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# Where I come from and where I belong

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Where I come from and where I belong: the two are forever linked. Deep, intimate links, connected to identity—denied, rejected links, cast aside, buried, thrown away and forgotten, leaving room for a new identity, deterritorialized, in a constant effort to make oneself over into a *creatio ex nihilo*. Sometimes for decades, resisting or deliberately ignoring where you came from; sometimes for a lifetime. Or on the contrary, sought-after, unearthed links, revealed in broad daylight, embraced, admired, appropriated, embodied, giving shape to an identity that is deeply rooted in territory. You don't know where you belong before knowing where you come from.

Each of Yapci Ramos' works is not only a self-portrait but also a brick in the edifice of her self-construction. Now at the age of maturity — a maturity evidenced in several museum exhibitions in 2018 and 2019, as well as in this catalogue—, the artist is taking a fresh look at her work, in both analytical and creative terms. She is beginning to study her more distant origins and incorporate them into her art; like an archaeologist, she is excavating the traces, genetic and otherwise, of her ancestors; she is unearthing “treasures” and boldly appropriating them for her own poiesis—her auto-poiesis. She is both becoming herself and providing a stage for the Other—for the Others living a parallel life (Back&Forth); for the Others that she is not, but could be (Perras y Putas); and for the Others that she herself once was, the little girl she calls Lolita. While this designation could engender confinement, the confinement of a predetermined identity, Yapci Ramos never ceases—in her work devoted to Lolita, as in all of her works—to eschew diktats, to eschew the imposition of a predetermined form. She repudiates the “politically correct” gaze and, through the power of her “politically incorrect” portraits, compels us to see and think about them.

Yapci Ramos' images are eminently sexual, and sex, like gender, is eminently fluid. In the artist's hands, sex and

gender inform us about the human condition, about energy, loneliness and connections: “... sex is not everywhere, it is both anywhere and nowhere. It exists in the world like a force among thousands of other forces. A libidinal energy exists, the way the spermatoc power of flowers exists, or the reproductive force of the stars, the tropism of cosmic flux, the magnetism of animal vigour, all creating variations on this unique, immaterial, invisible force.”<sup>1</sup> Her work also deals with the passage of time; in her video installation Red-Hot, we see the artist naked, writing words in her menstrual blood on her shower doors, then erasing them with the water, endorsing the fleeting interval of the menstrual cycle. One of the words is “39,” an indication that Red-Hot relates to age and time and a specific moment of life.

If sexuality is an essential part of one's individual identity, for Ramos, it is also fluid and malleable. Fluidity is seen throughout her work: fluidity of blood and water in Red-Hot, time fluidity in Lolita and Red-Hot, gender fluidity in Back&Forth, body fluidity in Natalia, fluidity of speech in Mayra.

## Lolita

The photographic series Lolita, of which an image is presented in Show Me, the artist's recent museum exhibition in Tenerife, is singular, authentic, powerful, courageous —and beautiful. With Lolita, Ramos brings “hidden things to the surface,” as she herself says. The pictured girl, freely, upon her own initiative, used the artist's clothes, shoes, makeup. “I saw her and captured those moments when she was wondering, as all children do, ‘Where do I belong?’” Lolita is also Yapci Ramos herself, just as she is thousands of little girls from yesterday and today, curious about the world around them, about what they understand and what they do not, girls who want to play,

<sup>1</sup> Onfray, M. (2008) *Les Bûchers de Bénarès: Cosmos, Eros et Thanatos*. Paris: Éditions Galilée.

with impunity, with all the possibilities one can imagine. The Albanian artist and writer Ornella Vorpsi expresses it well: “I did not create the world into which I was placed.” What could be more normal, then, to want to explore the world, to understand its systems and mechanisms, to experience all that is possible? In order to determine—and possibly create—the world “where I belong,” “I” need to understand what has happened, to know the rules, and to decide whether I want to follow those rules or “break” them.

Yapci Ramos is one of the few female artists today who dare show the way (little) girls play with their sexual identity and to expose the possibility that their sexuality exists. Lolita captures our attention, our projections, our desires, our images of what a girl’s sexuality should or should not be. How can children’s sexuality exist when, according to current norms, it should not? As if little girls (and little boys) were genderless, with no sexual organs, as if they did not explore them, as if they did not try to understand the pleasure they could procure. Yes, sexuality exists during childhood, one that belongs to the children themselves, and shamed by the one who thinks evil of it. Yes, children have their own sexuality, and Yapci Ramos asks the question “What is the right age?” without answering it: art is there to make us think rather than to provide answers. Whatever the right age however, adults have to respect the children and their sexuality without playing the voyeur-avenger.

With this photographic series, Ramos takes important risks and pursues an essential goal. The essential goal is to give back her childhood privacy to all Lolitas and hence to us, the viewers. And the risk? That of being labelled one day, like Irina Ionesco, a “perverse photographer,” discredited, judged, banished. But Yapci Ramos uses this ordalic risk as raw material for creating. Ramos states, however, that her Lolita gave only what she wanted. “I never asked for this or that. She gave me the space to photograph her, to photograph her power of attraction. She gave it to me. I saw it and took it.”

Lolita, at age eight, is a “little girl.” While the spectators’ gaze tends to objectify her, Ramos insists, through her images, that Lolita is, she exists, she tries to exist in different ways. Ramos’ Lolita does not provoke but searches: she looks for how her clothes, her “stuff,” her makeup, her attitudes, the roles she plays, might express what she searches to discover in herself. Look at her, admire her, this small person, rebellious and courageous, who braves our suspicious gaze, a gaze that sees sexualisation while

the child is searching for her identity.

Do not approach her, do not touch her, do not spy on her, do not tell her she is beautiful or that she is breaking the rules. Leave her in peace, because she is in no way searching for a sexual connection; she is searching for herself. Ramos reveals all this with her images, which are almost “self-filles” or “selfies,” speaking to us, adults who have forgotten how we wanted to be, whom we admired, whom we wanted to be and why. Fortunately, Yapci Ramos reminds us of the reality of a child, of a wild child who lives a child’s life according to codes of a child in search of him- or herself. “Let the little children come to them”<sup>2</sup>; look at this “becoming” but without intervening; keep your distance. Ramos generates this gaze from a distance, the distance of respect, while mentioning that “she enjoys putting herself on display as much as we enjoy looking at her.”

### **Natalia, “celestial tramp”**

Back&Forth is a double series of photographs taken during the 2000s of women and men who at the time made up Yapci Ramos’ world—in short, her family—, and videos of the same people ten years later, in which she asks them, “What of yourself would you like to give me today?”

Natalia is one of those family members, and as with all the subjects in Back&Forth, Yapci had already known Natalia for more than ten years. “She was twenty-four years old at the time. Ten years later, in 2016, and even today, in 2019, she is still a “celestial tramp” seeking to find herself. She is bare, stripped down, socially speaking. So when I filmed her, she asked to be naked.” And Natalia, dressed in her nakedness, fine and majestic, wanders around a graffiti-covered basement: she chose this location herself. And she repeats, slowly, to the rhythm of her footsteps: “home, time—home, time—home, time...” The home she does not possess, the time that passes yet still belongs to her. Natalia is not afraid of her own freedom. Natalia is the very model of the celestial tramp, except that they never really existed in images before Yapci Ramos: while Patti Smith might personify an intellectual and creative example, and we also have John Galliano’s Clochards collection with its silk rags, video art had not yet promoted the celestial tramp to the rank of an icon. This occurred thanks to Ramos, whose subversive and loving feminism opens our eyes to forbidden images, combining an extraordinary faithfulness to the original and an outstanding narrative ability.

<sup>2</sup> Polla, B. (2017) *Femmes Hors Normes*. Paris: Odile Jacob.



Ramos' work, as evidenced by her triple exhibitions this year, in 2019, is a sign of both great maturity and of an immense creativity that seems to have only just begun. A lavish prodigality with a rich, important message, essential in these frightening times of neopuritanism: "I could be her, I could be him, I could be them, they could be me." As Paul Ardenne puts it, "This prodigality in contemporary art is not a sign of total confusion, of an absurd or desperate scattering of gestures, values or intentions. It is the result of a poetic inflection that hereafter is decisive, favouring contamination."<sup>9</sup>

Yapci Ramos favours contamination, uncertainty and complexity. Decidedly and decisively.

<sup>8</sup> Bouchet, M. (2016) "Poetics of hybridity: Lolita, an Imagined Opera, a creation by composer Joshua Fineberg, scenographer Jim Clayburgh, choreographer Johanne Saunier, and video artist Kurt d'Haeseleer." In *Fabula / Les colloques. Circulations entre les arts*. Retrieved from [http:// www.fabula.org/colloques/document3898.php](http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document3898.php).

<sup>9</sup> Ardenne, P. (2009) *Art le Présent*. Paris: Editions du Regard.