Cuenca Rasmussen channels one’s attention to the large individual differences that are formed within familial structures.

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

ABSOLUTE EXOTIC, 2005

Video, 4:20 min, felt, 267 x 500 cm

Cuenca Rasmussen has successively expanded her exploration of the family into other fields, such as ethnicity and sexuality, which are just as decisive in the construction of identity. The artist accesses private, biographical experiences, which she condenses and revises until universal symbols for societal phenomena are created from them.

The video, which takes the form of a music clip, shows the drastically overblown art figure as an “export from Manila”, who was left by her partner for an “even more exotic woman”, a “half-mulatto”. Cuenca Rasmussen, who was born in Manila herself and grew up in Copenhagen, presents herself as an exotic beauty in a grass skirt in front of a backdrop of palm trees, both criticising and reproducing racist stereotypes. The work was created after the artist actually was left by her partner for another woman.

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

DISTORTED HEART, 2008

Video, 17:00 min

The interrogation of personal identity, that lies at the heart of many of Cuenca Rasmussen's performative videos and photographic works, is also decisive in the artist's documentary work. This video also reflects the artist's examination of her ambiguous identity, which is, on the one hand, formed by European rationalism and on the other by Filipino folk tradition.

In 2008 Cuenca Rasmussen travelled to her second homeland to have the traditional changes to the lifelines on her hand carried out, typical in Filipino folk culture. After her unhappy break-up with her partner in Denmark, her Filipino family advised the artist to have a particular branch of her so-called "heart line" removed. The video shows Cuenca Rasmussen during this intervention and one can witness her great scepticism about the effectiveness of the intervention.

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

THE ARTIST'S SONG, 2007

Video, 4:00 min

The identity of the performance artist, Cuenca Rasmussen, not only includes her family, her mixed ethnicity and her sexuality, but also her role as an artist in the global art market.

In 2007 Cuenca Rasmussen created a new art figure that precisely reflected this role. This form strode through the large sculpture gallery of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen in a strange, white dress with multiple protuberances. In a four-minute-long music clip the protagonist sings about the difficulties of permeating the commercial art market as a female, conceptual performance artist. For this purpose she recast her body as a sculptural object. The work was created at a time when artworks by several of Cuenca Rasmussen's male artist colleagues were achieving very high prices.

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COCK FIGHT SONG, 2006

Video, 3:00 min

During her journey to her second homeland, the Philippines, the artist discovers a feeling of foreignness in relation to the culture of the land in which she had spent the first ten years of her life.

In the work shown here Cuenca Rasmussen deals with the lasting impression that extremely brutal cock fights have left on her. She takes the aggressive and senseless violence of the fights, primarily enjoyed by men, as the provocation to create a new art figure. Between documentary footage of real cock fights in the Philippines, the artist can be seen in the role of a similarly militant and sexually charged cock. The text of the song that she sings in the film, gives the silence of the animal, sentenced to death, its own voice.

LILIBETH CUENCA RASMUSSEN

I WANT YOU UNDER MY SKIN, 2010

Plastic fibre, each 168 x 125 cm

For her newest work the artist has expanded her more than ten year inquiry into her own identity in a new direction. In contrast to earlier performative videos and photographic works, in which either the artist herself or her family are the centre of attention, Cuenca Rasmussen has now shifted the focus to others and their play with adopted identities.

Cuenca Rasmussen asked eight people in her circle to temporarily adopt a different ethnic identity. The portraitees attempted to portray their selected ethnicities as far as possible through clothing, make-up, bearing and expression. Through their heavily overblown cultural codes the “ethnics” almost appear to represent fashionable “looks” in a glossy magazine, which grapple with a visual rather than a real, socio-cultural character of the adopted role. The ornamental and embellished quality of the photographs have been intensified via their transfer onto carpets using digital technology.

In reading order from top left to bottom right: Mette Salomonsen as modern Japanese geisha, Bocar Semega Janneh as Caucasian businessman, Kasper Ravnhøj as Native American, Liva Cuenca von der Recke Beckmann as Ghanaian, Else-Marie Bukdahl as Arab, Toke Lykkeberg as Italian “Latino”, Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen as Afghan, Lynne Weiss Drescher as Brazilian.

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HOW TO BREAK THE GREAT CHINESE WALL, 2008

Vinyl, canvas, acrylic paint, 1,000 x 162 cm, video, 4:20 min

In 2007 Cuenca Rasmussen expands her investigation into constructions of identity and introduces art-historical role models into her work, who were predominately important pioneers in the area of performance art in the 1960s and 70s.

Cuenca Rasmussen restaged and carried out a total of 21 body-based works by artists such as Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, Ana Mendieta and Orlan. In this work she appropriates often ephemeral works from important predecessors of performance art and at the same time searches for ways of transcending this monumental chapter in art history. An artist working at the beginning of the 21st century must not only take on board private contexts, such as family and constructs of ethnicity, she must also provide art-historical archetypes and models that are seen as a spiritual inheritance or burden. The 21 re-enactments, that in reality lasted many hours, are shown using time-lapse video.

The wall and part of the floor are covered with spots in various colours, a pattern that references a performance by Yayoi Kusama from 1968. In 2008 Cuenca Rasmussen brought this performance back to life. The ten-metre-long canvas with streaks of black paint was painted by Cuenca Rasmussen with her hair during a re-enactment, just as Janine Antoni had previously done between 1992 and 1996 as part of the performance "Loving Care".