

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER

11 APRIL - 17 JUNE 2007



Opening on Thursday 12th of April 2007 at 7 pm



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ARTISTS (Frac Lorraine collection):
Chantal Akerman, Esther Ferrer,
Natalia LL, Annette Messager,
Jo Spence, Ingrid Wildi

And Gerard Byrne, Manon de Boer,
Nan Goldin, Katarzyna Kozyra

ACCESS:

49 NORD 6 EST - Frac Lorraine
1bis rue des Trinitaires, Metz
Admission free.
Open Wednesday to Sunday
from 12-19.00 and
Thursday from 13-20.00.

PARTNERS:

Zacheta National Gallery of Art,
Warsaw (Poland) ; Frac Provence-
Alpes-Côte d'Azur ; Mudam - Musée
d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean,
Luxembourg ; Beaumont Gallery,
Luxembourg ; Jan Mot Gallery,
Brussels.

FILM SHOW: special screening of
Jeanne Dielman, by Chantal Akerman,
Friday 11 May at 8 pm, at cinéma
Caméo Ariel, Metz, with Ciné art.

The Fonds régional d'art contemporain de
Lorraine, member of « Platform », is supported by
the Lorraine regional Council and the Regional
Cultural Affairs Department (DRAC) at the
Ministry of Culture.

1- Natalia LL, *Consumer Art*, 1972.
Collection Frac Lorraine. © Droits réservés.
Photo : Frac Lorraine

« One is not born a woman, but becomes one »
Simone de Beauvoir, 1946

« The eternal feminine » is a vague, hackneyed phrase used as a handy way of defining... defining just what, just whom ? While being broad enough to lump together the predispositions and qualities supposedly inherent to the female sex, this loose « concept » covers stereotypes and other cultural constructs that contribute from early childhood to fashion roles and identities. This is an insidious way of perpetuating, including through women, a form of male domination, a standardisation of relations between the sexes.

An obscure concept for most of our « fellow » citizens, the notion of gender, used to distinguish one's biological identity (male or female) from one's social identity (feminine or masculine personality traits), is beginning to become common in everyday parlance. In English « gender » designates one's social experience and refers to the set of rules - implicit and explicit - governing relations between men and women and which contribute to the allocation of distinct roles, values, responsibilities and obligations in private and public life.

A few years of feminism have done little to change this mindset, barely scratching the surface of some self-righteous certainties.

And so, like the artists of *2 or 3 things I don't know about her* [women], we find ourselves wanting to throw a spanner in the gender works ¹, get side-tracked looking for some indeterminacy. The key figures of women's lib (Manon de Boer), provocative gestures (Natalia LL, Annette Messager) or ambiguous attitudes (Jo Spence) who punctuate this exhibition take the eternal feminine to task (Ingrid Wildi) and embark on deconstructing identity relying on appearances and belonging to a sex. « The private is political » shouted American feminists in the sixties : this spirit pervades the filmed portraits of Gerard Byrne and Nan Goldin or Katarzyna Kozyra, who take a passing swipe at stereotypical man-woman relations, destabilise established identities with a touch of subversion and a healthy dose of assumed vulnerability... It is hard to get across the absolute truth that one sex cannot and must not in any way decide upon individual destinies but on the contrary needs to deny itself the better to decide on the gender to adopt in its own life.

1- Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre, Pour un féminisme de la subversion*, 1990.
Première édition traduite en français chez La découverte, 2005.

↳ 02

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2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



CHANTAL AKERMAN

Born in 1950 in Brussels (BE). Lives and works in Paris (FR)

Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles, 1975

35 mm film transferred onto DVD Duration: 200'
Distribution : Paradise Films, Brussels.
Frac Lorraine collection.

PROJECTION > Friday 11th may - 20.00 pm
Caméo Ariel, Metz

Partners/address:

Ciné art & Frac Lorraine
cinéma le Caméo Ariel, 24 rue du
Palais, Metz.

Access : 4 € full rates / 3 €
reduce rates (members of Ciné
art, Caméo card, amis du Frac and
students).

Chantal Akerman's second fiction film after *Je tu il elle* (I You He She, 1974), *Jeanne Dielman* is a key piece in her career, and sets the pattern for many later developments. This remarkably long (3 hours and 20 minutes), hypnotic work is carried along by the diaphanous presence of the actor Delphine Seyrig, who plays the part of a forty-something widow living alone with her son. The film retraces her every gesture over three days. Through this real time approach to everyday life, Chantal Akerman marks a clean break with traditional filmmaking. The most straightforward action becomes an event, standing out against absolute platitude. Housework, shopping, washing-up, clearing up, the insignificant life of this anti-heroine is mechanically regulated and timed. Even the favours she grants to passing customers, every afternoon. Each day is the same as the last one and the one before, and the one before that, until a disruption upsets and derails this immutable timetable. This disruption is the murder of this customer who dared to give pleasure to Jeanne Dielman. Her ritual is suddenly broken, freeing her pent-up fear; is she for all that delivered from the void of her existence? Or wanting to get back to it? 'For me, she had two solutions', is the artist's analysis; 'to kill someone or to kill herself.'¹ Imposingly slow and languid, with an aesthetics of seemingly dead time, with this behaviourist fiction Chantal Akerman creates something never before seen in cinema. There are signs of the influence of the American avant-garde, which she had then just discovered on a trip to New York, particularly the films of the Canadian Michael Snow, based on the duration and dilatation of time. In her previous films such as *La Captive* (2000), Akerman held onto the meaning of de-dramatization and absolute understanding of the still shot. Devoid of any link shot or close ups, her montage is poles apart from any form of classicism. Her magnificent frames play with a cold, plastic symmetry that the heroine's back comes to haunt, like a sign of her behaviour that remains impenetrable until the film's final second. They make the violence of the narrative that much duller. 'I really left Jeanne Dielman to live her life in the middle of the frame, to be in her space. The only way to shoot this film was to avoid chopping this woman up into a thousand pieces, avoid cutting up the action into a hundred places.'² (...)

Emmanuelle Lequeux

1- In interview with *Camera Obscura*, November 1976, reproduced in *Art and Feminism*, Phaidon, London, 2001. (English edition only).
2- Idem.

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



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GERARD BYRNE

Born in 1969 in Ireland. Lives and works in Dublin (IE).

Homme à Femmes (Michel Debrane), 2004Vidéoprojection, durée 38'
MUDAM, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg collection

Trying to reinterpret, reanimate - in the sense of restoring life and soul to past events, thought debates - and trying to capture the truth of them, is the fine challenge taken up by Gerard Byrne. The artist explores our history, our recent memory. Not history with a capital H but rather social history, by revisiting exchanges or public debate conducted at key moments and transcribed by the media. He thereby stresses the ambiguousness of the media in constructing a history and common cultural values. Like an ethnologist or rather a sociologist, he looks into study « cases » which he reactivates the better to observe, understand, analyse, try to bring out hidden meanings, offer a possible interpretation, and most of all cast doubt on the pretences or obvious facts admitted in our collective history...

Byrne questions and revisits documents or information that are seemingly trivial or usually considered to be « minor » or insignificant : magazine articles, advertisements or interviews. Thus, through the staging of actors, the piece *New sexual lifestyles* (2003) reinterprets and revives a debate published in Playboy in September of 1973 around international experts and a porn star of the period. A reactivation in the shape of a « lively » debate of something noted at a time T and in a specific context.

Homme à femmes (Michel Debrane), looks at a mythical duet, often quoted as the example of the free couple, struggling against prejudice and its own limits in trying to live in mutual respect for the other person's desire and sexual independence : Sartre and Beauvoir. Two independent intellectuals, a man - a woman, each assuming their own individuality with apparent equality and reciprocity... Apparent... This is the observation that gradually filters through as this replay progresses of an interview Sartre gave Catherine Chaîne for Le Nouvel Observateur in 1977.

Beauvoir is absent, but, reading between the lines of what « Sartre » is saying we get the portrait of this unusual woman and more generally his relationship to the « second sex ». The topic under discussion is light-weight - the private life of an intellectual - but the answers supplied by this ageing man and the differences between the two protagonists bring out contradictions and highlight a degree of misogyny on Sartre's part. Face to face, a man, a woman, of different generations - Sartre was 72 at the time and Chaîne a young journalist - and distinct intellectual worlds - Marxism for the one, the heritage of feminist thinking for the other. The use of fiction, staging and space (disembodied voice off for the woman - faced with the actor's powerful physical presence) highlight the two stances and the two mindsets.

1- Gerard Byrne, *Homme à Femmes (Michel Debrane)*, 2004
Collection Mudam, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg
© photogramme : Mudam

2- Gerard Byrne, *Homme à Femmes (Michel Debrane)*, 2004
Collection Mudam, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg
Installation présentée à la Biennale de Göteborg 2005

Sartre, the icon of a certain modernity, appears as the questions are asked - obviously slanted coming from the young feminist - as a man of his time : a man with a paternalistic attitude for whom women are objects of seduction and conquests. Even when evoking his relationship with Simone de Beauvoir, in the respect he obviously has for her, a relationship of domination / submission clearly slips in.

Hélène Guenin

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



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2-

MANON DE BOER

Born in 1966 at Kodjkanal (IN). Lives and works in Brussels (BE) and Amsterdam (NL)

*Sylvia Kristel, Paris, 2003*Super 8 film transferred onto DVD, colour, 39'.
Loan from Jan Mot gallery, Brussels.

The films of Manon de Boer subtly sketch in the many facets of identity, playing with the layers of memory and appearances. Her works offer impressionist portraits, composed in successive touches and shifts, making room for various sensations.

« The complexity of an individual is palpable in the interaction of body language and speech ; between the intentional and unintentional communication » explains Manon de Boer who plays on these shifts and interactions the better to reveal what is at work between the self-image, social appearances and a deeper truth.

Manon de Boer adopts a subjective, constructed approach to montage. She dissociates the body and the voice, sound and image, thereby having an unsettling effect on the viewer while at the same meaning contriving to be meaningful.

In *Sylvia Kristel - Paris (2003)*, the film opens with a blank picture before a woman's silhouette appears, seen from behind, in a garden. The opening few shots are silent and underline the intensity of this presence, first of this body, then of the distant gaze that already seems to be completely plunged in memories. Nearly thirty years after *Emmanuelle* came out, we again find, set on film, the picture of the woman who both embodied the spirit of an age - caught between still deeply ingrained bourgeois moral values and the sexual liberation movement - and a whiff of scandal.

The erotic icon of the seventies then disappears off the screen as the body - at last ? - makes way for the actor's voice and shots of Paris.

Sylvia Kristel gives two narratives, a year apart, of her life in Paris. Manon de Boer first lets us hear the more recent one and during the two interviews shows similar pictures of Paris : views of gardens, streets, tracking shots of the overhead metro. The stroll through the city accompanies Sylvia Kristel's journey through her memories. The voice seems to become embodied and gradually come to live in the space of the city.

« Difference and repetition » : gaps and variations slip into these two narratives which appear as two versions of a period she has lived through. A hazy memory, a more or less conscious transformation of bygone moments and feelings, a game of appearances ?

As an over-exposed icon and the symbol of a period of revolution in morals, with *Emmanuelle* Sylvia Kristel embodied the first images of pleasure and sexual freedom for women. Paradoxically the muse of what was at the time a sulphurous film has remained locked up behind the image of this body, reduced to just this physical dimension. With Manon de Boer's camera trained on her, the icon reverts to being a woman : Sylvia Kristel talks of her career and the heartbreaks. She keeps her mystery and recovers profundity, the shifting reality of an identity.

Hélène Guenin

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-

ESTHER FERRER

Born in 1937 à San Sebastian (ES). Vit et travaille à Paris (FR)

*Intime et personnel, 1977*B&W photographs, 30 x 40 cm each.
Frac Lorraine collection.

Intime et personnel (*Intimate and personal*) is one of the first performances by Esther Ferrer, a Spanish Basque artist, and a historic member of the ZAJ group (considered to be the Spanish branch of Fluxus). As often with this artist, the system proposed here is extremely simple, generous and freely interpretable. The idea is to measure a body (hers or someone else's) with a measuring tape, marking the places measured with a number, a dot or a note, which can then be read off at will aloud, played, marked on the floor or on a board, etc. At the end of the performance, the body has possibly turned into a *tableau vivant* (scientific, plastic and literary) all in letters and figures. While obviously a questioning of the universal notion of identity lies behind this superficial exploration and systematic marking out of an organic territory, we might also see it, against the political backdrop of Franco's Spain, as a gentle denunciation of the body's submission to the normative logic of statistics exacerbated by a certain totalitarianism. But the benevolence and curiosity that drive these gestures most of all show the artist's fascination for space and numbers which we find in her later installations centring on a poetics of prime numbers. Mathematics and physics.

The interest of this particularly 'open' work also lies in its practical focusing of the crucial art issues of its time. Among a relaxed relation to the body, the musical paradigm (influence of John Cage), the economy and reduction of means, the importance of the system over actual realization, the possibility of accidents and the formal non-resolution of the work in progress. And even, with humour and freedom, the breaking down of boundaries between the private (revealing one's intimate parts) and public spheres (the body politic and social), playing on sexual differences and overturning theatrical conventions through refusing the spectacular and through interaction with the audience. In a word, a yardstick for the minimal conceptual and performative practices of art in the 1960s. However, how such a performance is received is changing all the time, like a harmonic note, depending on where it is given. For, as economic and moral tyranny takes over from the dictatorial regime in its programme for standardizing bodies, in its radical simplicity, *Intime et personnel* gains fresh relevance. Its system for reactivation since 1967 also sheds a clear light on the paradox of gestural art which is essentially immediate and nevertheless immortal. (...)

Guillaume Désanges

1- Esther Ferrer, *Intime et personnel*,
1977, photographs.
Frac Lorraine collection
© Droits réservés.
Photo : Rémi Villaggi.

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-

NAN GOLDIN

Born in 1953 in Washington DC (US). Lives and works in New York (US).

All by myself, 1995Slide show of 83 slides with soundtrack, *All by Myself*, by Eartha Kitt, lasts 5'30. Slides, slide projectors, tape recorder and speakers
Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur collection.

Viewed as the photographer of people on the fringe, drug addicts, drag queens and generally of transgression, Nan Goldin is first and foremost an actress and witness of her « sex, drugs & rock'n'roll » generation, the generation of the American counter-culture and of sexual liberation. At once a personal diary and a « collective autobiography », her photographic work is closely linked to her lifestyle and operates within the sphere of the people close to her.



2-

Born in Washington in 1953, Nan Goldin left her family circle at the age of 14. In 1972, she went to Fine Art School in Boston where she met David Armstrong, the future photographer and first member of her « extended family ». He introduced Nan Goldin to the drag queen scene where she built up a circle of friends. These people who had chosen to live outside of bourgeois conventions and normality were to become one of her first photographic subjects.

These action pictures taken with no stage effects, capture her friends' moments of intimacy or her own portrait in moments of doubt, under the influence of drugs or in love-making scenes. Nan Goldin prefers closed, intimate spaces such as hotel rooms, bars and bedrooms. The saturated colours, aggravated by the artificial lighting in which the places are bathed, highlight the violence, the passion and the crudeness of the scenes.

With the passing years, Nan Goldin built up her snaps with pictures of her friends and her own life story into a narrative. This deployment through time is materialized in the principle of the slide show. It was in 1976 that Nan Goldin first experimented with this device which is suited to the world of bars, nightclubs and private apartments - the places where she shows her work. The succession of slides reinjects a time dimension and builds up a narrative, underlined by the music she started including in the 1980s.

All by myself was produced in 1995. This autobiographical narrative of the artist goes back through 83 slides over the relationships that have marked her life, from childhood to adulthood - her lovers, mistresses, partners, friends - the good times, the rough times, the break-ups and also the drifting due to drugs and alcohol. The self-portrait *Nan one month after being battered* (1984), in particular, shows the artist bruised face after being battered by her boyfriend : a stark picture of a woman's vulnerability, doubt and frailty.

This work, which is in the pure pictorial tradition of the self-portrait and the mirror portrait, may be seen as an experience of memory. A backward introspective glance at her own life, *All by myself* enables Nan Goldin to take stock of her relationships and the people she has met. Beyond the private personal dimension, the installation more generally questions relationships between men and women, the sometimes difficult road to sexual freedom, when choices have to be made all the time, and the blurred boundary of sexual identities.

1- & 2- Nan Goldin, *All by myself*, 1995
Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur collection.
© Nan Goldin, ADAGP, 2007

Hélène Guenin

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-



2-

KATARZYNA KOZYRA

Born in 1963 in Warsaw (PL). Lives and works in Warsaw, Trente & Berlin.

Mens' Bathhouse, 1997Video installation, 8'.
Project created for the Venice Contemporary Art Biennial
Zacheta National Art Gallery collection, Warsaw.

The sulphurous reputation of Katarzyna Kozyra and the controversy stirred up by her pieces very often give her detractors an excuse to sidestep the real meaning of her interventions.

In the still somewhat conservative context of contemporary Poland, Katarzyna Kozyra's caustic, uncompromising gaze on the normalization of behaviour patterns, sexual identities and the standardization of bodies really hits home. From the facetious dwarves of the Midget Gallery that slip in and show themselves in contemporary art shows, to the exhibition of her sick body (*Olympia*, 1996), and taking in the transgressive picture of Nietzsche and Rilke on dog leads held by a domineering Lou Salomé, Kozyra spares none of our culture's values and symbols. Irony vies with irreverence in this critique of the canons of beauty, conformist attitudes and what is « allowed » in terms of social behaviour.

« Gender Bender » carries on this attempt at deconstructing western values and conventions. Whether she keeps waiting lascivious *naked Boys* (2001-2002), their sex masked by a patent vagina in the main staircase of the National Art Gallery in Warsaw or acts out on the stage of a Berlin nightclub a strip-tease by a drag queen (*Tribute to Gloria Viagra*, 2005), Katarzyna Kozyra questions and blurs the obviousness of sexual identities and behaviour.

An androgynous woman or a feminine man? The silhouette in *Men's Bathhouse* (1999) walking among the men at the baths of a Budapest hotel is ambiguous to say the least. « Disguised » as a man, wearing false genitals, the artist has slipped into this space hitherto for men only. A hidden camera films this clandestine intrusion into a private moment and unknown to them records the men's behaviour. In addition to the uneasiness brought in by this body which despite the transformation stills looks very feminine and slender, what strikes the audience/voyeur entering the recreated space of the hammam is the display put on by the men: a comedy of appearances, of the social role and power play are carried on even in this space. Everyone is observing and sizing each other up.

A similar experiment carried out in 1997 in a women's bathhouse revealed something quite different: with no men to look at them, and no artificial seduction imposed on them, women forget « the Other », they recover their natural movements and postures, to concentrate on their bodies and this moment of well-being.

Sexual and biological, social and cultural identity, gender permeability ... Kozyra and her baths take us to the core of the gender issue.

Hélène Guenin

1- & 2- Katarzyna Kozyra, *Men's bathhouse*, 1999. Courtesy Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Varsovie (Pologne).

2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER

**NATALIA LL**

Born in 1937 in Zywiec (PL). Lives and works in Wrocław (PL)

Consumer Art, 1972B&w photographs, diptych, 100 x 100 cm each.
Frac Lorraine collection.

It is not her and there is something beyond that. So, it is really not her? This question comes out regularly when discussing the early work of eminent early Polish feminist artist Natalia Lach-Lachowicz. It is not her, indeed. Ela M., Anna D., Danuta N. and other women who acted and posed in works *Consumer Art* and *Post-Consumer Art* by Natalia Lach-Lachowicz in the beginning of the 1970s are nearly anonymous, known only to the art circles of Wrocław of that time. (...) Earlier in 1971 the framework of installation *Natalia LL*, the last name of Natalia was reduced for the first time into two initial capital letters and it remains her official art name until now.¹ Half real half fictional, the Persona for long was the artist's only identity and trademark, although later the artist decided to work with her own face and body.(...)



These works strikes the viewer with expressive although symbolically recollected sexual content. Female Characters who played in different, both video and photographic versions of the piece, playfully eat bananas, the variety of sausages and cherries, when in the following series of Post-Consumer Art they eat jelly and pudding no less suggestive way, allowing it to drip from their mouth and licking it up with irresistible pleasure. And so what? Good question, since it seems to be obvious that they are women who are the rulers here and the male gaze has nothing to do with it. The artist, at the time when the works from the series were made, never declared any will of dealing with sex as a subject of art or to adopt a feminist critical position. Her power within this context is laughter and the denial of being dependent of sexual symbolic.² Moreover, LL in her declarative texts plays with imagination and expectation of the viewer. No, this is not to cause arousal, it is just an objective registration of everyday life she declares in her artistic manifestos. (...)

1-

The Intimate Sphere, another work of that time is based on full photographic registration of sexual intercourse. Sex, she says, is like eating, sleeping and any other human activity. But there is a seduction hidden underneath the alluring visual display. The more attractive and narrative the visual is, the more Natalia LL forces us to look behind it and entangle with art itself.

Aneta Szylak

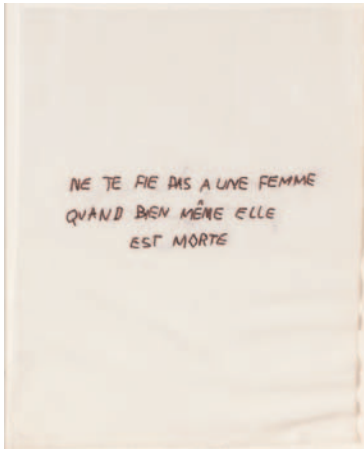
1 See: *Texty. Natalia LL*, Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biala, 2004, pp. 503-504.

2 This aspect is being discussed by Gisliind Nabakowski: *Zwei Mythen werden mit vernünftigen Preisgegeben*, 'Heute Kunst', February-March 1975, n°9, Düsseldorf, reprinted in *Texty. Natalia LL*, Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biala, 2004.

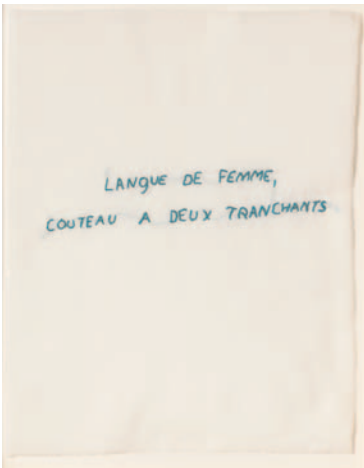
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2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-



2-

ANNETTE MESSENGER

Born in 1943 at Berck-sur-Mer(FR). Lives and works in Malakoff (FR)

Ma collection de proverbes, 1974Embroidered cloths, 30 elements, 35 x 28 cm each
Frac Lorraine collection.

Ma collection de proverbes (*My collection of proverbs*) is an anthology of received wisdom about women, hand-embroidered by the artist on pieces of white cotton; things like 'When a girl is born, even the walls weep', or 'it was woman who turned the devil's hair white'. With this proliferous work, Annette Messenger mischievously gets mixed up in the geometrism and the quest for purity of Minimalism, literally pinning these 'white squares' that dominated the aesthetics of the time. She also mischievously loads them with the stupidity of the world, spreading out before us the worst the collective unconscious can come up with by way of male chauvinism. Throughout her career, Annette Messenger has been tackling one cliché after another; without denouncing them, she takes their original form and subsequent variations as far as they will go. Making no value judgement, she forces viewers to face up to their own contradictions. This accounts for how the piece was greeted with great perplexity when it was first created in 1974. Raising the question of womanhood without becoming committed to women's lib, she highlights a despised popular art, embroidery, in a seemingly provocative way. 'A gesture that is at once vengeful and masochistic', writes Catherine Grenier. By making her own the parody of this handicraft technique, Annette Messenger hijacks the sign of submission to second-class status and promotes it to a form of beauty. She also asks herself where the boundaries of art lie, and questions them, notably by using poor materials like plush or pieces of cloth, mundane textures that have pervaded her work right up to the present. This series is one of the numerous *Collections* the artist brought together in the early 1970s, a time when she divided her output up into cycles, each featuring a character she would invent for herself in schizophrenic succession; these belong to the 'Annette Messenger the collector' cycle developed alongside the 'artist' cycle. The *Proverbes* thus join a set of 56 albums including lonely hearts adverts, press cuttings (*Les Hommes que j'aime/j'aime pas* [*Men I like/don't like*]), photos (*Les enfants aux yeux rayés* [*Children with their eyes scratched out*]), magazine pictures, signatures or Rorschach inkblot tests. An embroidered litany, it also announces the coming cycle, that of the 'handy woman', in which Annette Messenger focuses on ordinary manual tasks (*Mes travaux d'aiguille, Quand je fais des travaux comme les hommes* [*My needlework, When I do jobs like men*]). Presented together, these small pictures invade the wall and seem capable of endless proliferation. Produced the same year as her first exhibition at l'Arc, where the artist showed dead birds, the *Pensionnaires* (Boarders) that made a name for her, they are a part of her revolution of the traditional hanging that impels her among other things to present her *Collections* in long display cases on legs, like the ones you find in an ethnology museum. 'You can show things better by moving them and ordering them like in a cabinet of curiosities', she says.¹ Taking over and diverting the vocabulary of classification, the multiple, hysteric image imposes itself on the museum. Needlework as artwork

Emmanuelle Lequeux

1- & 2- Annette Messenger, *Ma collection de proverbes*, 1974. Frac Lorraine collection. © ADAGP
Photo : Rémi Villaggi

1- In conversation with the author, May 2005, unpublished.

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2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-



2-

JO SPENCE

Née en 1934 à Londres (GB). Décédée en 1992 à Londres (GB)

Circa 1959, II, 1986
*Circa, 1962, 1986*Photographies couleur, tirages cibachrome, 91 x 61 cm chaque.
Collection Frac Lorraine.

Working on her own body, the photographer Jo Spence explores how we construct our social identities. She proposes that we reappropriate the popular uses of the medium and turn it into an instrument for therapy and rebellion. The idea is to ward off the suffering produced by the violence inherent to our lifestyles standardized by the dominant culture, and reactivate processes whereby we socialize the self in order to rebuild our identity. The viewer is implicitly called upon to embark on the same undertaking that can lead to direct involvement through various devices set in place at exhibitions and photography workshops for feminist groups, therapy groups and student organizations. (...)

What she holds onto from feminism are the reflections on identity - as the fruit of an education, a culture and not of one's essence - and its deconstruction of control phenomena arising from a power struggle - language and representations as revealing inequalities on which a subject's social construction is based. Lastly, she challenges the hyper-aesthetic approach to documentary photography for its victimizing representations that reproduce the very inequalities they are supposed to be denouncing. This critique was possible through the artist's active participation in rediscovering the revolutionary amateur photography of the interwar years: movements like the *Workers' International Photography League* were instruments of representation run by worker organizations seeking to undermine established bourgeois distribution channels through journals. This repressed side of the history of photography was crucial to artists like Jo Spence or the American Martha Rosler; the traditional bond between the photographer and the person sitting for the portrait was broken in favour of a new producer / subject with full powers over how they were to be portrayed. Understandably therefore, Spence stubbornly refused to picture other people apart from cases of close collaborations where roles became interchangeable, and she remained attached to techniques available to all. The photographs from the mid 1980s in the Frac collection are testimony to the rich collaborative experience forged in the course of her brief career (for these particular works with the photographer Rosy Martin). The forms of alienation are updated, reactivated by the protagonists who recall their memories as they play the part of various characters who belong to their emotional world. The camera has become both a mirror and the look on society. (...)

Frédéric Oyharcabal

1- Jo Spence, *Circa, 1962, 1986*.
Frac Lorraine collection.
© Droits réservés.
Photo : Frac Lorraine.

2- Jo Spence, *Circa, 1959, II, 1986*.
Frac Lorraine collection.
© Droits réservés.
Photo : Frac Lorraine.

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2 OR 3 THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER



1-

INGRID WILDI

Born in 1963 in Santiago (CL). Lives and works in Geneva (CH)

***Si c'est elle*, 2000**Video, colour, sound, 11'50"
Frac Lorraine collection.

In the title of Ingrid Wildi's video *Si c'est elle* (If it is her), the 'if' is not as innocent as it looks; it opens up the work to a sum of possibles. Three men seen face on in close up against a white ground bear witness one after the other. They tell of a woman they have loved in a distant or not so distant past, we don't know. The words cross over, mixed together by the editing. Although we can't be too sure, our initial reaction is to believe that they are describing one and the same person; the portrait becomes romantic. Gradually this foolish and wise virgin, capable of dumping you right in the middle of a film show, comes to life for us through the voice of her loves. She was unique, a bit of a healer, wearing skirt and high heels, she was singing, not singing ... These concordant accounts then begin to diverge; as it all comes out, the single heroine of a complex, captivating novel (this is what we see in the eyes of those telling the story) vanishes, becoming multiple, and we understand that each eyewitness is chasing after their own character, depicting her with a charge of emotion that, reading between the lines, tells us as much about themselves as about this woman they are describing. The meeting of these stories builds up a baroque narrative framework that resembles an inquiry for the viewer. Is she a lover? A friend? At last we feel we know who it is without actually being told: three grownup children are talking about their mother.

As often in her work, in *Si c'est elle* Ingrid Wildi combines the universal and the personal, calling indirectly and with sensitivity upon her own story, that of a Chilean expat who came to Switzerland at the age of eighteen and was forced to leave behind her roots, her language and her mother. At the same time as it resonates in each of the viewers, the testimony of the three men seems to hark back to the artist's own obsessions. *Si c'est elle* is the building up of the picture of one's mother through the prism of memory. It is a quest for origins formulated through language. Ingrid Wildi contrives with this refined device to construct a delicate work in which this talking at cross-purposes flips the life experience over into a form of narrative. Reconstruction by evocation has their testimony constantly drifting between the real and the imaginary. The woman of the story becomes a character. Memory writes up a whole world within an interstice. Its approximations, its convolutions, its ellipses (added to those of the editing), give the video-essay, for that is how the artist describes her work, the paradoxical strangeness of the familiar world. Memory and the unconscious become the constituent elements of a kind of 'real-life abstraction'. (...)

Guillaume Mansart

1- Ingrid Wildi, *Si c'est elle*, 2000.
Frac Lorraine collection.
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