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UPenn's Art Institute Announces Free Admission for Five Years

Thanks to a gift from UPenn alumnus Glenn R. Fuhrman, admission to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at the University of Pennsylvania will be free to the public beginning on July 1, 2008. The gift will underwrite admissions for the next five years, allowing access to ...

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Don't Touch the White Wo

By Natalie Massone Saiph

Daniela Kostova performing her artwork

From September 16, 2004 to January 8, 2005, the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Centre of Contemporary Art in Turin, presents the all- female group show Don't Touch the White Woman, curated by Francesco Bonami. The exhibition presents the work of 19 artists from around the world: Micol Assael, Maja Bajevic, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Marlene Dumas, Ellen Callagher, Carmit Gil, Fernanda Gomes, Lyudmila Gorlova, Mona Hatoum, Michal Helfman, Emily Jacir, Koo Jeung-a, Daniela Kostaova, Senga Nengudi, Shirin Neshat, Shirana Shahbazi, Valeska Soares, Nobuko Tsuchiya and Shen Yuan. Their paintings, videos, sculptures, photographs and installations break the stereotype associated with their cultural backgrounds. Francesco Bonami titled the show after the Marco Ferreri film of the same name, where the Battle of Little Bighorn is re-staged in a biting satire against the backdrop of contemporary Paris.

As Bonami explains: "if, in his film, Ferreri identified the 'white woman' with the Western world and its mad genocides of other minorities and populations, the exhibition "Don't Touch the White Woman" looks at the orders enforced by Western society, based on its economic power, upon the rest of the world. The artists who have been invited to take part in this exhibition are from a diverse range of cultures originating in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States. They do not focus exclusively on their female identity; their art is political not because it directly confronts any political issues as such, but because the nature of their artistic language re-configures and dissolves certain pre-conceived boundaries established by certain western hegemonies."

he first feeling I had upon entering the exhibition space was that of wonder: I was walking though different, mysterious and unexplored worlds gathered together like a colourful composition of flowers. As I walked in, I was immediately attracted by the growing silent voices of the artworks: Nineteen strong individual voices with the same need of affirmation. . The woman artist is the compelling protagonist of this journey across so many different heritages, nineteen different ways of expressing their individual and cultural identity; each artist focused on a particular and individual priority. The identity of the woman as a unique human being, the woman as individual, the woman as artist with her language, that deserves the same respect as the men artists. "Don't Touch the White Woman" implies the effort not to destroy, not to denigrate, not to use violence, psychological nor physical: if you don't understand, keep distant, don't touch. Understanding means to enter the other's mind, the other's way of feeling, trying to catch a glimpse of what is inside another person's world: total understanding is far too complex and almost unachievable for anyone, but respect and comprehension are a right for every living creature, male or female. As Francesco Bonami asserts: "The exhibition is meant to be reflective of exactly that: autonomy, independence, and shameless pride in front of the world that denies that the real issues for a better, just and free society are not the obliteration of Al Qaeda, or the control of oil fields, but that in a large number of places a majority of people, women especially, are denied access to their own rights to perform freely their role as human beings. Yet the woman is a territory for which no war is launched in the name of democracy and freedom.... Don't touch the woman or just the white woman? Don't touch! is a violent order to a violent act. Yet, to think of the white woman existing in relation to a non white woman is an equally disturbing and perhaps more insidious concept than the idea of touching a woman in general."

Bonami invites us to enter a fragment of the female language: "The works of the artists reflects varying solutions, directions, and state of minds. The way the female artists aim to shape society and reality from within, seems more subtle and yet more direct than that of male artists...Essence, Action, Identity, Anxiety, Trauma, Violence, Anguish, Chaos, Dislocation, Language, Body, Longing, Sensuality, Spirituality, Metamorphosis, Madness, Underground, Distance, and Space.Nineteen points in a symbolic landscape..., their resistance to being absorbed by any controlling attitude unifies them into the complexity of the female gaze." (1)

Nineteen women tell their different and complex social reality from their individual point of view, using various media of expression. The Italian artist Micol Assael imposes her distressing minimalist installations, objects upon which time passes by, wears away and consumes, objects that go through a process of interminable erosion and inexorable annihilation. The Bosnian Maja Bajevic proposes "Hayku", a contemporary story that takes place both as a geographical and inner travel: the artist, who mainly works with photographs and video installations, communicates a strong sense of anguish, revealing the awareness of the violence spread in the reality we live in. The images presented by the South-African artist Marlene Dumas are clearly distorted records of our contemporary society, while the works of the Belgian Berlinde De Bruyckere spin around the vulnerability of people and nature: the human need for protection and warmth, partly denied by the brutality and violence that predominates reality. De Bruyckere's woollen blankets provide suffocating shelters, where pain and fear overwhelm the human needs for love and understanding. For the first time in Italy, the AfroAmerican performer Senga Nengudi realizes complex sculptures with a variety of natural and unconventional materials to fashion her works, from sand to pantyhose, creating harmonious and attractive compositions.

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SPECIAL PROJECTS



The sensuous installations of the Brazilian Valeska Soares investigate the relationships between inner space and outer space, between reality and illusion: how much do we live in one rather than in the other? Soares' research represents the opposition of elements by containing them within the light boundaries of control and desire, reason and emotion, structure and chaos, restraint and excess. The minimalist abstractions of the American Ellen Gallagher analyze social and racial conflicts through stereotypical images and powerful historical symbols. "The Gallery Carpet," by the Israeli Carmit Gil conveys the importance of social meeting and its meaning. The carpet is made in orange plastic material with carved wooden patterns in three dimensions that limit the orange space of the meeting. Various and particular materials are also used by the Brazilian Fernanda Gomes, her works immediately convey an extremely elegant visual impact: found objects and urban detritus can assume unsuspected shapes and significance.

The Russian artist Lyudmila Gorlova chooses to deepen her work in the contemporary image, telling minor urban stories immersed in the neurotic chaos and frenzy of our age. Violence, voyeurism and oppression are the main themes carried on by the Lebanese Mona Hatoum, who manipulates objects to communicate a strong sense of vulnerability and insecurity. The tension within these objects expresses the awareness of the precarious state we live in. The mysterious, dramatic and elusive landscapes presented by the Israeli Michael Helfman evokes a dry valley of tears through weeping willows. The photographs and videos of the Iranian Shirin Neshat questions the role of the woman in the Islamic society, the artist builds a strong tension in her video "Possessed", where solitude and violence is are weights too heavy to carry. In her conceptual project, the Iranian artist Shirana Shabazi doesn't extolify or over dramatize her subjects: she presents Iran through its contemporary daily life and society, searching both traditional representations and documentary photographs. Her works can be considered as a link between the European and the Iranian cultures.

The difficulties of communication are particularly explored by the Chinese Shen Yuan, who raises the issue of migration: in her installations, language becomes the subject matter of isolation. Space and Identity are, instead, the theme examined by the Japanese Nobuko Tsuchiya: her installations offer dynamic, light and elegant shapes, that find their balance opposing to heavy weights placed at the centre and at the bottom of the compositions. Finally, the Bulgarian artist Daniela Kostova directly explains the "entropic effects of Space", as Bonami defined her research, and her choice for the work she presented at the show: "Don't touch the White Woman is a very interesting project for me. I like the show and I met very good artists there. The choice of the curator to show such a variety of artists is related to the idea of liberated contemporary women art. My work is about crossing the borders between different realities, about transition. That is why I choose a curtain on which the image is projected. The visitor is invited to pass true it. In the video I'm using the blue screen as a metaphor of absence and displacement. I'm sure you know how the blue screen technique works. It is a powerful devise which could help you to bring two different realities together. I'm looking for similarities between them and for communication. I'm taking the blue screen, which represents the place where I'm coming from and I'm going on the street. The communication is not always successful but as you see I keep trying..." (2)

The works of these nineteen artists reflect a panorama of the social changes occurring throughout the 20th century by focussing on the exceptional events of artistic, cultural and social interest.

Along with the "Don't touch the white woman" exhibition, the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo presents a rich program of connected events, that complement and evoke reflection and meaning along the themes confronted by the nineteen artists in the main group show : the current "Visione in Viaggio", cured by Emanuela De Cecco, presents a new art films season with the cinematographic works of the writers Margherite Duras and Assia Djebar.

The Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo is not new to this kind of art exhibitions: the Foundation has always kept an eye on international contemporary art issues, as the past project "On the roads of Kiarostami" presented in the fall of 2003 and the upcoming project "Baobab", where the artist Tacita Dean will be rewarded by an international jury, and her last film will be presented to the italian audience for the first time. "Baobab" will be displayed from the 5th November 2004 to the 2nd January 2005 at the projectroom of the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Via Modane 16, Turin (Italy). The project "Baobab" and the monographic book, with english and italian texts (ed. Postmedia Books), have been cured by Emanuela De Cecco.

(1) Media Release - Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Via Modane 16, Turin (Italy); tel.+39 011 19831600 info@fondsr.org info@fondsr.org ; www.fondsr.org ; the catalogue of "Don't touch the white Woman" is by Francesco Bonami, Hopefulmonster editions.

(2) Correspondence between Natalie Massone Saiph and Daniela Kostova (13/10/2004)

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