

on our empty spaces inside / gretta sarfaty

Gretta Sarfaty navigates between diverse artistic expressions, such as painting, performance and photography. The artist experiments with her body as a territory of transformation, as a landscape or open field, understanding it as a space that impacts both internal movements and social fabrics. The narratives of subjectivity on being a woman as an invented political subject overflow, percolating identity issues and expanding the boundaries of that which is expected of our existence.

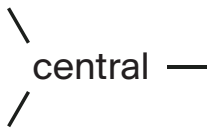
The little visibility of Gretta Sarfaty's work is not an isolated case in the systematic silencing of women in the History of art. Active policies are needed so that the representation of women may be expanded, not just for female artists, but also for other subjects that suffer with structural invisibilization. Reviving the female force as a creative motor is fundamental for overcoming narratives of oppression, implemented for centuries on different levels based on gender, race and class. The fact that female representation is judged by a white, elitist and occidental male gaze transforms women's bodies and actions into a subjugated institution in comparison to men. This process emphasizes the political connotations of Greta's practice, a Brazilian artist that builds her own image, narrative and identity.

This exhibition is Gretta's reinsertion project in the current artistic context. The title *On our empty spaces inside* was inspired by American historian Linda Nochlin's critical speech about the motive for which so many women's works have been kept without recognition: "(...)But in actuality, as we all know, things as they are and as they have been, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, are stultifying, oppressive and discouraging to all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male. The fault, dear brothers, lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education (...)" (NOCHLIN, Linda. *ArtNews*. 1971.)

The exhibition brings together a series of works from the 1970s and 1980s, among them, "A Woman's Diary" and "Evocative Recollections", that consist of the artist's corporeal research. Photography and paintings contrasted in black and white present forms of a body without a face, a body activated as a border that, according to the researcher Talita Trizoli in her dissertation about Gretta, represents "(...) the discursive and material build of the body, specifically the woman's body, is traversed by ambivalent flows of absence and presence, erasure and carnality" (TRIZOLI, Talita. *Atravessamentos Feministas: um panorama de mulheres artistas no Brasil dos anos 60/70*. 2018. p. 63).

In some interviews, Gretta presents a resistance to all descriptions that alter the natural meaning of her actions, avoiding theories that sterilize the practice and subjectivity present in her artistic process. In an interview with Nadiesda Dinambro for her dissertation *Gretta Sarfaty: photography, performance and gender* (2018), the artist reveals: "(...) I am very intuitive in my work and I don't like to create based on theories and things. I like to flow, because if I don't the work loses its meaning, loses its spontaneity especially. (...) It is possible to be associated to something that has synchronicity, because I am thinking, and someone is thinking at the same time. So it is somewhat relevant, I think" (DINAMBRO, Nadiesda, *Imagens de Gretta Sarfaty: fotografia, performance e gênero*. 2018. p. 41).

The possibilities for female self-representation only begin to exist in the 20th century, when writers and artists explored the concept of feminine alterity to the subjective possibilities assigned to the feminine. Gretta confronts the hegemonic system of representation by situating herself as the author of her own image, working female nudity in an active perspective,



on our empty spaces inside / gretta sarfaty

allowing herself to be her own narrator and articulator in a voice of dissent. We select some images from the series "A Woman's Diary" to present in the form of a street poster inside the gallery, as in the context of the urban center of São Paulo and, that way, occupy spaces culturally closed to the woman's intimate subject. This action promotes consciousness of and consequently transforms the way in which women artist's works are confronted into a political stance. It also develops a new meaning of what is public and, as such, the meaning of art in society.

The representation of the female body as an organic and sensualized institution is rejected in this view, opening space for social and psychic dynamics that mold female sexuality more freely. In the series "Just Like a Woman" (1986), Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains the redirecting of femininity further than the objective and body, associating the authentic feminine to the production of meaning and subjectivity. The new iconographies that female artists like Gretta created to understand the body, femininity, self-representation, oppression and desire can be understood as exercises of liberty transformed by her personal expressions and conceptions of the body.

In his book *The History of Sexuality*, the philosopher Michel Foucault explains that "(...) We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required. For the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics" (FOUCAULT, Michel. *Historia da Sexualidade*. 1988. p. 10).

When it comes to women's resistance it is important to reveal the internal asymmetries of the individuals and bodies navigating this world and the privileges they carry and barriers they confront. It is not possible to talk about gender without talking about gender differences. The relations are variable and unpredictable, in a way that the history of culture of women should be studied in all of its discontinuities and specifics. The creativity and disobedience that women from the 1960s to 1980s exercised when they discovered their politicized bodies through experimenting unorthodox forms of creativity and expression are viewed today by individuals as non-conformist. For Gretta, her artistic process "(...) was a search for identity and way to say who I was, reclaiming myself as a woman, without stereotype, I wanted to find myself (...)". It is not possible to define a common identity for all women. Being a woman is not everything a person is; gender is not necessarily coherent and consistent; being a woman is not enough to share a context; identities are not static; we are an open system that inspires a sentiment of expansion and multiplicity, resistance and subversion.

The breaking of a regime of control of women's bodies, in which the servitude to the other is no longer permitted and the subjectivity of the self is stimulated, promotes a new visual nature of desire in the present day. In the artist's words, what interests her is "to be artwork, open from the inside out" – and this in and of itself is a revolutionary strategy.