

Larisa Crunțeanu: **Keep Forgetting to Forget Me**

curated by Anja Lückenkemper

Shrill neon-colored curtains mark the entrance to the exhibition space. They form a threshold and clear visual demarcation between what is outside — an objective reality we all seem to agree upon — and the interior, where subjectivities multiply: Pushing through the curtains, we find ourselves in the dark limbo of Larisa Crunțeanu's latest exhibition tale. It is a tale composed of various narratives that are at the same time complementary and conflicting: subjective imaginations musing on the idea of contemporary female identities.

The neon color greeting visitors stands in direct contradiction to the dusky aesthetics of the interior space and the works collected here, which evoke visual and musical language of Romanian folklore or show rural landscapes. The women who populate this space are never clearly identifiable. They are transforming, developing or disintegrating, are camouflaged, or exist only as a trail, an empty hollow where once there was a hand performing a gesture. They are each in a state of flux, either a becoming or a having-been, but never present in a solid, realized state of being. Crunțeanu creates a moment of haziness, of ambiguity and vagueness. The exhibition space is no longer a physical place, but turned into a state of consciousness — sombre, hovering between darkness and light, alternating between humor, craziness, ennui and self-pity.

70 years ago Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her seminal book *Le Deuxième Sexe* „On ne naît pas une femme, on le devient [en: One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman].“ Women, de Beauvoir states, have been turned into “the other” by men. Man is posited as the absolute, the subject, while woman is assigned the role of the other, the object. SHE is always defined depending on a HE and thus struggling with an existential conflict: embracing a passive “feminine” role or her own agency. A similar feeling of alienation is tangible in Larisa Crunțeanu's exhibition **Keep Forgetting to Forget Me**. Female identity is something that doesn't come natural, but needs to be tested, rehearsed and performed. This is the artist's way of looking, navigating and imagining (future) conditions of life through a feminist lens. She has turned the exhibition into a space where common boundaries are being re-negotiated: a place of indefinability and brittle identities, where even skin, the first boundary between oneself and the external world, seems permeable.

*I could buy a yacht and a holiday in the Tenerife
And a golden watch
I could smoke a joint*

1 **No Image, No Camouflage**, video (color), 14.27min, 2018

A humanoid creature, camouflaged with a recognizable checkerboard pattern commonly used in graphic design software to signify the lack of any image, is moving through a landscape. The figure remains unidentifiable and almost alien, sometimes it looks like an amorphous mass, then again it has human traits. It traverses a mountain range, hitches a ride on a farmer's tractor and rides on horseback in an orchard. The artist, but also her female identity has disappeared behind the camouflage, become invisible and ineffective. But the figure, even though hiding in plain sight, shows, that a disappearance is not possible.

The work is produced using a green screen suit, normally used to render the wearer or parts of her invisible in video postproduction. By substituting the form not with the background of the picture — and thus making it disappear — but instead filling the shape with the checkered stand-in

of digital “transparency,” an irritation is introduced into the familiarly coded image: The character does not blend in, but rather, her form and the digital foundation of its representation within the rural idyll are emphasized, putting her on display while at the same time suggesting her as a blank space, onto which any content, any image could be projected. What initially might remind us of an updates version of the classic Monty Python sketch “How not to be seen” turns into an investigation of the infinite manipulability of digital images and the processes of unveiling and modi of invisibility: through the digital camouflage in the pastoral setting, the figure achieves a sort of hyper visibility. And even though shy at first she enjoys the center stage, hiding in one moment, posing for the camera the next; getting more and more comfortable in front of the lens, while seemingly hidden behind a cloak of invisibility. Her invisibility — or her desire to turn invisible — takes on the form of a self-exhibiting, which is maximized and further complicated when, in the end, she rips the mask from her face only to reveal true transparency in place of the anticipated human features.

I would watch less talent shows
I would participate in a talent show

2 Larisa Crunțeanu and Sonja Hornung: **Untitled (Femina Subtatrix)**, concrete cube, 28x28x28cm, 2015

A concrete cube with two opposing apertures invites visitors to put their hands inside the openings, trying to reach out to each other. It captures a past moment of touch, the hands of the two artists, immortalized in concrete. Within the cube female identity (identities), as well as female collaboration and solidarity, are only visible or rather tangible as a trace, as an empty mold in concrete.

“Untitled” is part of “Femina Subtatrix,” a collaborative complex of works speculating on the processes of privatization during the transition from socialism to capitalism, and a historical archaeology of the female workers of APACA — a prominent textile factory in Bucharest producing fine-quality garments primarily for export and political elites. The artists, Larisa Crunțeanu and Sonja Hornung, appropriate the national legend of the rise and fall of APACA, which was operating from 1948 with mainly female employees, in order to analyze old and new models of femininity, tracing the former workers’ experiences and reflections on their working lives in (post-) socialist Romania. Founded in a time when the newly Socialist Romania cracked down on prostitution, APACA hired former sex workers and was since confronted with the rumor that its employees were shameless, promiscuous and vulgar. The female workers at APACA became well known following Prime Minister Petre Roman’s legendary visit to the factory, at which time the women are said to have chanted in unison: Nu vrem Kent! Nu vrem valută! Vrem pe Roman să ne fută! (“We don’t want Kent [luxury cigarettes]! We don’t want hard currency! We want [Petre] Roman to shag us!”). These stories and projections contributed to labeling the female workforce as “APACA girls” — a minimizing term, which Crunțeanu and Hornung counterbalance by titling their work “Femina Subtatrix,” a Latin neologism for “weaver woman.”

I could have made it to the outerspace by now
I would stop being afraid of water

3 **The Life of the Plant**, light box, 70x150cm, 2017

At first glance “The Life of the Plant” shows the artist obstructed by a potted palm tree, cleaning the leaves of the plant. But a second look reveals an underlying narrative or action. The woman in

the picture seems to be in the process of transforming into a plant-being herself: her hair has taken on the form of a palm tree, while the decorative patterns of her clothing evoke organic shapes and flowers. There seems to be an urge not just to camouflage oneself, but to disappear into the other — an approximation and adaptation to another life form. We are not so much witnessing a woman hidden behind a plant, but the process of a peculiar, fantastical osmosis: a directional flow of identity-particles through the selective, semipermeable separation layer between human and vegetal beings.

I would have the most seducing voice

I would know how to sounds less aggressive when i ask for something

I would be able to pronounce the french rr

I would have a speech impediment

4 **To Want (revisited)**, audio piece, 10min, 2013/2019

An enumeration is being recounted throughout the exhibition space. It is a list of things and experiences, objects of desire of the narrating subject's (potential future) self. The words and manner of speaking oscillate between an (if ever so distant) potentiality and the certain unobtainability — the imagining of an identity being already disillusioned before the sentence is finished. The list speaks of desire, a longing to belong somewhere or to be someone, but also of the boredom and inescapability of consumer culture.

There are many variations of what (female) identity can be: Some show a cringeworthy self-obsession. Some an idealistic seriousness. An infatuation with consumption. Self-determination. Vapid vanity. Randomness. ...

I would focus on my career

I could ask for a bigger office

I could still have another baby

I could be funnier

5 **La oglinda**, video (color, sound), 11min, 2013

The video installation “La oglinda” [en: At the Mirror] shows a girl on the brink of womanhood. It is an intimate and simultaneously self-reflective rite of passage: the protagonist — performed by the artist — watches herself in the mirror, yet also seems to look directly at the viewer. She is softly singing a folk tune while combing her hair and cutting her long braided locks. The aesthetics of the video, as well as the song are a nod to Romanian folklore. The folk song tells itself the tale of a young girl in front of the mirror, who discovers her own femininity: “Asta-s eu! Si sunt voinica!” [en: This is me! And I'm so strong!], she sings. What Britney Spears once described as “I'm not a girl, not yet a woman” attains a more subtle, less sexualized note in Crunțeanu's work. Her focus is on the tension between innocence and sensuality, showing a protagonist who is equally anxious and excited, shy and self assured, obedient and rebellious, ultimately showing the loneliness of becoming and being a woman.

Every new screening of the video is a recording of a previous screening. Each new projection is thus dissolving the image and, over time, rendering it more and more invisible, until what's left is only a faint idea, a trace of an unreliable memory. The material's unstoppable, continuous disintegration links to the perception of women and their social situation in our patriarchal society: they dissolve, becoming more and more invisible — not just as aging women, but much earlier,

after leaving schools and universities, when gender inequality becomes more and more obvious, rendering female voices inaudible.

I could be shameless

I could be a free woman

I could afford to bring anyone home

I would stop asking for permissions

6 **Zombie Routine**, video (color, sound), 8min, 2019

“Zombie Routine” shows the staging of a protagonist’s re-humanization. Within an interior yet desolate space, which doesn’t give us any clue of its function, she is taking of the zombie-identity, returning to the human form — still, this return does not portray any happy salvation, rather an exhaustion. The camera continues searching for focus, giving the impression that even the camera, the machine, cannot find or grasp the identity of what is in front of it. While Crunțeanu is drawing on and subverting the visual language of Youtube’s myriad of contouring or make-up tutorials, her work is alluding to a current political situation, which Brazilian philosopher Marcia Tiburi describes as a process of political zombification: “Desperate for money, for power, sick for death, from within, all run to the target that is the still healthy living body, not to survive in it, but to pull it into death without hope or expectation.” That body devoured, Tiburi implies, is democracy. So it is within the neoliberal climate, that the emergence of the zombie experience happens. A (digital) time, where everything is instantaneous and in which there is no time for deliverance, only nihilism: “Every season has the monsters it deserves,” Tiburi states, “While in the vampire’s narrative there is always someone left for the future, the zombie movie shows a life lived as death. [...] The zombie body acts without any hope.”* It is from the start without a future and, therefore, lives without any hope, with no expectation of salvation. Drawing on this theory, Crunțeanu’s work questions how to perform feminism — or even democracy — within a hopeless neoliberal project of general zombification. Is there even the possibility to take off the make-up?

(*as translated from the online essay: A zumbificação da política brasileira, 2017)

I would be more courageous at the revolution

I would be smarter after the revolution

I would buy a couple of apartments after the revolution, when things were still so unsettled

I would leave Romania, just after the revolution

I would never find out who were my informers

Keep Forgetting to Forget Me; “me” not “myself”, as Crunțeanu is not referring back to her own person — even though she is performing all the female identities in the exhibition — but rather to a reservoir of uncertainty regarding the subject, who is performing the forgetting. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” — Crunțeanu’s women are stuck in this becoming. The exhibition space is the rehearsal room, where they test out what female identity could be. An imagining as not-of-this-world, for example, or as a traditional, archaic role model, as a blank space, as a nonhuman organism. Not all attempts are serious, Crunțeanu enjoys the absurdity. But nevertheless: their compilation and especially the ongoing impossibility to define a picture, an identity of a self, show an inescapable seriousness.

I could be

LARISA CRUNȚEANU (b. 1986) studied Photography and Moving Image and is currently a PHD candidate at the National Arts University of Bucharest. She works at the intersection of video and performance between research and speculation, often collaboratively, creating contexts for the emergence of new practices and organization.

Solo shows: Anca Poterașu Gallery Bucharest (2018); Zacheta Project Room Warsaw (2018); tête Berlin (2018); RKI Gallery Berlin (2015); Ivan Gallery Bucharest (2015); Atelier 35, Bucharest (2013); Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest (2012); Atelier 35, Bucharest (2012).

Selected group shows: MAB, FAAP, Sao Paulo (2017), Projektraum LS43, Berlin (2017); Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2016); District Berlin, Berlin (2016); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest & B5 Studio, Târgu Mureș (2014); Salonul de Proiecte, Vienna Art Fair, Vienna (2013); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2013); Salonul de Proiecte, Bucharest (2013); tranzit.ro Bucharest (2012); Platforma Space, Bucharest (2012); Sala Dalles, Bucharest (2011).

Selected performances: “A Conversation Between Two Workers and a Rock”, with Sonja Hornung, FORUM Stadtpark, Graz (2018); “Bite a Tail, Grow a Head”, solo performance, FAAP Residency, Sao Paulo (2017) & tranzit.ro, Bucharest (2018); “Librarian for The Library by Galerie International”, Blask Brzask Festival, Łodz (2017); “Do as I do as I do as I do”, Black Hyperbox, National Dance Center, Bucharest (2016); “Things that Don’t Matter” - with Xandra Popescu, MNAC Bucharest, DISKURS FESTIVAL Giessen, Romanian Cultural Institute Vienna (2016); “Things for Money” - with Xandra Popescu, Museums Quartier, Vienna (2014); “100 Loafs” - with Alice Gancevici, public space performance, Bucharest (2012); “The Firecracker Concert”, MNAC Bucharest (2011); “I Hope This Gets to You” - with Maria Pitea and Adrian Cristea, Prague Fashion Quadriennale, Prague (2011); “Storm”, Bucharest National Opera, Bucharest; “The Future of Romanian Contemporary Art”, National Dance Center, Bucharest (2010).

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