

RECONCILIATIONS

Audacities, affections and memories

In the beginning of the 1970s, while still very young, Gretta Sarfaty entered the visual arts circuit and was quickly recognized as a vanguard artist. This is proven by the invitation of Franco Terranova (1923-2013) to realize an individual exhibition in the prestige Petite Galerie in Rio de Janeiro. The 70s were active in regard to the ideological, artistic and costumes planes. In Brazil, these years were marked by artistic experimentation, resistance to the dictatorship and sexual liberation resulting from the discovery of the birth control pill, but also from the feminist movements that fought for greater social protagonism for women, discussing gender-related issues outside of the male/female binary and fought against domestic violence against women.

Since entering the artistic world, Gretta became involved with the counter-culture movements and with the renovation of language, discarding more traditional mediums from her work. In Rio de Janeiro she lived alongside Cildo Meirelles, Artur Barrio and Rubens Gerchman (1942-2008), among others. It is possible that Ivaldo Granato (1949-2016), her professor at the Panamerican School of Art (1972), encouraged her rupture from conventional art forms. In 1976, Gretta produced her first video - "Transformações e Diário de uma mulher" (Transformations and the Diary of a woman) - for the Global Art Gallery in São Paulo, which included distorted images of her own face. This innovative process (Self Portrait) opened the way for new mediums (video, photo, graphics). It was from this experience that the artist created a new language in which her body was the substance materialized in her art work. In this way, the body of her work is interwoven with her own body.



A WOMAN'S DIARY XII (1976)

It is true, however, that one decade earlier several artists included their bodies in their artwork. Among these was Ives Klein (1928-1962) with his "Anthropometric" performances in Paris and Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980) with his "Parangolés" in Rio de Janeiro. Nonetheless, Gretta proposed a new, vanguard approach in her further deepening of the issues that linked her body with violence against women.

In 1978, Gretta participated in the collective performance "Mitos Vadios" (Stray Myths) with her piece "A Tenda" (The Tent), organized by Ivaldo Granato in São Paulo, which also included the participation of Hélio Oiticica, Regina Vater, Arthur Barrio, Antônio Barrio, Antônio Manuel and José Roberto Aguilar, among others. By the following year, she was already realizing international performances and, in 1980, when I was director of the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo, I invited Gretta to present her artistic intervention "Modificação e Apropriação de uma Identidade Autônoma" (Modification and Appropriation of an Autonomous Identity). The performance realized at the Pinacoteca was composed of a large paper structure (cube/cage), made by Elvio Becheroni (1934-2000), in which Gretta acted freely, developing a choreography that involved destroying the entire structure to liberate herself. In the performance, the artist's body is at the same time the artistic object; not just a medium, but also a representation or metaphor through which she reveals herself as an extension of the meaning of what is real.



Performance realized in the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo, 1980

This performance had already been presented previously live at the International Cultureel Centrum in Antwerp, at the Galerie B-14 in Stuttgart and in 1979 at the Museu Palazzo Dei Diamanti in Ferrara, Italy.

A few years after her first show in Rio de Janeiro, Gretta already projected herself as an artist and was internationally recognized. In 1979, she entered the European vanguard, presenting herself individually in Milan, at art dealer Luciano Inga Pin's (1927-2009) Galleria Diagramma, she was interested in Body Art and worked with Marina Abramovic, Urs Lüthi and Gina Pane (1939-1990), among other renowned names of contemporary art. In Europe, she met the critic Gillo Dorfles (1910-2018), who became an admirer of her work: "We behold an uncommon combination between the creative activity of an artist, that knows how to make the most of expressive and visual possibilities of her body and the realization of a photographic documentation maintained autonomous, in both its technical and aesthetic values".

In 1984, Gretta moved to New York, where she developed her first works on the computer, in a search for new mediums of expression. Meanwhile, it was neither the new technological support nor the new media that awoke her interest, rather the new possibilities for innovating the language and expression of the body - of her own body - the driving force of her poetry. It was in the United States that Gretta went on to utilize other bodies as models for the development of her projects. The bodies were presented as partially covered, obscuring their identities. Her work was relevant in the place and time in New York, where the feminist movements gained power. Gretta's work, however, proposed other perspectives: "Female Versus Feminism".

When we observe her artistic path, an intense and diverse body of work is revealed. Although, through the years and different artistic phases, it is clear that the body is the primary medium of expression that impregnates her language. Her work, in this sense, does not necessarily portray a recurring theme, but rather navigates a vast territory, conquered, where life pulses without rest - an incessant energy in movement - in dance. The dance is one of liberation, as in the poem "A Dança e a Alma" (Dance and the Spirit) by Carlos Drummond de Andrade: ".../ the dance-not wind in the branches / sap, force, perennial being / a being between sky and dirt / new domain conquered / in search of our passion / liberates itself from the other side.

In the numerous interpretations of the representation of the body, Gretta weaves a quilt of meanings, above all in the ties between the body and thoughts, experiences and affections. In this way, the artist builds vigorous work, ardent, impelled by an intense rhythm in vivacious movement. There are also works in which the corporeal rhythm is more contained, of a prevalent lyricism that can be associated to an *adagio*, as in the series "Reincarnations" (1987-88) and, especially, in the series "Body Works", realized in 1981 in her studio in Milan, of an elaborate erotic poeticism enveloped in a veil that does not conceal, but rather suggests concealments

(intimacies) while at the same time expressing a power of seduction (voyeurism). The series represents a moment of rest, diverse and even contrasting from the more dramatic and impetuous aspects that until then were more dominant in her work.



Evocative Recollectios XI, 1981

GRETTA SARFATY'S RECONCILIATIONS

The series that provides this exhibition with its title, “Reconciliations” (2018), was created recently, after Gretha’s return to Brazil and reencounter with her family. We realize that in the works presented there is a significant change in her language. The artist brings to light intimate familial situations after a long period distanced from family. To represent this experience it was necessary to develop a new visual approach and establish a new narrative rhythm that could reveal the lived experiences that permeate delicate relationships of tension and tenderness. The feeling of tension remains because the reconciliation, while it means harmonization, it also indicates previous ruptures, misunderstandings and distances.

Gretta turns all of her attention to the family sphere and seeks to delve into the microcosm of this quotidian life. The artist extracts from the banality of the everyday an existential perspective of continuity, like the flow of a river’s waters. She questions her own presence in this coexistence - she who returns after a long period of absence. “Reconciliations” approaches interpersonal and existential issues experienced by the artist, resulting from an immersion into the family that touched her profoundly, resulting in a “fusion of intimate memories”, as she says. The building of this scene, however, develops inversely for who observes at a distance, from the outside.

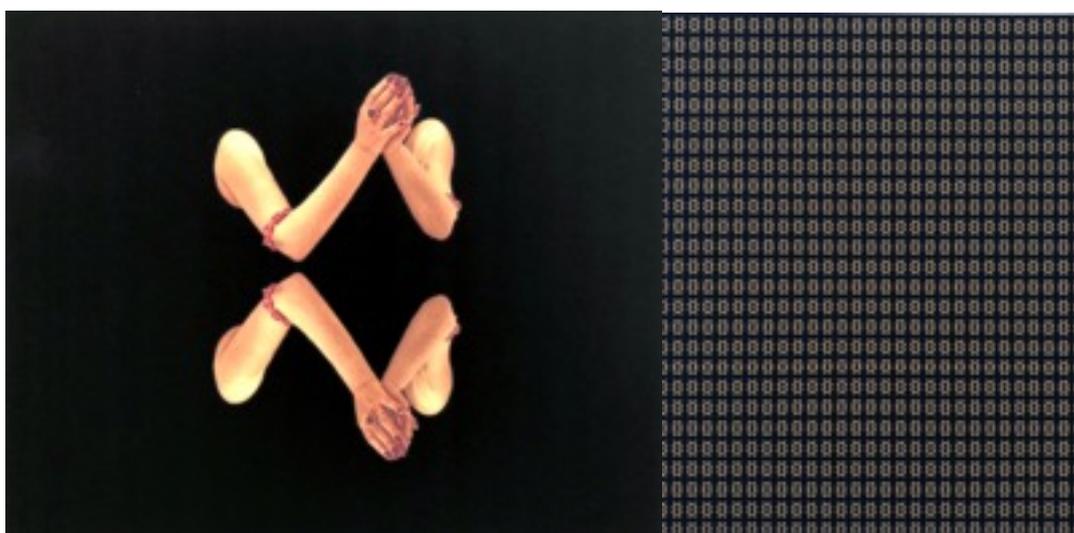
Affection emerges in her recent works, a relevant and substantive expression in her current poetics. For affection to manifest bodies must interact with one another; for it is not possible to express this feeling alone, the experience must be shared.

In the series “Reconciliations” the images were photographed in everyday life, taken from the forgetfulness and brevity of the days and, later,

reworked on the computer and transported to the canvas with the addition of paint, graphics and collages.

As told by the artist, “when my mother got sick and was hospitalized, I was in Brazil and was able to be by her side in the hospital. By then she no longer recognized people, but I believed that when she looked at me she knew who I was. We had two months to say goodbye to each other. When my brothers came back from their travels, we were together and became more united than ever. For me, the days of reconciliation were especially meaningful. I am sure that, in some way, she was who made that profound moment happen. It was as if my mother had organized that moment, bringing together her three children again to exchange affection and say goodbye to their mother. She brought our family together again with mastery, the family she dedicated her life to.”

The exhibition includes works titled, “The Myth of Womanhood” (2001-2005) e “Youth Versus Gravity” (2001-2005), realized between the years 2000 and 2005, before the series “Reconciliations”. Each represents sequences and developments of a single photograph that is repeated in series, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. To build these mosaics (symmetries), Gretta reworked concepts of digital creation established by North American Timothy Binkley (1943-), whom she worked with in the realization of the series “Symmetrical Reincarnations”, from 1987, at the School of Visual Arts in NY. She explored the possibilities of mirroring to amplify the field of vision of the images in arrays. She photographed and made the most of contrast and chromatic density to accentuate the kaleidoscopic effect.



In this show we also include the installation “Família Memorabilis” (2013-2014). The piece consists of a photographic narrative (family album) as an expression of the artist’s temporal/existential memory.

Gretta manipulates certain photographs and establishes new dialogues by interfering in the construction of the pairs of images and relationships between the images. In this pair of encounters and divergences, of celebrations and of conflicts, Gretta sews an autobiographical and existential language of memories. She revisits, in the shadows of her memory, experiences that for a long time rested in the darkness of oblivion.

FABIO MAGALHÃES