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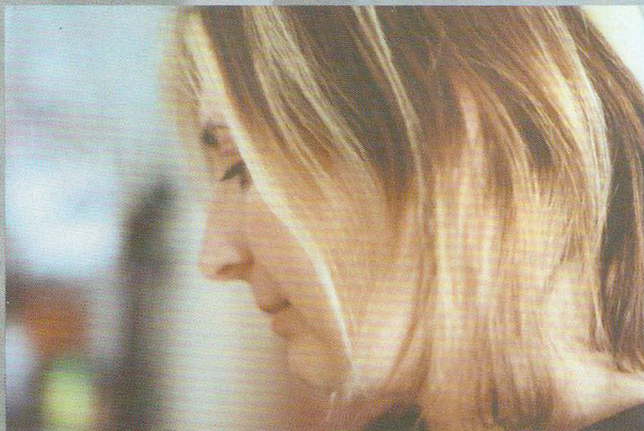
The Cinema Effect

at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

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GRIMANESA AMORÓS

› INTERVIEW ›



Grimanesa Amorós. Courtesy of the artist

Grimanesa Amorós is an artist who enjoys well-deserved international acclaim. Her work demonstrates an interest in sociology, anthropology and scientific research, especially in the fields of biology and genetics.

Through her work she touches on universal themes of concern to contemporary individuals, such as: the relationship between man and nature, personal and social identity, gender issues. Using various artistic media including video, photography, sculpture and installation, her work becomes a powerful vehicle, promoting diversity and dialogue among cultures. Our magazine interviewed her on the occasion of her recent exhibition in Miami.

WAM - You are currently presenting the installation "You Cannot Feel It...I Wish you Could" (2000-2003) at Hardcore Art Contemporary Space here in Miami. Could you tell us how this idea came about and what circumstances led you to create this piece?

GA - "You Cannot Feel It...I Wish you Could" is a piece that came out of my own experience and my husband's curiosity about pregnancy and childbirth. It made me think about how only a woman can really know what it feels like to have a life growing inside you. The bond that forms because of the physical aspects of being pregnant and the ability to feed and nurture this new being you've created, is something that's unavailable to men. However, scientific advancement seems to progress at lightning speed, so perhaps the idea of a male pregnancy is not as impossible a feat as it may seem. We don't know what the future holds.

WAM - Could you explain the conceptual and technical creative process involved in producing this installation?

GA - The conceptual process began really with my own pregnancy. The creation of this work was complicated. The sculptures, with the exception of the heads, were all cast from my own body when I was pregnant, only a week before I gave birth. In spite of the risk of casting a ninth-month pregnant woman, I found a casting company willing to make the mold. I also had to find a man willing to have his entire head cast. I took the two completed molds to create the handmade paper, consisting of natural fibers, which was a long and intense process. It took me almost 3 years to complete all eleven sculptures.

WAM - In many of your works you reflect on the role gender plays in human relationships. For example, in works such as, "You Cannot Feel It...I Wish you Could" or "King me, Dominate me," you touch on themes such as the hegemony that one gender exerts over the other in various life situations. Why is this topic of interest to you?

GA - The idea that my work often comments on gender role issues is interesting. I believe this is because I grew up in Lima, Peru, a very traditional environment where men and women had roles that were clearly defined. I remember a time in my childhood when someone told me I couldn't be a diplomat and travel the world because I was a woman. I remember thinking, "Why Not? Why can't I do that?" I truly did not understand that. I'm not one to believe that one gender (Male or Female) needs to have absolute power over the other, but I do believe in balance.



Above: *You cannot feel it...I wish you could*, 2000 - 2003
Installation view at Hardcore Art Contemporary Space (Miami, May 2008)
Photo Lilijana

Below: *King Me, Dominate Me*, 2007 - Artist proof
Lucite and Silicone with sound, 12" x 19" x 3"
Courtesy of the artist

and perhaps that's why some of my work expresses this part of me.

WAM - In many of your pieces you create immersive environments in which the visitor acts as both spectator and participant. What are you trying to achieve with these installations?

GA - *The environments I create for installations are very much a part of the artwork itself. I want to invite a spectator to not just see, but also experience, my work.*

WAM - In creating your pieces you have had the opportunity to work with composers, such as: Jim Wilson, Laura Koplewitz, Jonny Perl, Jose Luis Pardo, and in the case of "*You cannot feel it...I wish you could*," Meshell Ndegeocello.

We assume that the music in your installations is a resource that reinforces your intent to create environments in which the spectator can immerse himself, so he can participate. Tell me about the function music performs in your pieces. We would also like you to comment specifically about your collaboration with Meshell Ndegeocello.

GA - *Music in my work acts as another element that draws viewers in and asks them to use another one of their senses. I began to incorporate it in my work in 2002, while creating a piece entitled "Falling" - influenced by that fateful day of September 11, 2001. For the past 16 years I've lived and worked within only a few blocks of where the Twin Towers were situated in New York City. Sirens still rang clearly in my own head as I became aware that sound was just as much a part of the experience as the visual image. I had an opportunity to collaborate with Composer, Jim Wilson to make*



"The sculptures, with the exception of the heads, were all cast from my own body when I was pregnant, only a week before I gave birth."

music that became part of my piece. From that moment on, I started to work with composers such as Hilmar Örn Hilmarson, Laura Koplewitz, Meshell Ndegeocello, Jose Luis Pardo, Jonny Perl and others.

My collaboration with Meshell Ndegeocello began when I approached her to possibly create a piece of music to be part of my installation project, "You Cannot Feel It...I Wish You Could." I invited her to my studio to see the installation. She really loved the work and she decided to compose music specifically for "You Cannot Feel It...I Wish You Could."

WAM – Your works often reflect social themes, using the experiences of specific individuals, communities or groups, and their interaction with each other and with their natural environments, as a basis. In many instances they have represented public projects and your oeuvre has left a lasting imprint on the lives of the communities involved. Could you tell us a little about your sociological and anthropological concerns? What are you trying to achieve by reflecting them in your pieces?

GA – I approach much of my work through an analytical process. Since childhood, history, community, people, and human nature have always interested me. I do a lot of research, which is an important element when I start a project, especially when I create

public works of art. For example, I study the environment, the local culture, the people that make up the community, the historical factors and the physical space for which I am to install my art. These elements are critical, because again it would help me to create a piece that will ultimately invite a viewer to experience my artwork in an interactive way. Whether the participation is physically active or not, I would include some element of motion, history, community, familiar colors etc. to create a visual language.

WAM – We know that you were born and raised in Peru and that you have lived in the United States for more than twenty years. Tell us about your artistic and professional training.

GA – I knew I wanted to create art since the age of 11. I studied Psychology and Art at the same time. I attended the Miguel Gayo Art Atelier in Lima, Peru. Later, I had the opportunity to study at the Art Students League in New York City. This was the beginning of my career as an artist. I started off as mainly a painter and eventually moved on to creating three-dimensional works of art. I became very interested in the process of making paper and wanted to utilize this technique in my work. I was always fascinated with tactile elements; even as a painter, I tried to incorporate texture into my work through a process of layering and building surfaces of paint.



WAM – What artists or experiences have significantly impacted your career?

GA - I think that the people who have most impacted my career as an artist have been Miguel Gayo and Knox Martin. They were both teachers of mine in Peru and then New York. They encouraged me to pursue my career, and for that, I am grateful. Jacques Lowe was a friend, collector of my work, and, most importantly, a mentor. I now work in the space that once was Donald Sultan's studio, which I think, brought me good luck. My trip to Africa has had an impact on my artwork. The richness of the cultures in Africa changed my perspective of time, composition and symbolism. I also cannot forget motherhood, which taught me the importance of living in the present, how some things are just important right now, and how needs sometimes have to be met at that moment in time.

WAM – We know that you are going to show in September at HVCCA (Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art) in Peekskill, New York, as part of the "Origins" exhibition, which will also include other notable artists, such as: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Zhang Huan, Kiki Smith, Sigalit Landau, amongst others. Tell us about this exhibition and especially about the project you will present there.

GA - The exhibition titled "Origins," which I will be part of at the HVCCA in September, highlights works of art that incorporate the use of natural materials such as clay, wood, soil and fiber. I will be presenting a piece of work entitled, "Rootless Algas." It incorporates handmade paper sculpture, originally conceived from a trip I took out to Flatey Island off the coast of Iceland. I was looking to study the various species of birds that were supposed to inhabit the island. What I found instead, was a beautiful landscape of seaweed and algae that covered the rocky shoreline. I was in awe of what I discovered and had to create a piece that reflected this. I noticed that the vegetation covering the rocks for miles, in thick piles, in an assortment of colors, all along the shoreline, was rootless. I went to work to create large, cast-paper algae, which I chose to hang from the ceiling to enclose the spectator. I produced a video from footage I shot on Flatey, combined with a score by Oscar award-winner, Hilmar Orn Hilmarsson, who spent much of his childhood summers on the island. The environment would reflect the dynamic relationship between nature and human beings. I wanted the space to allow the viewer to experience the beauty, and simultaneous sense of isolation, I felt while on the island.

WAM - What are you working on at the moment?



GA - I have a few projects, one of which I have just completed. It is a book/catalogue for a few of my public works commissioned by the Hudson Valley Healthcare Center in Peekskill, New York. Currently, I'm working on the research and development of a series of sculptural pieces entitled, "Delicias." I will have a video piece to be shown at the Chelsea Art Museum this coming June, curated by Koan Jeff Baysa, for a show called "Sonic Self." I'm also considering a collaborative with Koan Jeff in Washington, DC in the spring of 2009. I will be showing and traveling to the upcoming art fairs in Europe and the US, including Pinta New York, and Scope Basel - all in conjunction with Hardcore Art Contemporary Space.

WAM – When will you exhibit in Miami again? Do you have any other projects in mind for our city this year?

GA - I have The Ill New Media Festival in September at Hardcore Art Contemporary Space, as well as presenting work at the next Scope Miami. In 2009 I have a solo show at Hardcore Contemporary Art Space. □



The oeuvre of Grimanese Amorós has been widely exhibited in the United States, Europe and Latin America. In the last few years she has also developed several public projects of an educational and social nature. Among her most recent solo exhibitions and public works, most notable are: ArtSpace (Raleigh, NC); BUZZER 30 (New York); Remolino (Jamaica Art Center, New York); Substantial (Peekskill, New York); Ambulante Dental Health Van (Peekskill, New York); Terraforms (The Lab Projects, Miami, FL); Terrarium (New York); Yama Festival of Visual Arts, 5th edition (Bulgaria); Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture (New York); Frente Feroz (The Lee Building, Harlem, NY); Hudson River Healthcare Center (Peekskill, NY), among others. Furthermore, her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, such as: The Museum of the Americas (Washington, DC); The Lab Gallery (New York); Athens Institute for Contemporary Art (Athens, GA); SITE Santa Fe, Monothion 16 (Santa Fe, NM); Free Manifesta Biennial (Frankfurt, Germany). She has also participated in several art fairs and film festivals, such as: LOOP Fair (Barcelona, Spain); Pulse Miami (Florida); Art Forum Berlin (Germany); New Media Festival, Hardcore Art Contemporary Space (Miami, FL); Sequences Athens Video Art Festival (Athens, Greece); Optica 2006 (Gijón, Spain), among others.

Left and Right Page Images:
Grimanesa Amorós - You cannot feel it...I wish you could, 2000 - 2003
Multimedia installation - 39" x 19.5" x 13.5" (each piece), 21' x 60'
Music by Mesneil Ndegeocello - Lighting by Grimanese Amorós and Steven Dubay
Courtesy of the artist