

Rachel Korman - The shadow of my being

„I have a beautiful body. Big tits, wide hips, firm ass. I make men weep at my feet. Once I went out in a sexy g-string and a see-through dress. A procession of men followed me. I then went into a garage and fucked them all.“ Rachel Korman

Preamble on shadows

(I do love Plato but wouldn't go so far as to evoke the Myth of the Cave, where shadows show lies, dilacerating the real into either illusion or the imaginary, apparently...)

In shadows lies the root of painting according to myths and factualities, a kind of metaphor that once served - and still does - the purpose of multiple self-identification and self-referencing. In order to make up for the definitive essence of the loved one (take Pliny, the Elder, in *Natural History*) one would trace their outline thus fixing his morphology through drawing. Such a body circumscription, one that brought it to the present, fades away in its own vanishing, would rather acquire a fulfillment, thus going beyond the condition of the silhouette.

Shadow is simultaneously what opposes light, the image of things themselves, unreal beings, fugitives and/or mutants. In some cultures it was forbidden to children to play with shadows as it meant to disrespect the holy. He who sold his soul to the devil would lose his shadow ... for he would thus cease to belong to himself, to exist as spiritual being, his soul lost, absent.

There is no flesh if there is no shadow. Shadow and flesh are not able to dissociate in humans. The shadow is so to speak like a second nature to all beings. Shadow legitimates the flesh one would say ... with irony and pertinent to the implicit world contained in Rachel Korman's work. The shadow may return and be reunited, somewhere beyond time, in a greater shadow that is the aggregated definition of a subjective time, one lined with complex enacting between nature and the edification of society.

Act around the face

The whole show is based on the self-identity that unveils itself albeit partially into self-portraits. The self-portrait is a recurring theme in many artists' works, always privileging the face, the figure ... Traditionally, it is a way of getting to know oneself, however, in other cases in face of the compulsive figuration of the self, it serves deconstructive purposes that aim for reunification of the self or that long for emergency, thus allowing the ambiguity of the self to linger on.

The video presented underlines the (transmutable) features of the face, presenting it in a frontal fashion and focusing on the consequence of the artist's identity between the ages of 5 and 50. It is a singular file of herself, premonitory and subsequently deliberate. There, the ID-sized photographs serving the purpose of legal identification for a myriad of legal documents one may have. Through the manipulated succession of different face images the audience allows its gaze to wander in her gaze, side by side with a person who unveils herself in her mysteries for all that is known of her is the physical appearance. The attention splits itself into unshakable eyes, almost constant albeit fixed, despite the life charge aggregated by the anatomy and psychophysiology and by mistaking sounds that the artist herself celebrates.

The self-portrait is attached to the body and to the soul... as one would say "like flesh and bones". No shadow is allowed in this case for there is only the effective and peremptory existence.

In 1543, in the *De Corpus humani fabrica*, Vesalius determined the implicit distinction between man and his body. Since then man has become the source of a dualism that saw the “lonely” body in a kind of indifference to which man lent his own face.

In Descartes, the body had to be tamed, repressed, domesticated and subordinated to the soul (Rational Moral). The body acquired a derogatory value, despite being incontestable factor of individuality. Descartes prolonged even more so the dualism started in Vesalius, designating men to recognizable ambiguity, despite demarcating its individuality. The epistemological, social and ideological schisms have served the main esthetics principles as well as Art, especially during the beginning of the XIX century, giving way to the liberation of the body and granting it privilege and primacy.

In the image of the other body details and characteristics are projected, those that have long concocted this figure, those that it should possess to correspond to the (other) visual/mental (internal) image. An identical procedure applies to the images that the artist domesticates of him/herself as well as the very image that he/she assumes, imagines, transfigures, transforms. In this exploratory context of the intimate and the private, by means of externalization, images of self-portraits come about – when they are considered in conformity (or not) with the portraits captivated or made by someone else. Be it photography, drawing or painting (or any other complementary or isolated procedure) – the (self) portrait gives off internal convictions of the body. On the one hand, it refers to rational character definitions, added to psycho-affective as well as social and ideological reveries. On the other hand still it might reflect (divergent and/or convergent) elements that the artist unconsciously elaborates of the “self” confronting, battling authenticity (or fantasy) of his/herself to him/herself, not necessarily to the ones who watch him/her.

Since the beginning of her artistic endeavors the artist has experimented her body in the arts. The body has been the very first mode of artistic communication unveiling and presenting itself to others (only to return to itself) always between her and the public: a figure, a working body (conceptual and physical), creating poses and gestures to fully contest the existence and witness the lushness of the impossible – a kind of Dionysian ritual that is successively reenacted. The self-portraits are fictional, simulacra (drawing on Baudrillard, Wunneberger or Boltanski et al.)

Decisive act of the self (re)united with the other

Personality, more than identity, patent in the self-portraits, expresses itself by that which:

- cannot be given by others (shadow that belongs to the self or to the particularized and singled out face);
- all of us needs to set free of ourselves (shadow as the intoxicating essence of reality or face that affronts the world).

The idealized/transfigured body lies between the real existence and the virtual world, the personal body that is conceived, that is rationalized by the profound impregnation of desire. To the definition of the ideal body, three orders of meaning are pertinent: ideal body meaning desired body, perfect, model, Absolute body – whole and good and beautiful (in a platonic perspective) – means apparent, fragile, precarious: perhaps only shadow, apparition.

In order to make clear the corporeal idealization, the primordial mode, refers to ability of portraying the image of the artist in him/herself, present in the plastic work, as well as in the multiple fictional emancipations (of pseudo-autobiographical characters) – patent in poetry and in literature. On the other hand, the idealized body is also found embedded in hoped for masculine images, in spiritual or physical models, brought by the creation that the artist exhibits, be it at pictorial level, photographic or on video. The identity ambiguity becomes extremely peculiar once it expands into gender divisions, in the masculine and the feminine. The initial androgynous is an anthropomorphic figuration of the *cosmic egg*. Residing since the early times, in the cosmogony as much as in the last menacing face, in scatology. In the alpha and in the omega of the world and the self, the wholesome figure, expressing the sexual and fundamental unity where opposites coalesce by means of conciliation, foreseeing the ultimate reintegration. This unifying mystique, saved by *humanity*, means (personifies) the duality of the world and appearances (falsifying, according to mythologies and beliefs). The primordial rupture that found its irreversible echo in the *Myth of the Fall* is like fire and water, earth and air, the feminine and the masculine... in a poetic conception that draws us near to Bachelard and Jung. The rupture might generate the *Kaos* if it wasn't for the complicity of the sexes, inhabiting desires and nightmares. *One* produces *two* says the *Tao*, and it is thus that the primordial Adam, not the male but the androgynous, converts into Adam and Eve. In Greek Mythology and, consequently, in Roman myths, many of the figurations are androgynous. Several are the legends that unveil explicit episodes where gender differences are subsumed, becoming the (ultimate) identity in its archetypical plenitude. In some different geographies, its territories and times, the bi-sexual division in favour of the unity has enriched itself drawing on a iconography corresponding to the current esthetic models – in term of anthropological-symbolic and teleological term perhaps. In the Western history of Art and Culture the androgynous condition, bisexuality, gender bi-valence have always taken on intentionality and externalized themselves (sublimating themselves) via pictorial, sculptural or poetic products and conceptualizations, in every case. The longest of Virginia Woolf's books, "Orlando" (1928) celebrates the existence of both genders in one same being making the primordial, almost exclusive, assumption of one or the other at the same time that this sort of reincarnation crossed historical moments of western civilization. The characters jump from one sex to the other in face of ritual situations that the British writer placed within emblematic and esthetically cultural periods. She adopted a rather fantastic style inducing the reader's imagination to wander in visuals, something that in 1992 would be immortalized in a motion picture, directed by Sally Potter.

The drawings initiated by Rachel Korman for the 2008 "Draughtsman contract" (*O Contrato do Desenhista*) exhibition gained more and more ground, invading unsuspecting walls and in them breeding assertiveness and pleasure; to these the ludic and paradoxical statements are added. It is the return to the origins of creation in distinct conceptions, where it is evident and where the connection between the origin of drawing and painting is once again clear. The shadows gain since the Renaissance (enhanced) volumetric excellence and perspective achieved through fading effects giving illusionary effects of cinematographic valence. The woman (re)gains the will, the dominance and the power (paraphrasing Nietzsche), incorporating the phallus, unifying her breasts in the uniform shadow that projects itself onto a theatre of identities and paradoxical and ironical existences.

In Rachel Korman's work the shadow and the silhouette serve equivocal substances of transmutation and sexual ambiguity, within both realistic as well as dreamlike settings. Within the shadows of her being they lie camouflaged by duplicity, perhaps even triads. In other words, by incorporating the penis to the body of typically feminine shapes there is a correspondence of drawn behaviors that move from side to side – in an analogy to the sexual act itself, between penetration and the penetrated being and vice-versa. Thus, a third sexuality arises, and a fourth and so on, in the likes of the assumptions defined by Woolf in *Orlando*.

If the polychromatic rhetoric dominated the writing of Woolf in the 20s, it can be said that in the drawings, photographs and videos made by Rachel Korman, the human picture, i.e. the self(portrait) almost always comes to life in a bi-chromatic narrative, one that has its synthesis, its androgynous nature and its completeness in the shadows.

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