



Interview with Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen

for the exhibition *Your search "exotism or pornography" did not match any documents* curated by Marti Manen and Job Ramos

1-Sometimes, talking about issues like exoticism, it can be so easy to fall in a Good/Bad situation, just opposites. We think that your video is a good example of how to deal with an issue like this from an intelligent point of view. You are presenting a particular situation, using popular music as a valid channel to start a discussion. How did you decided to use popular music and a format like the video-clip?

I wanted to use this popular expression to reach an audience out side the art crowd. I find inspiration from other artistic genres, as music, film, and documentaries rather than from art. I like to explore the formal language of familiar genres and use them into an art context, to break boundaries of form and to broaden up the 'art language'. The issues I deal with are universal, contemporary problems that concern people, and not only art people. At some point I can get frustrated about how narrow art, and how little impact it has compared to popular medias as film, television or music, and on the contrary, I get frustrated about how empty and rapidly the popular medias work with big issues. So I try to work on both sides. And it is a challenge, but for me it is the most interesting part of a project.

E.G. in my next video, which is a documentary about Filipino Healers; I am planning to edit it as a documentary musical, and I will see how it works out. Working with a popular expression, insisting on being in an art context means that I am very conscious about all the layers my pieces must have. I mean to serve it light, but at the same time, be deadly serious about it....

2-The situation in Europe (regarding culture, religion, background) seems quite difficult right now. To be a "European" means to be exactly what a particular tradition demands. And, of course, it is far from reality. Do you think that we are generating a new society of classes?

Classes I don't know. But I think Europeans will be divided roughly into two categories. Some people will get more nationalistic and start to cultivate their heritage more than usual and be more aware of this. The second group will be relieved to be independent of cultural, ethnic, national and religious background, and will have a flexibility to change to whatever culture. It is interesting to look upon the United States as an example. A huge united country speaking the same language brought up with the same culture and is multi cultural. Americans are very aware of their origin and roots, without really in having to search it out, or having to deal with it deeply. The big issue

there is skin colour and class. The white European American still has more power and privileges compared to a coloured. If a white person is upgraded in class, in terms of economy and education, it will have far more advantages and flexibility, compared to a coloured person. A coloured person will be in a dilemma and has to make a choice between upgrading and maybe hanging out with the whites, or to be true to her/his own colour. If a coloured person starts to hang out with white people from upper class and intellectuals, he or she might find that that they are betraying her own coloured or they feel betrayed. It is complicated.

3-Exoticism is something that is defined in every context, but we come from a colonial tradition that shows that there are different “levels” of exoticism. Part of the travel industry is based on old concepts like the “discovery of the other”, “the adventure of the new place” and, of course “different countries, different rules”. At the same time, we can see how individual mobility is changing everything. One Part of the population of the world can move to another place because they want it. Another part is migrating for basic needs. Under your perspective, how this situation is changing our particular life?

This flexibility is good, but ambiguous even it is your own choice. No matter one will always feel a deep relation to his/her root and be split up between the new place and at the same time have nostalgic feelings to his/her origin. It means that we don't longer feel as a whole but something mixed and belongs different places.

4-Music industry can be related to sex; Tourism industry can be related to sex, exoticism can be related to sex. Is exoticism based on a sexual behaviour?

I got a price once and my works where briefly mentioned, also my video 'Absolute Exotic', the speaker accidentally called it 'Absolute Erotic' a Freudian slip, this could be an answer to your question. I think exoticism is often related to sex or sexuality, which is another reason why I'm (un) dressed as I am, and use my female sexuality in this piece, also regarding to quote: 'Sick of being a target in this ethnic supermarket'. But I think exoticism can also mean and refer to something that is different from what you are used too, something you are curious about and find a bit fascinating.

5-Media is becoming something simple. Is art a good platform to talk about complicated issues?

Definitely, art is perfect, the audience expect a deeper insight to contemporary problems and perhaps takes time to understand a new perspective that art can guide you to. The problem is what I mentioned before that art also could have this to specific insight that the insight will stay within

an art forum and not spread out. Right now I think there is a tendency that some art totally doesn't want to deal with politics and some art is only about politics and to integrate both at the same time isn't that commonly done.

6-I'm usually stopped on the airports. I know that I have something like a 70% of options of having a nice conversation with a person who will open my bag to find I don't know what. Last time, as usual, I asked why were they stopping me. The officer said that it was because I was "Interesting" and I was coming from an "Interesting" country. In Absolute Exotic you are using a direct language. Is the political correct language something to be afraid to?

There is a difference when I make an art piece that deals with such a hot spot agenda as racial discrimination, when I rap I don't want to wrap my language into metaphors and be political correct, that would be a compromise with the whole idea. This woman is angry and she is not going to say black, but Niggah to the girl who got her boy friend. In another context e.g. in television I wouldn't say the N word in a discussion about racism, and then I would speak politically correct with all respect for the black people. To be apolitically correct can be necessary in order to create a debate, especially one, that people are getting tired of, because the same is said, and people don't listen anymore, when it is politically correctly said, and also the issue is not concerning them, but their neighbours.

7-In other works that you have made, you revisit Philippines with new eyes. What percentage of your work is based on your background? What is for you your background? Are we using the word "background" incorrectly?

Background for me is legal to say. My works always carry a bit of myself with them either on a personal experience, thought and sometimes cultural back ground. Since my back ground is half of Danish the other half Filipino, its pretty much both cultures I am influenced by.

I feel more Danish than Filipino, but actually I feel more as a human an individual not based on race. But either I lived in the Philippines or in Denmark (as I do now), I have always been confronted with being 'a mixed'. When I was younger I was very sensitive about it, and hated to be asked, where are you from? Later I saw that people who addressed me where friendly and just sincerely curious about my blood mixture, in a positive way. Now I don't mind, it is a standard conversation I can't avoid, when I meet people for the first time and it doesn't bother me anymore.

I have often had more discussions about my documentary work, than the per formative ones. Works about a specific group of people provokes the viewer and I can be accused of being a stereo typer, putting people into different boxes. When you stand there yourself, you put yourself on the target, it is harder to be accused. My documentaries from the Philippines might have a danger to be read as being exotic, if they concern a phenomena that doesn't

exist e.g. in Denmark. E.G. when I make a video about cockfighting the national sports in the Philippines, it is more about the macho cultural aspects I am interested in more than the exotic bloody sport. It is their tradition. Cockfighting can be compared to European Football or Tour the France. I only work further with an idea, if I can see a universal topic and aspect to it, also if I somehow can relate to it personally as I can with the Filipino material, not because it is different or exotic.