

## **The Exchanges of the Skin**

Katia Canton

*Here's the tattoo: my ever-present soul diffuses itself in white gleams into the interchanging reds... Thus, complex and somewhat frightening, our identity card appears. Everyone has his own, an original, like your thumbprint or the conformation of your jaws. No card is like another, they all change with time; I've made a lot of progress since my gloomy youth and my skin bears the traces and paths opened up by those that have helped me in the search for my diffused soul.*

Michel Serres

(1)

*The only wholeness, the only world that really exists is the one you embrace. Infinite richness of soul's life – it is the only existing thing.*

Pierre Lévy (2)

The concern with limits, identities and the otherness of the body was already present in the artist's previous series, *Anfíbios* [Amphibians], where Xavier showed bodies dimly delimited by the outlines of the nets that they were donning, diluted into the same blueness of the pools in which they were immersed.

In those works, the idea of deconstructing the body sprang up from the observation of street beggars wrapped in felt blankets and from verifying that, when searching for shelter, body limits fade out and give way to the masses and to the volumes that get dissolved and that gradually reinvent themselves on the threshold of gestures and movements.

In the re-creation of this concept, the artist used nets enveloping bodies immersed in water – a retrieval of the liquid matter that constitutes a great deal of the human body. Semblances of amphibians, living metamorphoses trying to reinvent themselves, the encapsulated bodies seeking shapes for themselves as they gesticulated and writhed, losing the memory of their individual and human features to materialize as strange bodies within the blue plasma.

In *Anagramas* [Anagrams], Daisy Xavier dispenses with frames, settings, or extra-body resources enveloping us in a simple and throbbing landscape of bodies, a dense lineup of skins. Corporeal spaces denuded of their personas become subtle volumes – pauses made for one to anticipate how skins will feel when touched, the textures of the pores and their temperatures.

These masses of flesh, in their whole truth and full vulnerability – sublime warranty of their humanity – become living and throbbing materials, precious documents of the memory of the body.

Here, we take part in a poetic game of instances of incompleteness, where each piece tells a forceful, autobiographical and naked story involving four generations – four women lending the particular features of their lives and bodies to create another nature. Here we are dealing with a nature of imprecise limits, replete with pulsations, dislocations, breathings, inequalities, small symbioses.

These reliefs of flesh touch one another, fitting snugly in, at times gently floundering; they coil up and bend, they get wrinkled and then stretch out afterwards. These bodies intertwine just like trees that have been planted too close together, growing and expanding inch by inch along time.

In this continual motion, either frozen, as in the sequence of photographic works or fluid, as in the videos projected in an aquarium –

a retrieval of the plasmatic character of the internal matters of which the human body is made – the skins start drawing affection outlines. Together, body parts are turned into boxes, receptacles of lined-up, stacked-up, stuck-together life narratives in miscegenation, united by the ways of genealogic complicity.

These masses of flesh are soul shelters – casings that point to the possibility of attaining a form of refinement related to the capability of being and feeling, clearing up some sort of an access trail to the world's spiritual powers through worldly, carnal relations and through the exchanges that are contained in the orifices and pores.

This compact of bodily masses becomes true anagrams as they play a game of parts that intertwine. There, limbs are transplanted from body to body, migrating in space and mystifying us in a delicate *trompe-l'oeil*, ascribing translucency to the surfaces in their ability to diffuse themselves, as a fetus growing inside the womb.

Through contact, friction and the constant grazing of one skin against the other, there happens the embodiment of an action that leads to delving deeper into the body surface, bringing souls close together, sharpening the senses, thickening the present moments of each life experience.

Times get expanded in this continual reinvention of the skin. In the opposite sense of the equation of the various spaces intercrossed into one sole time – something guaranteed by the technological development of jet planes, by cybernetic culture, by the internet – what we have in these anagrams is an accumulation of times stacked up in one sole space. The existences of four women, of four stories experienced along four generations, become one large mass that compactly occupies the space of an artwork.

Finally, the precise outlines of each body then slowly fade away, allowing for a subtle exchange. A gathering of volumes finds an organization and then, slowly and provisionally, gets recomposed into an unstable cluster, into a packet of instances of otherness which constitutes contemporary identity.

In fact, in a globalized and unequal post-modern world, the process of identification through which we project our identities has become a more variable, problematic and provisional issue. In the words of British sociologist Stuart Hall, “this process produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as not possessing a fixed, essential or permanent identity” (3). According to Hall, identity today has become a movable celebration, something like the series of bodies in friction, as Daisy Xavier offers us.

In this game of many a hybridism, of identities that seem about to go into fusion, shuffling up their limits and becoming mutant bodies, what the artist offers us is actually the unmasking of the notion of skin as a limit of the self. It becomes, on the contrary, a repository of transfusions, of multiple contaminations and of unpredictable re-combinations.

**Katia Canton, PhD in Interdisciplinary Arts from the University of New York; a professor and a curator at Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo [University of São Paulo Contemporary Art Museum].**

Notes:

## galeria **laura marsiaj**

- (1) *Os Cinco Sentidos* [The Five Senses] (Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand Brasil, 2001).
- (2) *O Fogo Libertador* [The Liberating Fire] (São Paulo, Iluminuras, 2000).
- (3) *A Identidade Cultural na era da Pós-Modernidade* [Cultural Identity in the Post-Modern Era] (Rio de Janeiro, DP&A, 2000).

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