

essay by

Domenico
de Chirico

Whispers of the Self

Binta Diaw
Zehra Doğan
Regina José Galindo
Sandra Gamarra Heshiki
Sarah Jérôme
María Evelia Marmolejo
Aryan Ozmaei

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Via G. Ventura 6 -
Via Massimiano
Milano

Whispers of the Self is a group exhibition that gives voice to an evocative interweaving of artistic voices, in which each work takes the form of an intimate whisper, a pervasive resonance of experiences and reflections that explore the complexity and contradictions of the concept of identity. The works of Binta Diaw, Zehra Doğan, Regina José Galindo, Sandra Gamarra Heshiki, Sarah Jérôme, María Evelia Marmolejo e Aryan Ozmaei are presented as empirical, sensitive, and powerful manifestations, both personal and collective, expressions of individual histories that are intertwined with the complex universal dynamics of living and being.

The title of the exhibition recalls the fragility and silent insistence of that inner voice which, at times barely perceptible, continually invites us to introspection and self-analysis, thus becoming an opportunity for profound revelation of the most tormenting facets of our existence. In this dimension, self-awareness inevitably merges with that of others and the world around us, giving rise to a continuous dialogue between the private and the public. Each artist explores the concept of self through distinct languages, diverse materials, techniques and styles, resulting in a journey that delves into the deepest recesses of existence, highlighting its shadowy areas, its tensions and, nevertheless, its liberations. In this sense, each whisper becomes a metaphor for inner revelation, an invitation to fearlessly explore the multiple, sometimes eurythmic, sometimes discrepant and often subterranean voices that constitute the foundations of our identity, and to question how much of ourselves remains hidden, incomplete, fragmented, dislocated or even irretrievably lost.

In doing so, *Whispers of the Self* also serves as a sensory journey through the teeming gurgling intimacy of the human being. Therefore, the exhibition does not merely explore the many facets of identity, but becomes a reflection on interiority, on the hypodermic dialogue that each of us has with ourselves, or at least should have. It is a deep listening to the inner voices that, tumultuously, define our being, our place in the world and our relationships, in an increasingly superficially interconnected context now predominantly permeated with sorrows.

Far from the clamor of contemporary society, devoid of any form of intimism and marked, according to Guy Debord, by the spectacularization of relationships and experiences, the exhibition *Whispers of the Self* offers instead a space for introspection, catharsis and the exploration of what, even today, seems to remain hidden from the eyes of the other, but which here, with respect for individual practices, emerges powerfully in the possible intimacy of art.

In this perspective, the Heideggerian concept of *being* becomes the thread through which the heterogeneous but complementary works of these artists follow one another, unfolding. Indeed, Martin Heidegger explores the idea that being is defined in time, through experience and self-awareness. According to Heidegger himself, moreover, reflection on being is often subtle and overlooked in everyday life, but gains depth in moments of silent introspection. This chorus of whispers becomes, thus, a call to Being itself, an invitation to recognize the uniqueness of our being-in-the-world through a deeper awareness that gradually emerges only in stillness and solitude. The exhibition stands, then, as a reflection on this awareness, through which each whisper and each cry that compose it guide us to a crossroads of introspection, self-awareness and understanding of that intimate dimension that constitutes the universal bond.

Sandra Gamarra Heshiki's multidisciplinary production - which includes sculpture, painting, video, text, and installation - attempts to critique the concept of modernity. Whether it concerns artistic modernity, with works that question the role and mechanisms of exhibition space and musealization, as well as the pictorial tradition, or a more historical and political dimension, all her works document episodes of colonial abuse. Gamarra uses specific methodologies of the archive, documentation, appropriation and mixing of non-art objects, transferred to the field of art, to denounce the historical role and responsibility of the West in colonial exploitation. Within this specific but at the same time broad field of inquiry, his Peruvian background further enriches her gaze with a syncretic dimension, where pre-Columbian, colonial, and Western cultures are eurhythmically intertwined; **Aryan Ozmaei's** work, for its part, began as a critical reflection on the Western taxonomic spirit, seeking to challenge the conventional perception of objects. Her artistic research has evolved over time, leading her to establish a deeper connection with the objects themselves, overcoming their vision as mere "things" to relate to the human presences that animate them. Originally from Iran and living in Italy for about two decades, Ozmaei maintains a strong connection with her culture of origin, which is visibly reflected in her works. Her art explores a symbolic return to her homeland, interweaving myths, historical narratives and personal experiences, without reducing her country to an exotic place, but striving to preserve its complexity and cultural richness. In pictorial terms, the artist sees the canvas as a stage where she narrates what is going on in her mind and heart, seeking a balance between colors, shapes, composition and texture. For her, the path from idea to realization is sometimes more important than the subject itself, and she tries to limit definitions so as not to lose the creative freedom and pleasure of the creative moment, just as in her life, where she explores the boundaries of her stories and cultural roots; **Sarah Jérôme**, through her somewhat eclectic course of study, has developed an artistic approach that blends a rich and nuanced sensibility, placing herself in a liminal state where dance and visual arts intersect. Her research deeply explores the body, the muliebre, and the power of the image as an instrument of resistance. Her works are distinguished by their ability to elicit intense emotions and dissolve the boundaries between dream and reality. Using a technique that integrates traces and erasures into the creative process, her paintings, with vibrant and intense colors, are made in oil sometimes on thick media sometimes on tracing paper. Ceramic sculptures, on the other hand, expand her reflection on matter and the representation of the human, continuing the dialogue between body, emotion and form; **María Evelia Marmolejo**, on the other hand, through her works steeped in symbolism, explores the relationship between memory and identity, telling stories rooted in traditions but projected into the future. Her performance art addresses universal themes through an intimate and personal lens, reflecting on the complexity of human existence, dealing specifically with issues such as gender, colonialism, and political oppression specific to Colombia. Using different media, the artist shapes visions that dialogue with her experiences and cultural roots. Her creations evoke reflections on the body, spiritual-

ity and power dynamics, creating spaces for introspection. Marmolejo invites the viewer into a world where art becomes a tool of resistance and revelation, transforming her inner quest into a powerful visual expression that shines a spotlight on the contradictions and innumerable nuances of existence; **Binta Diaw**, an Italian-Senegalese visual artist, develops her research through installations of different sizes, immersing herself in a philosophical reflection on contemporary social phenomena. Her work addresses crucial themes such as migration, the concept of belonging, the gender question and the convulsive relationship with history, explored through the body and spatiality. By nourishing her practice with contributions related to intersectionality, feminism and ecofeminism, the artist invites us to discover multiple levels of identity: both her own, as a black woman in a Europeanized context, and that of a collective crossroads of evolving histories and geographies. Diaw's visual language is expressed through natural materials such as soil, plants, water, stone, and hair, but also through her own body, creating a profound connection between matter and sensory perception. Her works, often site-specific and monumental, challenge social conventions and invite viewers to reconsider their place in the world, highlighting marginalized narratives and as-yet-untold stories of minorities. With her sharp gaze and refined aesthetic sensibility, the artist deconstructs the Eurocentric view of history, proposing complex and polyphonic rewritings that broaden our horizon of understanding. Binta Diaw, through her art, claims the transformative power of materiality, using the body and space as privileged sites for a radical experience that is as physical as it is political. Her work is an invitation to explore the multiple dimensions of identity, with a constant focus on the interconnectedness of history, geography and individual testimonies; and then again, the work of Guatemalan artist **Regina José Galindo**, who focuses on using the body as a tool to denounce violence against women, gender and race discrimination, and all social, political and cultural injustices. Inspired by the research of artists such as Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramović since the 1970s, her performances, which she calls 'acts of psychomagic', explore her physical and psychological limits, transforming the body into a stage laid bare, a theater of conflict and suffering. Her art addresses the traumas stemming from Guatemala's thirty-six-year civil war and the persistent social issues in the country, prompting the viewer to confront violence and shake off the passivity induced by decades of conflict. Her work stems from the need to amplify the fear generated by Guatemala's dictatorial regime and the relentless censorship that limits freedom of expression and daily life. Also author of intense poetry, Galindo uses the body as a fundamental part of her artistic language, in a process that naturally follows her expressive needs. Her performances, including actions such as isolating herself in a brick room or flogging herself in protest, are a powerful reminder of the struggle for freedom and an act of resistance against oppression, while also revealing a deep sense of powerlessness; finally, **Zehra Doğan**, a Kurdish artist and journalist with Turkish citizenship, known for her engagement and provocative art that addresses the scars left by violence, war and exile. After posting a drawing on social media depicting the destruction of Nusaybin, a town in southeastern Turkey, during clashes between security forces and Kurdish insurgents, she was arrested and sentenced to two years, nine months and twenty-two days in prison. Her conviction followed the publication of the work in an area where the presence of journalists was prohibited by the national government. During her imprisonment, first in Diyarbakır Women's Prison and then in Tarsus Maximum Security Prison, Doğan created an in-house journalistic editorial office together with other female inmates, producing works using the few materials available, such as cigarette ash, menstrual blood and turmeric. Her works are a powerful call to struggle against patriarchy in Kurdish society, expressing a strong denunciation against oppression. In addition, Zehra Doğan co-founded JINHA, the first Kurdish news agency made up exclusively of women, an initiative she pursued until her imprisonment. Despite the difficulties, her art and efforts have managed to cross borders, thanks to her family's network of activists and support, allowing her works to reach abroad.

Into this proscenium of stream of consciousness, uncertainty, transition, will and need for awareness lies the exhibition *Whispers of the Self*, which not only represents an introspective journey, but also becomes an experience that reflects the social, political and cultural context in which these whispers come to life. Each work exhibited is, in fact, a courageous act of self-reflection that dialogues with the world around it, helping to tell stories of identities that are never static but always evolving. In

this journey of self-discovery and recognition, identity emerges as a dynamic, sometimes contradictory, and constantly metamorphosing process in which self-perception is constantly in confrontation with the other.

The exhibition invites visitors to reflect on their "self" and explore how their own origins, stories and experiences can intertwine with those of the ones around them, making identity a fluid and open territory, where the individual and the collective continuously merge. Ultimately, *Whispers of the Self* offers a space that is not only visual, but also emotional and intellectual, inviting each of us to embark on a journey into the mystery and the faint but persistent glimmer of the beauty of who we are, what we have become, what remains of us and what we could still be. For, after all, as Marguerite Yourcenar wrote in her landmark novel *Memoirs of Hadrian*: «any happiness is a masterpiece: the slightest mistake falsifies it, the slightest hesitation cracks it, the slightest coarseness disfigures it, the slightest insult degrades it»..