

The femininity through Greek myths and the Renaissance painting according to the video artist and photographer Lee Yanor

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The concept of femininity is mysterious, complex and not accurately definable. Precisely for this reason over the centuries it has been the major core not only of different fields of art, but also of philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Therefore, the first feeling I get when an artist attempts to explore the above mentioned topic is always that of (positive) loss, of sinking into an abyss of sensuous visions of existentialism, which are unexpected but amazing.

This feeling of being (positively) stunned characterized my first glimpse and my thoughts when I visited the exhibition by **Lee Yanor - Israeli film maker, photo and video artist** - in Tel Aviv. In her career she has always been working on the deep essence of femininity and on the relation between body and space, with specific reference to the expressive language of dance.

In her new exhibition **Rooms**, held at Zemack Contemporary Art Gallery and curated by Sally Haftel Naveh, Lee Yanor leads the visitor through the gallery with video installations and photographs. The site-specific installations forge a path that represents the concept of femininity: the visitor needs to confront themselves with its archetypal aspects through an intense visual journey.

The video work **Full Moon**, presented at the entrance to the gallery, is emblematic of the entire exhibition. The video is focused on the figure of Barbara, a mature but still extraordinarily sensual woman, who emerges in a vigorous dance. Her harmonious and athletic naked body is wrapped tightly in a black overcoat and she wears elegant heeled-shoes. Some of her actions appear illogical (for example putting the shoes on and taking the shoes off) but convey the essence of the feminine archetype in a poetical way. Barbara appears like the visual representation of the Greek goddesses Aphrodite and Athena.

On the one hand she represents the unrestrained vitality of eros and of beauty like a foolish and therefore sublime pulse towards love; on the other hand she conveys a sort of supernatural wisdom that accepts the potential use of strength when pursuing a noble idea

of justice.

Full Moon introduces the visitor to two adjacent video works – **Lenny** and **Homecoming** - that contribute to render the representation of femininity even more complex.

The video **Lenny**, whose projection is on a rounded screen, focuses on the tender face of a young woman. This work is an example of visual poetry, which is clearly deeply rooted in the Renaissance painting, and leads the audience into the essence of femininity through the vision of a dreamy ethereal female figure. She will become quite vague and almost indefinite in the video **Homecoming**, which portrays a girl's see-through dress floating like a feather in the wind, thus creating shapes that, though iridescent, always appear to be harmonic and balanced.

We find a dress again in **Legato**, a two-channel video work that features a woman in a virginal white dress performing a graceful dance: a movement in space in front of a disquieting black screen. This installation creates a sort of expressive 'conflict' with the works **I Have To** and **I Want to See the Sea**, videos that display theatrical situations at the center of which stands a woman. The actions she performs, like hiding a bunch of spaghetti in the pocket of her red coat or putting the lipstick on her lips, are obsessive.

Those absurd acts, performed by the protagonist with irony and obsession, often mirror a representation filled with stereotypes.

The visual journey I have just described is combined with photographs that contribute to make the concept of femininity showed by Lee Yanor even more convoluted. I would like to end my article recalling one of these photographs.

In Maria, a single photographic frame, we look at an anonymous woman in a very large red dress. Her hair is falling over her shoulder and arm. We perceive the movement of her steps but we can not connect it to a precise subject. The darkness surrounds the shininess of her image. The concept of femininity is now revealed like 'the shining', like an arcane streak of light in the darkness, which is caught in the dichotomy between weakness and strength.

This multi-layered photography (cibachrome and print on voile) reminded me of the painting entitled 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' ('The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy' - 1926) by the English painter Frank Cadogan Cowper. The painting was inspired by the ballad written by the English poet John Keats, which is about a 'menacing' lady who meets a knight, who he is then lulled to sleep and dreams of the lady he met as a being who can enslave other human beings.

Fundamentally, in the exhibition by Lee Yanor, the concept of femininity is expressed in its purest essence like in Cadogan Cowper's painting and in Keats' poetry: mystery, dream, transformation, power, softness, beauty, enigma.