

Body Architectures

Tamara Jacquin

Cultural Center of Aravaca (Moncloa - Aravaca) – Madrid City Council

We are only born in one body we cannot detach ourselves from and a series of categories are applied on the said body restricting its possibilities and shaping it into a pre-established order that assigns a male or female gender, color, race, measurements, size, nationality, roots. The starting point and engine of Tamara Jacquin's artwork (Chile, 1986) is always the body, a tool she uses to perform a critical analysis of our contemporary society. Her series *Body Architectures*, which started in 2014 and was awarded a grant by the BilbaoArte Foundation in 2015, focuses on the body as a measure and a reference from which the subject establishes all kinds of relationships with its environment, metaphorically shaping the construction of the normative body, i.e. coded, controlled, constrained and socially and culturally oppressed.

The experience generated by the movement of prosthetic objects that the artist designs and builds to explore her body is captured in photographs and videos, constituting the artwork that has been selected for this exhibition. It is about a performative registry that accounts for a research process with theoretical bases enrooted in Judith Butler's thinking in order to question the naturalized criteria for classifying bodies. Gender and sexuality norms have historically led towards a physical standardization which moves the body away from the idea of *refuge*, as the element itself where one is born and is, to bring it closer to a whirl of obsessions frequently leading to a dimorphic disorder.

In that sense and influenced by Butler, Foucault and Bourdieu, Jacquin shells the cultural codes registered in the bodies since birth which, in some way, determine certain body behavioral patterns triggered by the image that one has of itself. Since, according to Butler and Foucault, there isn't an essence that the gender can express or exteriorize, it is the acts of the gender that create the gender. But then, there is a chance of gender transformation and exchange of roles based on body modifications, especially in conduct towards the subversive. If the purpose of the initial classifications of the body respond to a desire of social order, it is then possible to rebel oneself, but how?

Jacquin, who has studied Architecture and Fine Arts, creates rigid and heavy wooden structures, determining the position of the body as a metaphor of domination and oppression when carrying them. She carries the structures that make her body suffer in a way. These emulate carrying a home with you, maybe a refuge but arduous nonetheless; we find a female pattern in them that keeps questioning the gender as a negative social construction. For instance, the piece *Body Architecture IV* (2015) shows a wooden dress; the artist tackles the construction of femininity through the dress image, the image that projects a body with a dress, an image of fragility? Additionally, the video performance *Thinking of Penelope* (2015) shows us how the wooden fabric is knitted, reinforcing that idea of building structures and codes to dress the body. However, the piece of artwork that best shows this gender treatment and the female identification with fashion, which distorts body patterns, is the polyptych *Body Architecture III* (2015), a series of nine portraits in which the artist acquires different identities according to the audience's prejudices; given that sometimes it seems she is wearing an ethnic veil, or a tunic in others or a funny hat. Such experimentation recalls the work of the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, even though her view is actually addressed to the work of Rebecca Horn.

"The body is a very complex element, with many layers; it is presence, perception, movement and memory." Jacquin explains. "I was interested in figuring out why my body is the way it is, in other words, how my body is built, and in that path, I found out that a great part of that identity relation was also determined by the eyes of the other", she adds. Breaking up with the material cut of the German artist Horn in a subtle approach to Louise Bourgeois, Jacquin has produced in Madrid her most recent work incorporated in this exhibition, away from the prosthesis concept and wondering now about the spatial dimension exclusively. *Nomadic shelter for when the world turns hostile* (2016) is literally a bespoke portable and foldable refuge made on a human scale. Once again, the artist carries the refuge on her back as if she were carrying her home, evoking the feminist ideological burden, considering that the woman has always been

the one in charge of handling home-related issues in our culture, the duties that a conservative society pointed out as inherent to the female gender for a long time so as to balance the life in common. However, this home carrying is a defensive element now, it is not pure furniture or a traditional sculpture, but a moveable enclosure where you can stand from the inside, as the precursory piece *Body Architecture I* (2014): resilient.

The word *resilience* describes the capacity of human beings to overcome periods of emotional pain and adverse situations. This term comes mainly from psychology but it also has multiple meanings and it is used more and more in the art world. When used in an engineering field, it refers to the deformation energy per volume unit that can be restored in a deformed body when the effort that causes the said deformation stops. In both senses, the work of Tamara Jacquin could be considered resilient; an artist who does research from the individual to the general scope, from her experience and her body to the global circumstance of the others, considering that, accordingly to the Bulgarian thinker Tzvetan Todorov, to some extent, we live based on the eyes of the other, highlighting the importance that the life in common has and the roles that each of us adopt therein. That *other* is the spectator, the audience who is going to experiment and identify its own presence and corporeality through the tour that this exhibition project *Body Architectures* suggests inside the context of the Cultural Center of Aravaca in Madrid; the zenith of a process of more than three years investigating and creating, which has only been exhibited partially until now and that it is now shown in its entirety for the first time.

Marisol Salanova

Art critic and curator of the exhibition