

## **ART AND CULTURAL STUDIES LABORATORY**

An artistic project

### **HUMAN DOORS**

#### **A solo exhibition by Raffie Davtian**

15.11 – 21.11, 2007

Location:

The "Avant-garde folk music club", Yerevan, Armenia

**Curator:** Susanna Gyulamiryan

#### **All Others**

##### **By Susanna Gyulamiryan**

Raffi Davtian's artistic project entitled "Human Doors" consists of multi-imaged photo-objects/human bodies installed in space and a video entitled "Inter-est." Before speaking about his work, I would like to briefly comment on the dynamic of his artistic maturation along with some biographical details.

Writing on the critical text and biography Rosalind Krauss has noted that art criticism of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered the art of any artist as an artistic response to a specific stimulation arising from his life in which the personal, the private and the biographical of the artist appear only in the form of proper names. These are normally the names of those close and familiar to the artist, including the names of his pets. According to Krauss, in this approach the artist's work exhausts its meaning during the simple act of reference in which mimetic character or representation resembles the traditionally understood proper names. The reduction of an artistic work to the artist's biography ("art as biography") narrows down the bigger circumstances which influence the artist.<sup>1</sup> The artist's biography, apart from the frequent its usage as an accompanying material for researching his/her art in general and specific works in particular and as a means to examine the dynamic of change in his artistic philosophy, style, structure, articulation, manner of artistic expression, should also speak of the space, the culture, the social context and the time.

Raffie Davtian was born in Isfahan, Islamic Republic of Iran. He has lived in Armenia in the past ten years, occasionally traveling from one country to another. When speaking about his life, the artist, after mentioning the date and place of his birth, straightly goes to the year 1997 when he was admitted to the State Academy of Arts in Yerevan. Here he studied sculpting and continued his education in the Master's Program. Davtian's interest in sculpture goes back to his life in Iran. In Iran, for several years in a row he audited classes at the Free Arts University in Isfahan trying to perceive the essence of materials and forms. At that point sculpture was simply a universal category for him.

The paradigmatic advancement in the perception of sculpture as well as painting did not occur overnight. The perceptions grew proving that sculpture was not a universal category, but rather, a product of historical developments. The experience in this genre that Raffie acquired in his birth country limited the horizons to the understanding of the abstract and the minimalist with implications to constructionism. The works of the artist produced in that period are full of self-sufficient plasticity and geometrical inertness. However, in them one can already see the growing interest in a different artistic alphabet - the immanently of form, preciseness and multi-faceted bodies as opposed to transcendence and abstractness. Raffie's move to Armenia was inspired by his wish to get artistic education in a freer environment since in the Iranian art institute as well as other institutes of higher education there exists a rigid ban on work with body. This was in conflict with the artist's genuine interest in expressions and forms with and through body and in the body as a unique spatial unit, as well as his eagerness to discover its anatomic structures. In general, Raffie is very meticulous in his work. As though striving to break ground, with a medical scalpel he cuts through the material and over and over again pierces it to get new knowledge out of it. In

those years body art had become popular in Armenia's modern art and artists had started to use their own faces and bodies in photography, video and performance. This approach was particularly developed in the art of women who took the approach as an opportunity to change the ways female body had been traditionally used as an object in men's work and to raise questions of subjectivity.

I had the opportunity to familiarize myself with Raffie's photographic works, another field of his interest, when he was in his final years at the Academy of Arts in Yerevan and had by then detached himself from minimalist arbitrariness and cold geometrics. The works that I saw could be characterized as "studium" in the sense that a special care with usage of photo camera and photographic models was evident. Borrowing the term "studium" from Latin, Roland Barthes has used it to define the Spectator's (who looks at the photography) field of observation or knowledge of figures, facial expressions, gesticulations, decorations, movements created by the Operator (who takes the photo) in which the observer appears as a person of culture with no personal sufferings and emotions.<sup>2</sup> The photographs taken by Raffie Davtian in this period (year 2003) followed the line of (cultural) phenomenon in visual reproduction in which the luxus smoothly flows into the conceptual and vice-versa. Especially remarkable was the series of photos made with a skillful inversion of the human body into material world - the body stuck into a water pipe or into something reminding a household waterway. It is a sort of human cork which unites the segment to assure the connection between the canals. However, the "connection" here has created a closed system which has "flown" out of the real human body through a short connecting pipe on it, symbolizing auto-attachment and auto-eroticism of a lonely image. The humanization of things and the material world on one hand, and the freezing and dehumanization of the human body on the other, admittedly is not an innovative decision in art. However, I believe that it was exactly this series of photos that marked the long-standing interest of the artist in the problematique of body.

In this period the artist's "conceptual" efforts did not break deep through the ideological. Rather, the "optics of seeing" remained limited to an aesthetizing gaze that plays with brands and icons of mass culture, journals, advertisement interwoven with refined and unusual decisions. It is for a reason that the mentioned series, as well as several other works of Raffie received the American International Photography Award under the rubric "conceptual fashion." In the mentioned period the artist strived to stand out for unexpected decisions, to transcend any banality and not to demonstrate to what was known and seen by all. Even if the artist expressed banality in his work, he portrayed it as a unique act and presented it to be typical only to his own inspiration and emotions. Frequently he used the principle of the "shock photo" a term again borrowed from Barthes but without traumas and pains.<sup>3</sup> Attraction with refined aesthetics with unexpected "photographic surprises" was the spice which somewhat "sweetened" the taste of his photographic experiments of those years.

The next period of his creative life was marked with new nuances of transition. The theme of body which continued to excite the artist became expressed through naked bodies which had only to lose at exposure so out of parameters they were. His new aesthesis showed a clear transition: the ideal contours turned into disturbed proportions, sometimes also into deformations articulating the "rareness of the model." Faded away was the provocation about knowledge and memory of sexual pleasure which had hitherto been the motivating and exciting component in the previous works of the artist. For the first time he spoke about trauma, about the refused body, portraying the unavoidable body transformations imposed by age and ending with decomposition. This move of the artist already pointed to the hidden patterns of subjectivity which in Gender Studies' is referred to as marginalized group identity.

The post-Soviet as well as Armenian social and cultural contexts greatly deplored aging and especially that of women. The new economic relations gave rise to hitherto unheard of demand for youth, beauty and health. "Woman as image," the famous expression from the contemporary feminist critical discourse, dictated the traditional codes of constructing the feminine: everlasting femininity, angelic beauty, purity, "angel of the home," passive and obedient, "self-abnegation" for the sake of a number of commonly accepted (masculine) ideals. This idealization had its reverse side as well. Behind this sublime purity there stood the old witch or conceited temptress, the monster...

The artist started to reverse the codes of the obvious and the visually "deductive" material reinforced through mass-media, soap-operas, commercials and show-business culture. It should be noted that in the Armenian artistic context of that period the paradigm of "talking with body" already existed as a feminist strategy for women who through body-art and video-performance transformed and played with accepted codes of the naked body and aesthetic of pain. However, "speaking about body" when the latter becomes an object of examination and epistemological endeavor did not exist in the same context.

The series of Raffie's works with "unpresentable" body explicitly opposed the body beauty appearing in mass media which normally portrays the body not as a whole, but rather focuses on separate parts of the body. This in the Marxist feminist discourse is paralleled to pornography since the wholeness of female body gets dismembered and presented as separate erotic parts. Raffie started to portray the whole yet marginalized-by-the-dominant-discourse-of- pleasure bodies threatening and playing with the discourse. Thus, in the decisions of the artist the body stopped being only a display. The body turned into an object of research. This series of works already carried in them the ideology necessary to transcend more serious boundaries of body and social order. This is particularly evident in his project entitled "Human Doors." All that had hitherto been built up in his works in the form of objects for the photos and had turned into characters for his various narratives expressing the drama of the body sufferings, got expressed in the mentioned project in the form of a specific worldview – the history of sex. (The artist admits that the body was fundamental for the further development of his artistic language and more firmly grounded worldview).

In the project the artist has expressed the space of bodily figurativeness as an alternative "public sphere" in which through artistic expression not only does the gender discourse get revived but also the discourse of sex exclusions is actualized. The installment itself turns into a model of "majority" figure-objects who appeared as enveloped in their own subjectivity and caught by "gender trouble."<sup>4</sup> Pictured in "troubled" dynamic each figure appears as the carrier of the truth of a concrete character which can easily be linked to this or that subjectivity. Each object becomes a pure signifier of a cultural or social field. The body is not locked up only in its the physicality. There where the physicality ends the doors to the social open because "the body does not only sense and feel: it is a weapon for recording the space and time and a weapon for modeling the space and time. The body turns into a display on which various themes are observable. The body turns into a producer of not only the empirical but also the transcendental."<sup>5</sup> Not only food, liquids, etc., go in and out of the body. The bodies are signs and symbols of a culture. Working with various body forms, the artist often uses paint transforming the alive faces into masks. Roland Barthes writes that the photography was and continues to be haunted by the phantom of painting as though painting stood at the roots of a photograph. Yet, the thinnest point of junction between the photography and art, according to him, is not the painting – it is the theater. This junction takes place thanks to the unique transition mechanism – the Death.<sup>6</sup> The conventional theater stands out for its love for the cult of the dead. Marked with special paint, the bodies appear both as alive and dead. The Spectrum seems to be coming to life through existential and emotional sufferings. Yet, these are, at any rate, dead signs which shock the spectator with their resemblance to being alive. The spectator experiences a feeling of nightmare at the sight of the frozen body of the "dead." In the project the bodies represent the problem of subjectivity which problematizes the idea of a new compatibility of each "subject" presented by the artist in the "history of sex" with the institutionalized collectivity. Problematized are also the idea of self-identification and possibility of individual emotional mechanism of the Self when the latter is compelled to continuously deal with the system of limits, oppressions, discoursed gender politics, sexual exclusions and all other cultural and social taboos arising from them.

The variety of the bodies suggests multiple subjectivities. The history of sex after the initial unconscious efforts to shake the foundations of its dependency started to decentralize the discourse that rules and leads it. In contemporary culture and thinking there is an obvious paradigmatic move toward epistemological subjectivity marked by gender. Gender Studies has noted the specificity of its academic discipline which studies not only feminine and masculine subjectivities along the traditional line of binary oppositions, but among them also other kinds of subjectivities such as heterosexuality, the so-called "queer" identity (eccentric identity), gay-lesbian-transsexual identities. The term "queer" was first coined

by American feminist theorist Theresa de Lauretis. (The reference to methodology of feminist theory here and hereinafter is not accidental. Gender Studies uses methodology of these theories as well as other contemporary critical discourses). The term then started to be used not only in reference to both female and male homosexuality, but also all other kinds of contemporary identities. The contemporary culture among its research objectives included a new apparatus which examines the concepts of racial, national and ethnic identities. Thus, in gender marginalization oppressions of subjectivity grew in their forms which in turn increased gender inequalities in the post-modern world.

Going back to the project, it should be noted that normally the space of the exhibition functions as a theatrical and concert deck with an auditorium for spectators which makes it appear as an isolated field not prepared for unexpected and unfamiliar intervention. Perhaps one can say that there exists no space until it is filled up and given a new meaning. The format of the mentioned "spacing" has been perfectly expressed in the ideology of the project. The step-like vertically ascending architecture of the space common to amphitheater leaves the impression of a hierarchical order, while the seats placed roundly and marked by curved boundaries between the rows reminding runways in sport competitions symbolize the struggle for leadership, power and inequality. Yet, the artist has placed the figure-objects in a random order as though accidentally (and not necessarily) not articulating who the winners and losers are. More expressive is the collective "escape" and the short "pause" in hard-to-overcome distance. There are static figures in the installation. The artist does not give rules or routes for overcoming the field: the moves that we make as spectators and a "final objective" are not forced onto us. The space becomes a universal frame in which "gender trouble" strives to disturb the established world order and the rigid lines of hierarchy. The characters in the installments are engaged in a runaway from oppression from within.

Even if the principle of the "Other" does get articulated, it is not done so inside the symbolic community. The "Other" here is the external world. In the meantime, the difference between subjectivities is built through the principle of diversity. Research on gender does deal with the theme of the "Other" common to the postmodern discourse. The difference between the "Other" and the Diverse is regarded to be ideological and not logical. Contrary to the rhetoric of multiculturalism, being the "Other" in the contemporary culture means being subjected to fundamental dispossession, i.e. political marginalization and discrimination. The "Other" is interpreted as unequal irrespective of the fact whether the "Other" is in a dominant or subordinate position. On the other hand, being "Diverse" means being equal but different.<sup>7</sup>

The term "Other" which Simone de Beauvoir used in her theoretical formulations, to these days remains limited in its usage referring only to women's subjectivity. The formulation of Simone de Beauvoir more fully expressed in her famous work *The Second Sex* (1949) which was the Bible of Feminism for a long time, apart from not implying multiple and not less victimized "otherness," universalizes the concept of otherness for all women. Thus, it disregards other forms of female subjectivity such as post-colonial, colored, lesbian, etc. The problematic of female subjectivity is essentialized by the author and is generalized for all women who, as the author believes, are united by analogous female experience.

Going back to the installation, I would like to emphasize the semantic doubling appearing in it. At first glance it seems as though through the figure-objects the artist strived to express some kind of "anarchical" space of absolute freedom suggesting it as a field of "escape" from oppression and subordination. On the other hand, the project makes one believe that not only is it not possible to get free from administrative-normative conditionality and bars suppressing the person, but the "center" of oppression hangs heavily upon each and every object. If we are speaking about "escaping" the oppressing *center*, then the artist in no way points to that center and does not illustrate the ways for de-centering the discourse of power. Each character with one of the many different identities carries on itself the weight of the heterosexual power law referred to as phallocentrism in Lacan's terminology.

Each photo-object presses a strange for the spectator object against its genitals. It is a mechanical metallic door *cubeh* (Persian word denoting the object with which one knocks on the door). In the past these *cubehs* were used to knock on the doors and to recognize the gender of the visitor. The *cubehs* had either the form of a penis or vagina. They were installed on the gates and doors of private and public buildings in Iran. One can still see them in the country although today they have lost their original purpose giving away to new

technology. I saw many such *cubehs* during my short trip to Isfahan with Raffie. They have not been removed in urban spaces (Kashan, Yazd, etc) in which the *cubeh* carries the meaning of preservation of culture, rituals and customs whereas in the more industrialized capital city of Teheran similar *cubehs* cannot be found.

In the past Isfahan was known for having the best blacksmith who made incredibly patterned metallic and bronze pieces (*poulak* in Persian) on which the mentioned gender differentiators were installed. They produced different sounds at knocking. The male sound was low and deep whereas the female sound was high and loud. The hosting house recognized the gender of the visitor from the sound the *cubeh* made. The "male" *cubeh* was always installed on the right, i.e. the opening side of the gate, whereas the female *cubeh* was installed on the left, i.e. the side of the gate which normally remained locked.

Iranian scholar and historian Mariam Kian whom we met during our trip has done research on the gendered *cubehs*. According to her, the practice of *cubehs* dates 350 years back with roots exclusively in the Persian culture since no other Islamic country has had the practice.<sup>8</sup> However, during a private conversation when we tried to learn more about the gendered "bells," **Mariam** Kian preferred to speak more about the historical roots giving the time and reasons behind the appearance of the fences with gates installed on them for permitting the entrance and the exit. Her answers to our request to give more details about the ideological side of the phenomenon were evasive. Going against the suppression of freedom and the social restrictions requires radical political resistance which not every scholar is prepared to go to. As an Armenian Iranologist noted to me during a private conversation, modern Iranians are a type of story-tellers who are forced to make up myths, allegories, moving metaphors to yield to the ideology and rigid laws of the theocratic country where the essence of the civil rights are defined by the Islamic Law. The gendered *cubehs* became widely used in the country with the spread of Islam. If the visitor was a woman, she was to be greeted by a female at the door, and vice-versa. On the other hand, if the receiving party was informed about the arrival of a man, the women of the home had to cover themselves up from head to feet, leaving only their faces open...

In the Koran, the main guide of the Islamic legislation, behavior and moral norms, requirements on women are quite strict and structured:

"And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their headscarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms." (24.31)

"No blame will be attached to elderly women who are not hoping for sex, if they take off their outer garments without flaunting their charms, but it is preferable for them not to do this: God is all hearing, all seeing." (24.60)\*

The rigid law in the country regarding women's covering of their bodies and body extremities was "softened" by poetic romanticism. A contemporary notice on the shopping mall Golestan in the Shahrahke Gharb district of Teheran reads: "A covered woman is a pearl in its shell." Mariam Kian showed us an old photography of a *cubeh* dating back to the Ghajar dynasty and carrying the poetic words of Saadi: "There can be no two suns. If you do not cover yourself up, the sun will have to set."

During our stay in Iran we discovered some other curious facts. The *cubehs* on the mosques were in the form of female genitals both on the right and the left sides. Infrequently there was also an inversion of their positions: the female *cubeh* was placed on the right side while the male *cubeh* was on the left, the "female" side. Mariam Kian explained this by the fact that in Islam women are ahead of men in their proximity to God whereas men have to work harder to drive the animal beginning out of themselves and strengthen the spiritual. However, the doors of a mosque are always open and there is no need to ask for permission to enter a mosque. The only day when permission to enter is required is on one of the most sacred religious holidays of the country – the birthday of the Prophet.

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\* The pieces have been cited from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem's translation of the Qur'an Published by Oxford University Press, 2005.

The strong patriarchal norms in the country greatly discriminating women in public representations, in the canons and rules of the behavior, have opened up "male" professions for women. The profession of police traditionally regarded as masculine nowadays is accessible to a large number of women because only a female can go up close to an unknown woman and particularly touch the latter. The same pattern is observable in the security system: a woman can be checked for security only by a woman. The greater possibility for jobs perhaps pleases women, but women's pay in all professional spheres is much lower than men's pay.

The artist certainly does not try to "localize" the problem in his project. The problem of subjectivity at large is portrayed as transnational and universal. However, it is obvious that if not for his own biography and the context of his birth country, the problem of gender would have not been so actual for the artist. Moreover, today Iran is the (hostile) "Other" in the perception of the "West" if we are to misuse the word to draw lines between the parts of the world on the principle of cultural totality. Many researchers believe that for an average westerner the absence of an enemy figure is a traumatic experience while the presence of it is one of the necessary conditions for drawing the boundaries and constructing one's own identity. Edward Said has illustrated in his book *Orientalism* how the Orient gets constructed when the latter is studied and constructed through "otherness" located in the ideological matrix of "lacking." Similarly, the discourse of Orient exists in relation to the political and economic interests of those who speak and write about it.

However, contemporary Iran, that "inconvenient" Other for the West, itself had a profound intolerance to any form of separatism and did neutralize the internal "Other." Historical evidence shows that before the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s the country was a multinational state where Persians were only half of the country's population. The pre-revolutionary secular government weakened the religious influence which resulted in the decentralization of the Iranian community and growth of national differences. The centralized government needed a unifying and stabilizing factor. The Revolution of 1979 became this stabilizing factor. Among other things, Islam played a meta-ethnic role in uniting the country and solving the problem by bringing the divided people of Iran together around the Persian ethnos.

Armenia, on the other hand, which underwent the project of Soviet modernization and the external emancipation of which covered up the existing patriarchal relations and colonial patrociny, only in the post-Soviet times acquired the possibility to generate the discourse of sexual exclusions in its legal and public context. More precisely this was the discourse of male homosexuality because female and other queer representations are less evident perhaps because they do not get commented on even by NGOs dealing with gender issues. The so-called gender display as performance of sexual belonging is discussed by many specialists of the abovementioned problematique not from the point of view of social construction, but rather from the perspective of biological determinism. This approach insists that there are no ascribed, pre-written gender roles and takes no notice of the everyday interpersonal relations in which eccentric identities continue to be regarded as being outside the norm.

The epistemological effect of using the abovementioned *cubehs* as an instrument for understanding sex has some subordination in the project. The biological sex is subordinated to the social and cultural order. The sexual differentiation is a result of and is manifestly connected to the social and is subjected to a higher power – the "law of heterosexuality." Under this "law," as Judith Butler has argued, subjectivity is performative and theatrically performs the powerful social norms of this law.<sup>9</sup> Taken from this perspective, the gendered *cubehs* are the Center to which the figure-objects are "stuck" suggesting that everything and everyone is controlled by the phallus (phallocentrism). It is worthy to refer to Andrea Fraser who has noted that the "external" cannot be stirred because the institution is inside most people.<sup>10</sup> It is not accidental that the most accepted "escape" for some people is choosing the existential. This type of artist or intellectual is not a public "rebel" but rather one who choose the life of a hermit away from the unnecessary noise and "chattiness" of crowds and believe that "freedom" can be achieved only through this means.

Thus, the narrativity of the installation not only does not neutralize the sexual oppression, but rather emphasizes a certain desperateness and impossibility of escape. Even the spectator's gaze bears a resemblance to a voyeuristic observation of the passive victims, otherwise called *le plastron* in de Sade's terminology.

I recall a different artistic work by Valie Export entitled "Genital Panic" (1969) in which she tries to neutralize sex. The artist, dressed in jeans with a large hole revealing the pubic area, rushes into the theatre of the Munich Film Museum and faces each spectator in the audience watching the film. One of the interpretations of this act is that "[d]isclosing her sex under precisely the condition where jouissance is being displayed as spectacle on the screen (and often sexuality itself), she abolishes gender and sexuality. On the one hand she shows her own readiness to undergo castration, and on the other, she offers the audience the opportunity to experience their own. The audience "voyeur" finds himself in a situation in which it is not he who observes the spectacle (often focused on the sexual theme), but the Sex (of the artist) itself that starts observing the viewer, canceling his very capacity to observe".<sup>11</sup>

The fragmented, fluid and instable aspects of sex and sexual embodiment in the "Human Doors" include one more aspect of the postmodern culture – the new restrictions in subjectivity through the "machine." This aspect is presented in the video work entitled "Inter-est."<sup>12</sup> In the imaginary world pictured in the video one can see the artist's allusion on the biopolitics of the body which finds a way out, gets free of the social and cultural constructs through the technical.

The so-called cyber-romanticism so widely spread in our days marks the human beings role play in the internet in which the unclear category of "real life" is mixed up with a more unreal virtual stimulation for the construction of ones own Self. In the virtual world the problematic of subjectivity of "completeness" disappears and the old hierarchical power gets transformed to new "webs." According to many researchers, the hierarchical power is not weaker in new "webs." Nonetheless, it is worthwhile considering the opinion of researchers who saw a new possibility of escape in the machines. In the virtual space the person is free to construct and deconstruct identities, "desire machines," relationships, space, time and gender. It is believed that changeability, multiple roles and openness to re-personification are ideal qualities for a person. Using them, one creates for oneself a more complete model to survive and adapt to the surrounding, to more easily penetrate the dynamic of private and public spheres and the construct "I" in which every re-personification can become real.

Donna Haraway's in her *Cyborg Manifesto* pointing to the "troubling dualism" in the social and cultural contexts (self/other, soul/body, culture/nature, masculine/feminine, civilized/savage, real/unreal, active/passive, God/person) emphasizes that the high-tech culture in an intriguing manner challenges these dualisms which get systemically harmonized to establish power over women, the colored people, nature, the working people, the animals, everyone that is constructed as the "Other"... The cyber-organic form is regarded by her to be savior as it can show the way out from the maze of dualisms into which we have pushed our bodies and our tools. (According to Haraway, the Cyborg is the cyber organism, a mixture of a machine and organism, created by and with the social reality and forming in turn the real and fictional of our social and body existence. Cyborg is a fiction describing our social and body reality, as well as a resource of imagination pointing to a number of prolific combinations).<sup>13</sup> Politicizing the problem radically, Haraway renders the cyber organic not only as a dream toward a universal language. She considers the phenomenon as a possibility for "a powerful heretic heterogloss in which one can actually speak out." This resonates with Gayatri Spivak's question "can the subaltern speak" when s/he is located in the margins of symbolic power in possession of no voice and speech.

In the problem of machine and organism contemporary psychoanalysts see the connection between the personal and the health problem rather than a political discourse. The belief that the technological forms of information exchange, new electronic communication, etc., create abrupt transition and failure in internalizing roles for human beings thus bringing about serious symptoms of multiple personality disorder and personality fragmentation. This can be observed in real life as well since there are people who cannot get used to openness and endless diversity of offered roles. The person is compelled to cling to or choose a subcultural and even pathological role.

The video work about virtual interpersonal communication offers a simplified social laboratory with no reference to chains, knots and web of complex meanings. In my view, the work carries some irony. The absolutely ephemeral electronic figure-shades are stereotyped into similarity and resist any kind of individualism, illustrating the internalization of cultural-normative standards in the electronic version. In the Global Web a powerful movement for reformation and reincarnation of the Self takes place and the

artist places the codes of the ignorant world (versus the virtual world) into the machine world, reducing the gender display of the real world and the multiple incarnations of the virtual world to a standardized code of *youth* and *beauty*. This essentialist decision, in fact, offers more preferable models for "happy" existence not only for the ignorant but now also for the virtual. Here any attempt to problematize the concept of sex results in the simple reduction to the "optimistic" call of mass media "

The artist places the photo-objects and video work in spaces back to youth, fitness, shaping and other health-boosting and age-reducing activity!" which are linked and yet separated from one another by a wall. The narratives in both sides of the space shout desperateness. It is as though all subjectivities ("subjects") in the "history of sex" presented in the project get "power" instruction that belonging to one's own gender is the real "healthy" act *par excellence* because there is no possibility to create other histories to help people achieve a larger unity!?

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<sup>1</sup> Краусс Р. Подлинность авангарда и другие модернистские мифы. ХЖ, Москва, 2003, с.34-38.

<sup>2</sup> Барт Р. Camera Lucida. Комментарий к фотографии. Ad Marginem, Москва, 1997, с.44.

<sup>3</sup> Барт Р. (ibid.), с.45.

<sup>4</sup> The term is borrowed from Judith Butler. (Batler J., Gender trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity; New-York, Routledge, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Choukrov K.. Body as the political excess. Valie Export. Ed. H. Saxenhuber, Ina Martens. Imprint-Impressum, Vienna, 2007, p.175.

<sup>6</sup> Барт Р. (ibid.), с. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Введение в гендерные исследования. Ч.1. Под ред. И.Жеребкиной, Харьков ХЦГИ, СП «Алетейя», 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Kian M. "Zoumoud Giar's Art Works from Kashan". ("Zoumoud Giar" in Persian literally means "the maker of patterns"), in: *Meimar* (Architect), September, 2005, p. 108-114.

<sup>9</sup> Batler J. (ibid.)

<sup>10</sup> Fraser A. "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", in: *Artforum*, September, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Choukrov K. (ibid, p.176)

<sup>12</sup> The title is connected to the etymology of the word: [... (n.)... <Middle Latin (ML), Latin (L): it concerns, lit., it is between; r. *interesse* <ML, L: to concern, lit., to be between; (v.) earlier *interest* as v. use of the n.; see INTER-, ESSE] (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York, 1996)).

<sup>13</sup> Харауэй Д. Манифест киборгов: наука, технология и социалистический феминизм 1980-х гг. В сб. Гендерная теория и искусство. Анталогия 1970-2000. Под ред. К.Дипуэлл, Л.М.Бредихиной. М. Росспэн, 2005., (с. 323-324, 357-367).