

## **Marta Pujades. *A stylized repetition of acts***

Casal Solleric, Palma de Mallorca

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“A dancer is never himself”. With this phrase, Marta Pujades (Palma, 1990) ended the dossier she had sent me some months previously on *A stylized repetition of acts*, her individual exhibition for Casal Solleric; a proposal in which the artist uses classical ballet as her starting point to explore questions of identity, gender and performativity. I remember that sentence fascinated me and, given the invitation to write, I decided that such an ending could become the start of this text.

And it's true. A dancer is never himself. His movements are always the result of a pre-established, constructed, artful configuration: determined by the type of dance but also by the context in which it's received and by authorship - the choreography - which determines how his body must act. The dancer does not decide; the dancer performs what is expected of him.

This thought-provoking title chosen by Marta Pujades – a direct quote taken from the feminist theorist Judith Butler on the performativity of gender - plays a fundamental role: gender is not seen as a stable identity but as a stylized repetition of acts that create the illusion of a permanent identity; in other words, identity is not preconfigured but rather validated through continued, persistent action.

And that is precisely how the exhibition presents itself to us: a stylized repetition of acts that give rise to a display capable of reclaiming its unstable, performance-like condition by means of several chapters based on portrait photographs, the artist's main tool for reflection. Following these parameters, *A stylized repetition of acts* is divided into three independent but complementary parts: a soundtrack, a staging and various photographs that insist on repetition as an aesthetic and conceptual expression.

Firstly, the exhibition welcomes us with an audio piece. From time to time a female voice pronounces, imperatively, instructions typical of dance classes: “elongate the spine, ribs in”, “keep your five toes on the ground”... The messages - processed technologically so they are played at random, without the artist's control – intensify the project's central simile: repetition as corporal training and as construction of identity. Although aimed at hypothetical dancers, the instructions issued to correct posture also seem applicable to the public.

There follows an installation, *La puesta en escena*, which unmistakably dominates the space. Three large photographs of different dancers tower over the hall, turning it into a kind of stage where dancers and visitors are brought together at the same level. Like scenery - in other words, figurative make-believe - the installation provides a sculptural and ambient conception of the image. To reinforce the sensation of movement, as well as to highlight the pretence, each one of the figures includes anatomical diagrams that mark out the movements of the body.

Once in place, the walls of the hall show four photographic essays that are free from the social conventions that tend to accompany the male-female binomial, both in the context of classical ballet and also in everyday life. For this reason, the artist uses strongly gender-related elements such as cut-out paper dolls, embroidery and the female portrait in the history of art.

*Tutú* is a small-format diptych that alters the *costumbrista* imaginary of the children's game of cut-out paper dolls, showing a series of men dressed as female dancers in a burlesque and mocking pose. A joke that is widespread throughout society, opting for exaggeration as a means of escaping and moving away from a certain femininity of the masculine body. The triptych *Danseuse en travesti* offers three self portraits of the artist characterised according to the ballet *Les Gentilhommes*, providing a more beautiful, elegant and stylized vision of the masculine body. Here Pujades produces a hybridization of roles, with what is masculine and feminine merging together harmoniously. Thus the artist refashions a certain romantic tradition where women often acted by taking on male roles. In a similar way, *Madame Henriot en travesti* renews the image of a woman dressed as a man based on a pictorial portrait created by Pierre-Auguste Renoir in 1876. Here there is also another layer of symbolic meaning: the physical resemblance between the actress Henriette Henriot and Marta Pujades, reinforced further by the image being out of focus. Lastly, *Film stills* recovers several frames from fiction films dedicated to dance - *Step Up* (2006), *The Turning Point* (1977), *Fame* (1980) and *Street Dance* (2010) – all with a quote edged in salmon pink on their surface insisting on the embarrassing or provocative nature of wearing tights.

In short, the aesthetic and theatrical artifice of classical dance, especially when interpreted from the stereotyped perception of the masculine role, represents the crux of *A stylized repetition of acts*, an artistic project capable of blurring gender differences via two fundamental premises. On the one hand, a critical review of masculinity in the world of dance, often wrongly interpreted as something fragile and effeminate. And, on the other hand, a strong position based on feminist theory that helps to remodel the reference of classical ballet, bringing it to a pertinent and contemporary debate, and not only via visual arts but also via our contemporaneity in general. A debate about identity where, ultimately, a dancer (or any of us) does indeed manage to be himself.

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Marta Pujades