

Beneath [three] dichotomous circumstances

Text by Eleonora Farina

We shop therefore we are (B.K., 1987)ⁱ. The economic boom of the JIT Post-Fordist society has been the controversial arena for the sharp Barbara Kruger's photo-collages during her entire career of feminist conceptual artist. And we shop according to how we see ourselves in the mirror: our gaze in front of such heterotopic space turns out to be modelled by our intimate perception and, very much, by the multitude of demands we get from the market economies. We want to seem how we decide to – or better, how the mass-mediatic world “suggests” we should. Pain and money for glamorous perfection; *our body is a battleground* (B.K., 1989) for all the sets of glossy rules. In their artistic practice Apparatus 22 investigates such mechanisms that bond every consumer to the monadic (economic) entity above him, deepening «the way desire and emotions are shaping the fashion industry and vice-versa»ⁱⁱ. The caustic statement «You may look good but you feel bad»ⁱⁱⁱ installed by the collective on a red velvet fitting room (*Fitting not (Room Two)*, 2013) clearly denotes their way to inquire the Zeitgeist of both the outer reality and the human inner complexities full of hopes and fears, ideals and frustrations. To be or to appear: that is the controversy today. Similar intellectual and creative process of their most recent project: *Several Laws. The elastic test* (2016), where the disturbing still melancholic aphorisms tattooed on rectangular leather pieces are incisive affirmations yet rhetorical questions destined to each and every one of us. Playing with iconic double entendres and making use of disorienting personal pronouns in order to address all the beholders, Apparatus 22 condenses a decade of research (begun in 2006 under the designer label Rozalb de Mura and pursued further by the artist's group's outset in 2011) on the all-around identity of the human being within our resilient contemporaneity controlled by multinational corporations: aesthetic power covered under tons of layers of creams and powders; social stereotypes for which «the splendor and horror of old body» do not resist to lancets and injections; lipsticks, mascaras and nail polishes as radical tools against any religious gender discrimination; «a fabulous strapless gown» that politically reveals the racist dazzle of the white skin; the technology of Photoshop and Instagram tracing on our body disquieting *patterns of aura* (2012) from other times, due to which past and present mingle relentlessly. It is an *infinite contradiction* (2016) of dichotomies, towards which the artists take an activist stand fluttering a black flag filled with the multicoloured variety of emotional viewpoints. *Are You Yourself* (B.K., 1984) or is such bulimic system steering you towards the creation of your own artificial, glittering appearance? The Aristotelian liar paradox is hidden in the pseudo-scientific socio-anthropological questionnaire *Portraying Simulacra* (2013), where at issue are the notions of fake and false, original and true and where the strategy of questioning itself is the core of the work letting the perceiver to deepen and to reflect upon all their multifaceted implications. Is (the colour of) our skin

on the pantone of diversities of *Erratic statistics* (2016) our autobiography, or instead «beneath the shields – remain real just the – bones and silence» of our melancholy?

Every word becomes futile if charmingly aware that my organism is anatomically transparent to the Universe rays and that any kind of clothing cannot protect me from the molecular transit within.

ⁱ In *Italic* followed by the abbreviation B.K. the paraphrases, made by the author, of the titles of Barbara Kruger's photo-collages; in brackets the production year.

ⁱⁱ "Portraying Simulacra. Apparatus 22 interviewed by Luigi Fassi", in: *Reflection Centre for Suspended Histories. An Attempt*, Romanian Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, newspaper publication accompanying the homonymous exhibition, 2013, p. 8.

ⁱⁱⁱ If not stated differently, in guillemets the quotations from the texts of Apparatus 22's works.