

Exhibited in Matadero Madrid

UNEASY PLEASURE

A fine line separates pleasure from turmoil; enjoyment from unease. That vague space has become the inspiration for five artists who, with their videos, are able to concentrate both sensations. During their viewing, the videos generate feelings of repulsion, anguish or annoyance in the spectators; in other shots they become attractive and suggestive.

There are many factors that affect human complacency, and the limits that confine them are very subtle. The works selected for the exhibition demonstrate the delicate balance of our emotions. A struggle where pleasant and violent acts compete with each other. Expectation generates anxiety and hope at the same time; filling the void caused by ambition implies a continuous and costly endeavour, which will only be rewarded when it is fulfilled. On the way to happiness, we, human beings, oscillate between that uneasy pleasure implied by having a dream and the satisfaction of being able to make it come true.

"Pleasure is the beginning and the end of living happily, our first and native good, the starting point of every choice and of every aversion ", declared Epicurus. To achieve that hedonist objective, the Greek philosopher reflects, we must avoid everything that comes close to its opposite: pain. This latter case seems unquestionable in absolute terms. However, certain grey areas can be found on the confines of this premise; bonds and connections that question the apparently imperative distance between pain and pleasure.

We feel at ease if everything flows and nothing disturbs us: when the world seems to be under control. The known, the secure, the established and even routine, are notions associated with physical and spiritual well-being, but if they persist, they can verge on boredom. Thus, it is not surprising that the dreams and yearnings of the human being are, in some cases, related to experimenting with the other, the forbidden or the unattainable.

Other, less ambitious, desires are related to the transgression of small daily rules. **Eduardo Srur**, in his video, *Supermercado*, goes round a store with a shopping trolley where he stacks up product containers whose content he has previously poured over his head. To begin with, the action seems to be capriciously appealing due to the implicit connotations of illegality, novelty and excess. Opening a 3-litre bottle of coca-cola and pouring it all over oneself provokes a certain sensory satisfaction and also expresses the hidden authoritarian pleasure after the wastefulness. As his journey the aisles of the supermarket progresses, the artist adds layers of substances, of greater density and viscosity, until his entire body is covered with a multi-coloured mixture of different, and often unpleasant, textures.

In **Daniel Blaufuks'** video, *What is left is right and what is right is wrong*, the fantasy of overcoming the force of gravity is fulfilled by vertically and horizontally inverting the image of a scene from the film, "Royal Wedding" in which Fred Astaire appears dancing. The use of a rotating platform and other camera techniques enable the actor to tap dance on the ceilings and walls of the room without any apparent effort. The video surprises and appeals to us, stimulating our desire to acquire this skill; however, it also produces a feeling of dizziness and surprise.

A fixed overhead shot shows a young woman sleeping peacefully next to Pablo Picasso's painting *Acrobacia* in the video of the same name by **Eugenio Ampudia**. When she wakes up, the woman begins to caress the artwork with extreme subtlety: touching the foot of the figure, the leg, she places her face near to the surface of the painting, she stands up next to it and, suddenly, she reveals a knife hidden under the sheets. For a few seconds, she seems to consider what she is about to do, tracing a line on the canvas, but then she attacks it with force, stabbing each part and ripping the fabric until it is completely destroyed. When the massacre is over, the young woman lies down again, calm and satisfied. The piece reflects upon the relationship that we establish with our possessions and suggests a love-hate relationship, where the lover, after having metaphorically made love to the picture, is filled with rage and decides to destroy what she had loved so much.

In **Anthony Goicolea's** work, *Piñata*, a group of blindfolded children delightedly hit a large *piñata* shaped like a black horse. After several impacts, one of them puts his hand inside the cardboard animal and reveals its content: fresh entrails. They continue to mercilessly beat the hanging sculpture and with each impact a bell sounds until finally, the animal falls down and breaks into thousands of little pieces. Then, two of the children remove their blindfolds and one of them ties it to a stick that he victoriously drives into the horse as if it were a flag. During the activity, the participants enjoy the beating as if it were a liberating and expectant action, showing the pleasure of the process and, finally, satisfaction with the result.

The objective of **Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová** in their video *Never Odd or Even* is to bond their bodies together, by means of "an altered *auto-bondage* technique", to create a palindromic creature whose identity and personal freedom are lost. Each artist, dressed in a pink overall and mask, manipulates and knots a rope around their bodies and later joins it his companion's body, until they achieve complete interdependence between them. The result is a bicorporal being with symmetric parts that make an effort to move around in the space of the room. The ropes oppress their bodies but at the same time stimulate the friction with their erogenous parts. Their panting, showing their exhaustion when they try to free themselves from their bonds, is confused with moans of pleasure.

This same ambiguity can be seen in the film *Body Double 21, after The Rules of Attractions*, by **Brice Dellsperger** where more than 10 different characters, the majority transvestites, interpret the scene from Roger Avary's film, where a student cuts her veins in a bath. Each actor performs the ritual action, providing their own particular distinctive marks. The first planes of their faces unfold a whole range of intermingled expressions: from dizziness caused by a drastic and

daring decision, to delight produced by the expectation of a long-awaited change. Faces that suffer, but above all, expressions of internal pleasure due to the imposition of our freedom, because as the thinker, Schopenhauer said, “far from being a denial, suicide is an emphatic assertion of will.”

The work of **Sandra Torralba**, *Estranged Sex XIX* evolves among excitation and panic; a history of shared sex and unfilled fantasies where she is the main character. With an exhalation, she wakes up suddenly, dressed and with make-up applied, immersed in a strange situation where a girl whose style is somewhere between gothic and sadistic, kisses and caresses her whilst a boy looks on. A flashback shows us how the three characters have arrived at the house. Once inside, the artist “dragging her feet, with a foggy mind and dense breathing, unable to decide, abandons herself to a story that is not hers, which lasts only for a few minutes but that whilst it lasts, is eternal.”

Nerea Ubieto

Sexual tension is breathed during every second of **Erwin Olaf's** video, *Wet*, where a young man, with great physical appeal, showers sensually in a changing room that oozes cleanliness. The purity is perverted when a middle-aged woman with high social status enters the scene and begins to look upon him with desire. Her eyes, like the camera, fall on each part of the boy's body that the water is running down, enjoying it in silence. After a few seconds, the observed person detects the presence of the voyeur who unfastens her jacket and moves closer to him. Wet and expectant, he remains motionless like a sculpture by Michelangelo whilst the woman places her hand near to his mouth, touching it and tracing an imaginary line to his male organ. At the last moment, he encourages her to touch him but she backs away and abandons the scene. The visual contact of the young man moves then to the spectator, transferring all the controlled erotic charge.

Within a much more restrained, but no less murky, context, the plot of **Stefan Constantinescu's** film, *Family Dinner*, evolves. A family arrives back at their elegant apartment after a day's work, and whilst the husband and daughter prepare dinner, the wife decides to have a relaxing bath. This moment of relax becomes pernicious and heated when Maja – the wife – starts to exchange text messages that have a sexual content with her lover. The fact that her husband calls her for dinner or a discharged mobile battery are not sufficient reasons for her to stop the search for the pleasure she craves. Finally, we see the family sitting down to dinner in an apparently cordial and disciplined atmosphere. The spectator views the scene as a mere set, where the woman feigns enjoying a pleasant homely situation, when really her true craving is for something very different to the daily “here and now”.

Desires with a certain illicit and immoral content usually generate unease in the conscience, but not because of that are they less pursued; just the opposite, they are capricious and hounding: they imply excitement about something forbidden.

A whole eternity seems to pass during the video performance of **Maria Jose Arjona** *Right At The Center There Is Silence* where the artist is standing still, surrounded by four microphone stands at the ends of which a knife is attached, which rubs on her neck at the slightest movement. The action reflects upon silence as a state that goes beyond words, capable of expressing a perfect understanding or the greatest of discomforts. "Silence can relieve a conflict or it can turn into a great revolt; it can be the climax of a meditation, or be used to hide politically incorrect statements."

The artist plays with these limits, generating a situation where the calm of silence is replaced by a state of maximum alert: making a sound- means being hurt. The stillness is linked to absolute silence, only achieved by the extenuation of continuous surveillance.

Nerea Ubieta