



LIFE FOR RENT

JOANA KOHEN

**UN-KNOWN IS NOT A GALLERY
UN-KNOWN IS AN ATELIER**

A space founded by a distinct artist, as the creator of the opportunities to work, research, showcase and produce a circumstance. Inhabiting a dialogue between the viewer and the works, a three way conversation that will include the artist. A space as well as a show, initiated by the artist, dictated by the curator, performed for the audience. A space that will live, feed and be fed by the exchanges amongst other artists, idea-makers and personas that will augment on what it stands for.

UN-KNOWN is an initiative that was found by a solo artist and aims to provoke the use of collective artist studio production in its further projects. It has been named UN-KNOWN, for it remains an untitled and unfamiliar space that is supported completely by its own accomplishments. It abides as UN-KNOWN for its growing will be achieved by the artist's internal, UN-KNOWN forces, the sound in her mind and the color in her fields of study. It will grow and nourish as the artist is fed by her demons of creativity. It will expand as a space of searching and discovering. As the artist confronts herself and is confronted by her creations, in the light or in the dark, the space will evolve into more than a source of demonstration. It will feed the spectators, inspire and push boundaries. Perhaps it will give birth, amongst many things, to more agencies researching in this area. The artist will constitute and ruin for as long as she breathes, and UN-KNOWN will possess, accommodate and expose the stages of these conceptions. Following an exposure of content, it will alter itself into a space of solitude, an enriching area of withdrawal and nativity. A battlefield for the artist. Once visited, a sanctuary for contemporary realizations.

UN-KNOWN will be accessible to those that need it. Unlike anything that is currently available to contemporary artist of the generation UN-KNOWN will provide a space for production. As it requires the act of creation for its function, the creators will require UN-KNOWN to perform. UN-KNOWN will welcome visitors by appointment or invitation and will remain in its undisclosed agenda the rest of its time. UN-KOWN is not a gallery but in no way disrespects the existing foundations. Simply put, UN-KNOWN aims to be the space for those who need it, starting with its creator, the artist that gave birth to this simple yet unrequited question of 'What now?' UN-KNOWN stands for ideas and is a product of diligence. UN-KNOWN speaks to us through contemporary art production while studying as well as exposing the artist exclusively. UN-KNOWN is a place of privacy, it is accessible as it is tender and it must be approached with caution.

WELCOME



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Despite decades of feminist critique of the tyranny of beauty, monitoring and manipulating their appearance remains a daily feature of women's lives. Today it is 'normal' for women to worry 'about their looks' when they get up each morning, to religiously check their appearance in the mirror throughout the day, to not want to leave the house without make up on, or to feel fat or disgusted at the sight of their thighs. **KAT BANYARD**

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NG—In this new work here that is titled *Inevitable Imprisonment* (2016) you give us three terms: self-authenticity, individual identity and self-representation. They are inscribed on three collars that are chained to three mid-sized cages in brass. What is striking is the fact that what these three terms mean stand in clear contrast to the form in which the work is given to us. Is this a celebration of individual desires against social constraints or a declaration of their impossibility?

JK—Let me begin with a self-summary. I am a human being, first and foremost, which means that I respect myself and my species. I respect you and your boundaries and I expect you to respect my integrity. Beyond that, I came to this world to make a difference. I want to manifest myself on this platform, what I aim for is relieved thinking. I am a full believer in the power of female liberation and the expression of individual identities and the importance of said expression in a technological, materialist, politically correct, emotionally repressive world. The expression here refers to free will, free dialogue and self-authentication.

NG—Where do you place the social perspective?

JK—I believe in socially useful art. I see that people cannot just be themselves. In my work I deal with the problematic aspects of the society I live in. What we call identity is a socio-cultural construct whereas being oneself is a completely another thing. We need awakening. I do want to awaken people through my objects, which may appear quite violent. They are objects of desire and what I am exhibiting is actually what exists yet is invisible in the lives of each and everyone of us. The cages are blind. There are no doors so they are purely dysfunctional objects. Paradoxically though, the chokers lie outside the cages, which for me implies that there is still room for freedom, even if one is leashed.

NG—How is all this reflected in your own personal life? I guess that the inspiration or the trigger comes from the inside, even if you eventually find reflections of your thoughts in the outside world.

JK—I document the intimate moments of my life, and while doing that I celebrate the death of beauty, self-objection and gender issues. While using the camera as a mirror that reflects the modifications and violations of my face, head and body, I am being watched by the camera eye and so the personal becomes political as well as public. In a way, I exploit the female imagery and autobiographical self-esteem. The process comes in three parts: Child-self, Youthful-self and Future-self. The reason is that personal identity is developed through these three states of the feminine masquerade. And after all, my personal life is my public life. There is no difference whatsoever in between. For all my life I've been watching the people around me and now I let myself be watched through my art.

NG—And your body becomes your material...

JK—For a few years now I came to realize that I have no other material available to make art than my body and my physical identity. When I realized that, I could not help but use my body as a political tool. Gender and sexuality have been the main topics in my work since I was a teenager. Feminism has been the main issue along the way, and just recently something happened in the whole world and I believe that I am not the only one who feels a certain awakening around this issue. This new kind of awakening feels soft and simple to me, and it is not even called feminism anymore. Artist and writer Mira Schor says that, "feminism has little institutional memory, there has been no collective absorption of early achievements and ideas, and therefore cannot yet afford the luxury storage." That is all I am working on at the moment.

NG—Where do the large transparent boxes filled with cotton threads fit in this content?

JK—it's all coming from the work *Piece of me* (2015). I squeezed linen threads, broken stones and pieces of glass in plexiglass. The effect is super peaceful and hypnotizing, but if you ever touch it, the shattered glass underneath the fluffy cotton will hurt you. I like to think of it as the physical appearance of my own soul.

Istanbul, March 2016

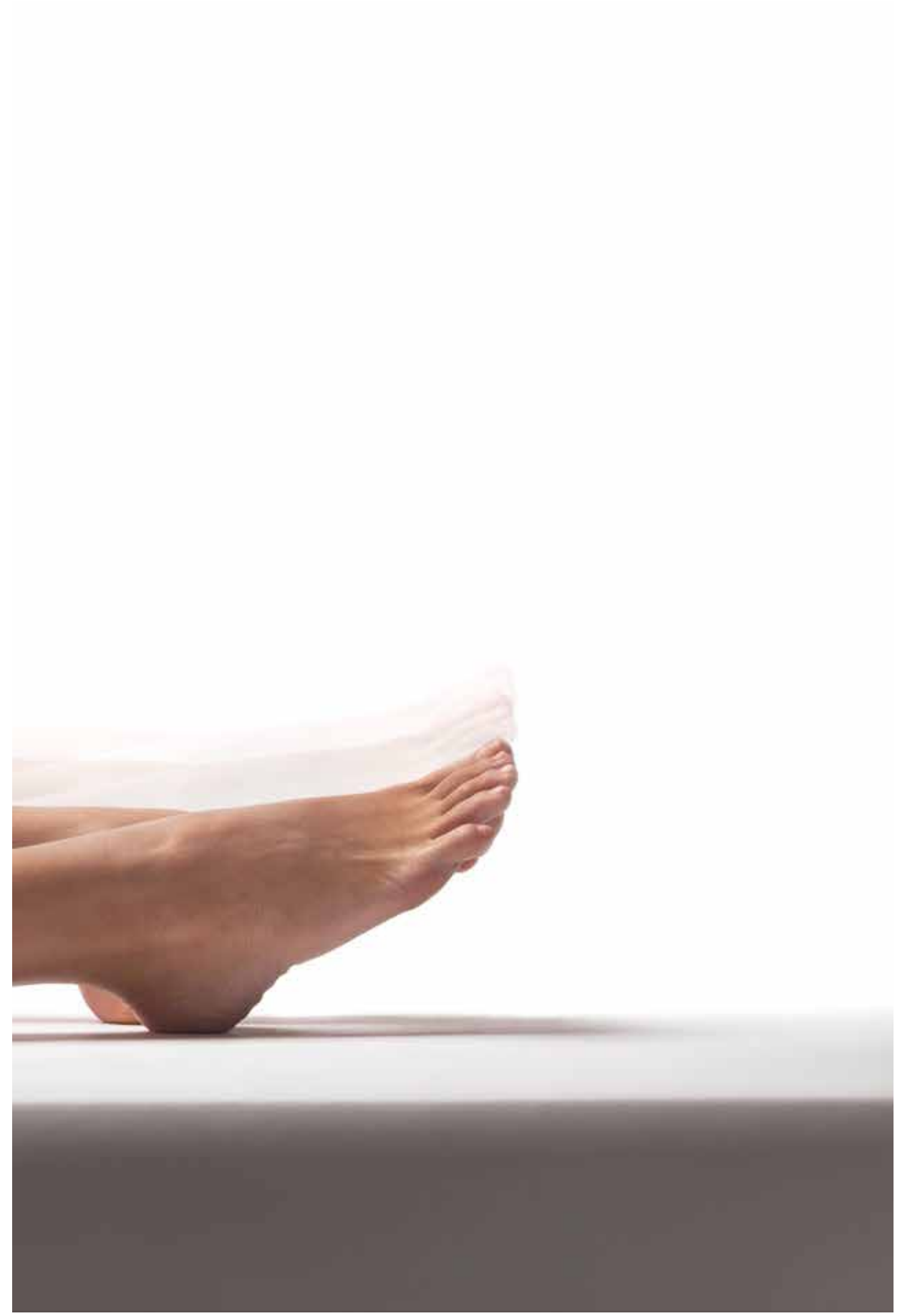
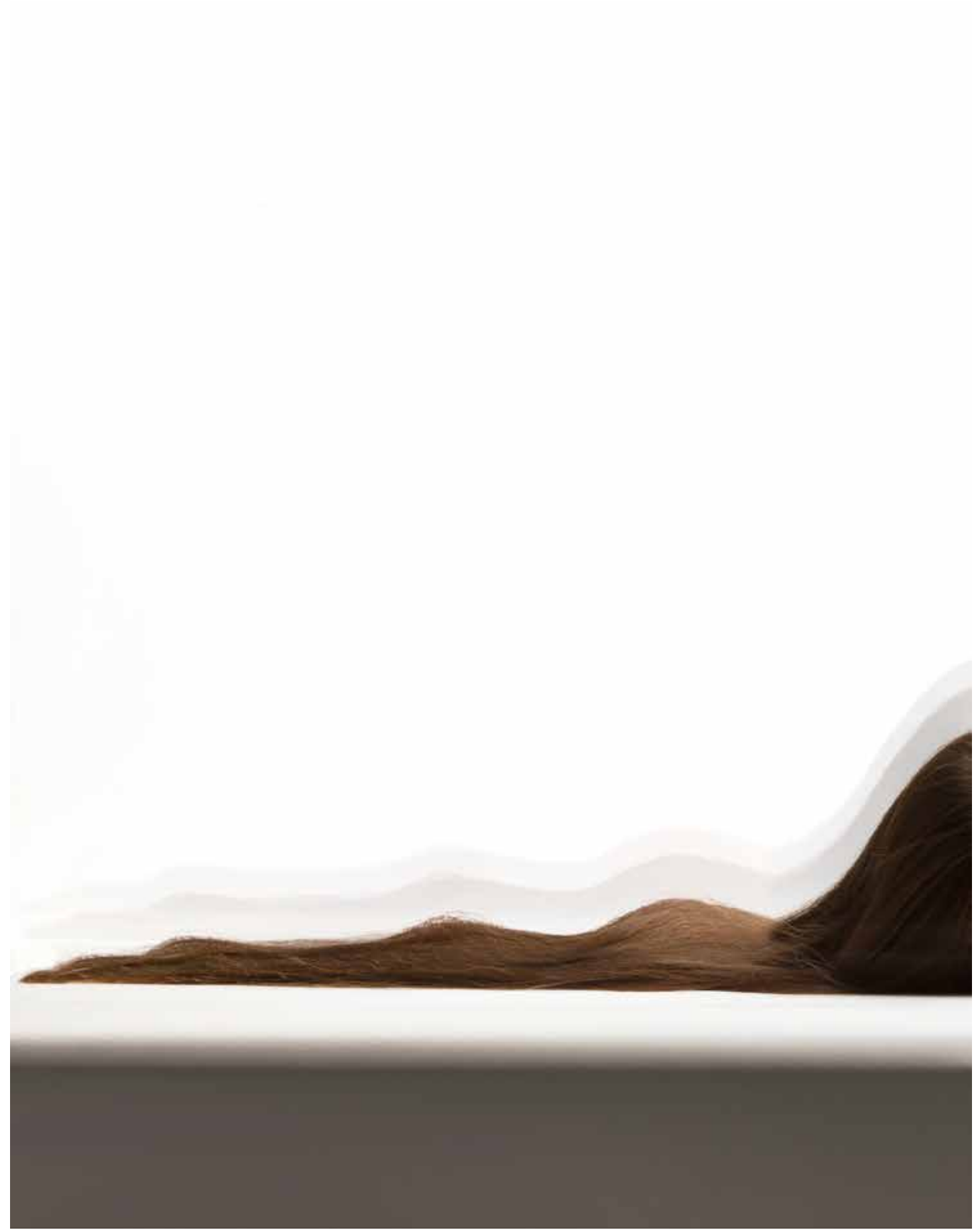


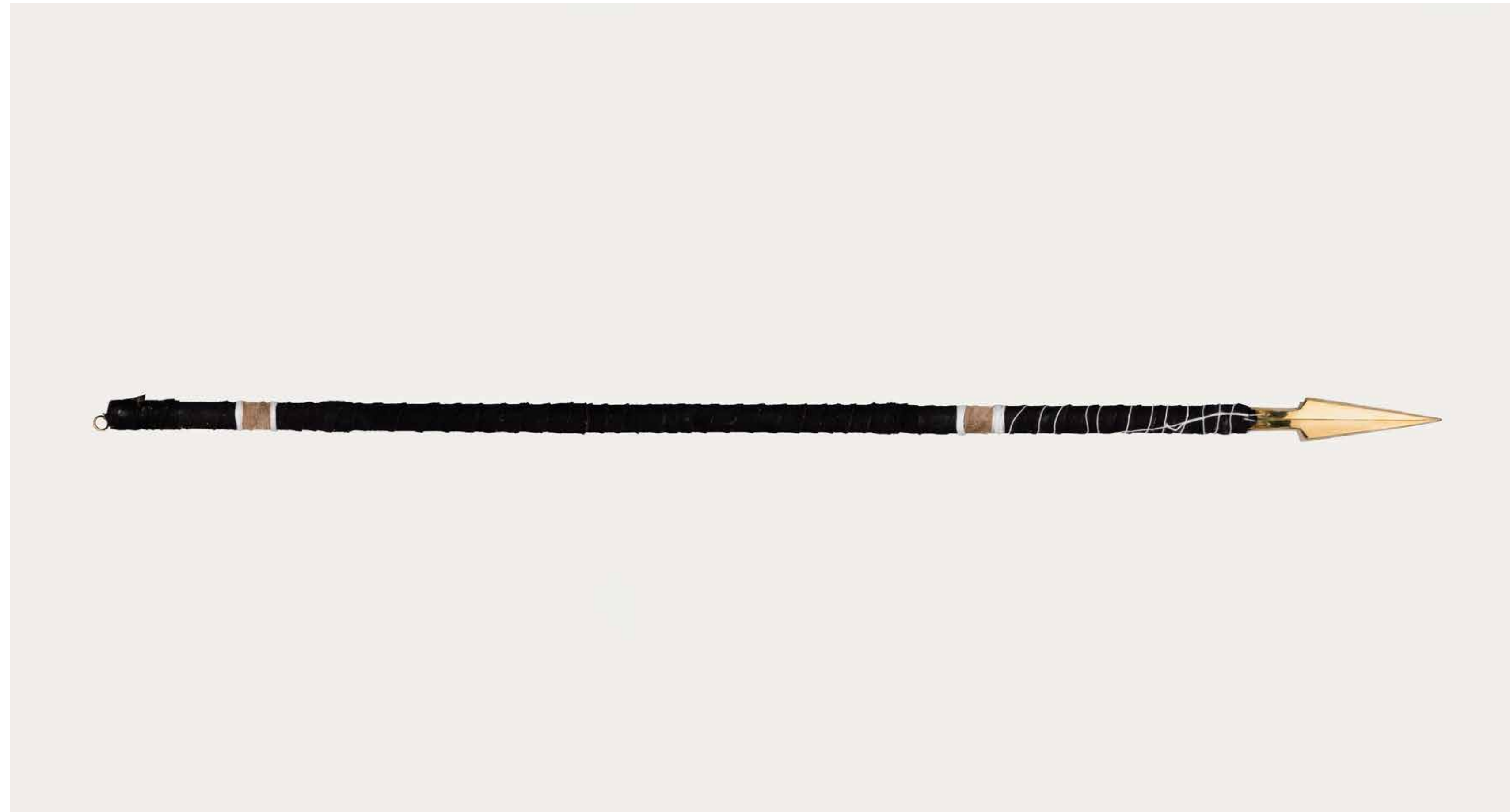
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The happy housewife heroine, the college girl in love, the suburban housewife with an up and coming husband and a station wagon full of children? This image - created by the women's magazines, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns and books by experts on marriage and the family, child psychology, sexual adjustment and by the popularizers of sociology and psychoanalysis - shapes women's lives today and mirrors their dreams, it may give a clue to the problem that has no name, as a dream gives a clue to a wish unnamed by the dreamer. **BETTY FRIEDAN**



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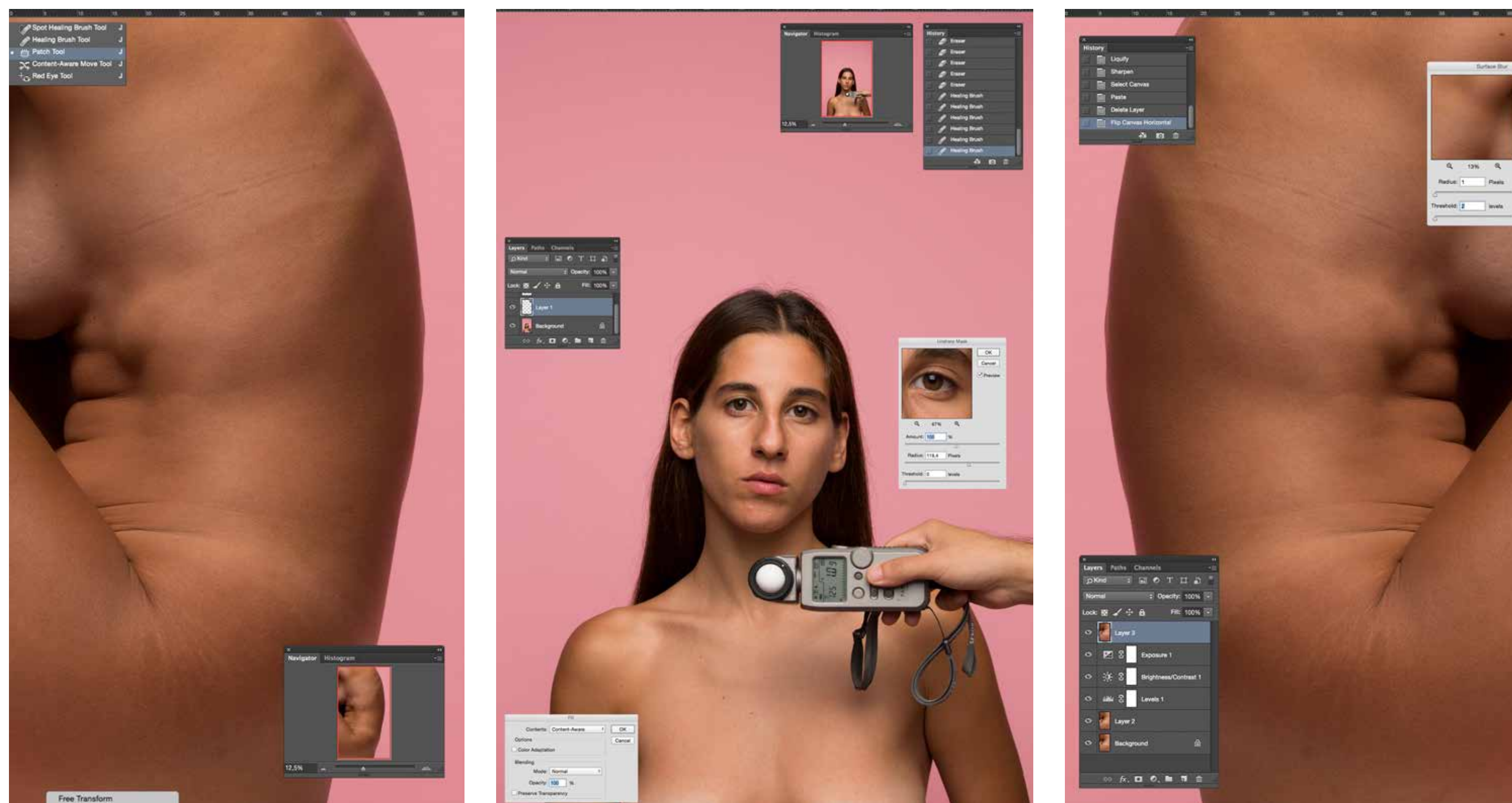




'FUTURE FEMALE PART I', SPEAR MADE OF LEATHER AND BRASS, 132 CM, 2016



'FUTURE FEMALE PART II, RE-AMAZON EDIT' VIDEO, 00'00", 2016



"It's both a blessing, and a curse to feel everything, so very deeply."
-David Jones

Whenever Joana tells me about her new work, these verses of David Jones come to my mind because her verge of awareness moves towards from a matter of 'existence' to the 'core' and becomes integrated with her work. Nowadays, photoshop techniques that become widespread day by day with the applications of social media, enable us to obtain an almost perfect visuality. Especially after 1940s, America being in the first place, the world objectifies the image of woman by removing it from the advertising form. That this artificial perception turning into a fact of reality reaches whole another dimensions with the modern-day theory of social media. While inquiring with this form that is transformed with her 'free will', Kohen uses the photoshop technique in order for the readability of the work. The artist, who exhibits her self-portrait with an ironic expression, brings the conflict of woman aesthetics in the 21st century -on the contrary to its norms- forward. The conflict, whether it is maintained as a product of a male-dominated mind by the hand of man who photoshops the visual, or as an apron of a woman who presents femininity, loses its significance in the sense that it returns to our routines. 'Free Transform' periods that are exhibited as triptych, refers to this process as well. The boxes that are on the point of photoshop, are unused and the appearance is left as it is, with all its deformations. As for the stand of fetal position that is in right and left panels, iconize the internal balance being dislocated in individual chronology. 'Free Transform' criticizes dissociative damages on the self, by going astray from a professional application platform of this field and turning into an application that is used by everybody. Kohen, first nurtures the concept with the mental transformation of the body, then she provokes.

Senem Çağla Bilgin
October 28, 2015

JK—JOANA KOHEN
HO—HANDE OYNAR

JK—As I told you before, I mostly research and investigate about self-image, the beauty myth and autobiographical self solutions I refer to the three phases of my life: childhood, present and future self. It's in these three phases that I develop my path and I call it the feminine masquerade.

HO—Why do you call it a masquerade? I'm very much interested in the masks we wear. Could we survive without our masks as women or as human beings?

JK—I am using the word masquerade, because I did perform the subject from my childhood to my adulthood in three parts, and I'm still performing, as I haven't reached my future self yet. Masks are metaphorical, perhaps because to perform the act, you do not need to wear something visible. The invisible act always makes it more like a masquerade. Everyday is like Halloween for us, if you ask me. I don't know if surviving without our masks or shields is possible, maybe it will be possible in our future selves. The world's all consuming, capitalistic and politically incorrect system won't let us change our paths. I save all my hopes for the morning after. I am a believer.

HO—We live in a society where we are supposed to move seamlessly from carrying our father's name to our husband's. That means traditionally we are defined by the men in our lives. It was thanks to the women's lib movement in the past century that we've started to understand that we can be "women" in our own right, not the second sex dependent on and inferior to men. Since then we have re-discovered our own self-worth and power, and sought equal status in society. Today in 2016, the role we independent women have chosen for ourselves might fulfill the ideals of those early feminists but we've also locked ourselves into a corner. We might have broken the glass ceiling in many aspects, but now we are expected to not only get married but also to have children, have a successful career and self-actualize all at the same time. In a few years, you could do another version of this work with a baby and a laptop right next to you. Society's expectations do not end at the announcement of marriage. They will ask you when you'll be having kids next, or judge you silently if you're not working. And if you're working hard, they'll judge you for not taking proper care of your kids. I know women who are depressed, because they are reaching a certain age and have not yet been married. At the same time, I know women who advised me to get married early so that I could have a long life ahead of me after the divorce. This madness can only end when we pick up those glass rocks from our backs, put them aside and wake up from whatever dream we are having about the illusion of happiness or unhappiness the society is imposing on us. Because neither are true. Being a creative individual gives you a critical attitude towards society's values but you are still a part of it.

JK—Well, I don't mind carrying any surnames but I'd prefer to have two – both mother's and father's like in Spanish culture. And no, I won't make another version of this work. I cannot empathize as I do not have a typical career and I don't think about having babies yet. Seven billion lives in this world seem enough for now. This is not to slur people with careers and babies. I am just an observer. I watch people and this has taught me a lot. I'm still learning to be an adult. I don't believe in gender inequality. There must be an egalitarian system where we do not even have to talk about gender issues. No more feminism as there is no 'masculinism'. No more women's day as there is no men's day, only humans' day if you want to celebrate any day. And no cultural anxiety, no forces, no judges, and less conversation and more communication. Social pressure is problematic. We are watching the same old scene constantly. We do not have to be part of any women's lib movements or any system they got us to drown in. I encourage myself for the do-it-yourself system. How do you tell your story?

As I was making "Heavyweight" I had some question marks, special needs of processing the subject matter. I see a system that makes us slaves and I needed to show it in a direct and radical way. I got 45 kilograms of glass stones and asked my friend to place them on my back till it hurt and I could not breathe. I wanted to feel the pain, needed to feel the weight of the stones on my body. I can assure you it does not matter where you go, where you live or what kind of family structure you have, the society always expects something from you. Yes, we do have careers, we make our decisions, and we walk as individuals, but the expectations of the society never end. Getting married is one of them. But questions never stop. When is this girl going to get married? Did he propose yet?

Why could she not get married?

Okay, now she got married, when is she going to have babies?

And yes, you need to wear a diamond ring and a wedding dress for sure. Those are musts! On the other hand, a person also tries to get married to fit in. So either way, problematically for your career, for your friendship goals, for your future safety and own family's health, you need to fit in.

Why fit in?

Why does the society force a person to find someone while they are trying to find themselves?

Why seek approval?

After all these questions, I did the work and was wondering if this concerns other people as well. Then I saw on the cover of New York Magazine, a woman's hand, giving us the finger – without the ring. The subtitle was "Single women are now the most potent political force in America." I knew there was an awakening around this subject. That cover would go everywhere, and that is a hundred percent useful. Life is super short for this imprisoning mentality for your society.

HO—

Lend yourself to others, but give yourself to yourself.
—Montaigne

'Piece of Me' is the work that stayed with me after I've seen the exhibition. Perhaps it's part of being a creative individual or simply a woman that I too try to dissect my own body and mind to be able to understand myself. I completely agree that I must be making a fetish of myself at some level, taking pleasure in this endeavor in a narcissistic way to be so engrossed in trying to analyze myself. In this age of selfie narcissism, what does it mean to strip down and look into the camera, at the viewer? Who is the real viewer? Is it the male gaze that you're subjected to or your own critical gaze? Do you feel vulnerable looking into the camera? Or defiant or neutral? Did you Photoshop yourself in that picture?

JK—Well I do and did ask these questions to myself several times:

What is the point?

What does it mean to use elements of the body?

Why do I present my body?

Do I sell myself?

Why make a fetish of the self?

Am I a victim?

Is art prostitution?

What is "uncomfortable viewing"?

Let me start with the urge in me: I came into this work with two different intentions. I remember when exactly –the day I started to earn money from what I do. I asked myself that if I were a collector, would I buy my own art? Actually the answer is I am not really into my art, so no. (I like things that I cannot create.) But what is the main reason to get involved with an artist and her art? Is it a need? I wondered how it was to see myself through their eyes... What is collecting? Is this an obsession? I believe so.

The other inspiration of mine was the Guerrilla Girls. When you visit institutions, museums, galleries, wherever they exhibit art, you see mostly female portraits painted by male artists, and most of the female photography shown by male artists, and that is all acceptable without feeling any shame. I know my body better than anyone else. I use it as a functional tool and while I exhibit it, as I stand in front of my work, I am not vulnerable. This is an answer to Francis Goya's Maya and to many other female figures discussed in Art History 101. I give myself to the viewer, as they want me to, so they can get a piece of me. I present myself full body, divided into pieces, hair to toe looking at the viewer, who wants to observe my physical appearance down to my soul. All the atoms I have. I see myself as an object first and convert it into a subject. The only thing that the audience or the collector cannot get is the soul. This is the reason you see that misty soul emanating from the body. I do autobiographical works, but what I do especially here has nothing to do with me, a body shown with no one's approval, just a subject making a point. Here I am no more me. I didn't use Photoshop in that photograph. Yes, the image looks acceptable because I am not fat or old or have any feature that society refuses to see. This is the reason why the work is tolerated aesthetically. And it refers to Virginia Woolf's words, "IT IS FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO MURDER A PHANTOM THAN A REALITY."

HO—Tell me about the spear and the video. What happens to the spear? Are you hitting the metaphorical bull's eye? Were you able to figure out what the Amazon woman was trying to hunt or kill?

JK—This was my first video–performance experience. I didn't know how it was going to turn out, I was more "going with the flow," but I made it. But this is not going to be the last video I shot, I assure you.

Last summer I was trying very hard to produce an artwork. It took me a year to come up with an idea and whatever I did, whatsoever subject I researched did not mean much to me. I was talking with my partner and he told me that some people just shoot the arrow and it falls short, whereas some people patiently wait to shoot and hit bull's eye. The next day I woke up with an intention. I had a dream about a spear in the Amazon. Everything was aggressive. I wanted to wake up so hard and felt I did not belong there. It was a sneaky game of my subconscious, which prompted me to start researching. A few weeks later, all the headlines in the country were filled with rapes and murders of women again. All of a sudden, all open–minded social media users became first wave feminists and began cursing the system. When everybody laments about something, educating people becomes even harder, because it feeds our social anxiety. Sometimes it does just the opposite and sets an example for people who transgress even further.

I wondered if it was possible to change this and convert negativity into positivity. As I was thinking about this, a friend called to tell me about his latest video work and I was intrigued. The dream, the research, the bad feminism, the violence and the phone call all came together. So I formulized it. I put all of them in a bowl and cooked it slowly. What I'm trying to capture in the video is sending the negative knowledge to the past, and after editing transfer it to the future. This is the reason it's called 'future female part II –amazon re-edit.' (I know it is long) Metaphorically the spear refers to change, not violence. First, you see my feet. You can feel the hesitation. Should I get into this or not? Then I take the first step and hold on to my spear. Then you see my face with the gestures of fighting with the past and the future. I manage to send it into an unknown future. You do not see the spear at the end. It goes on and on to somewhere we do not have to know now, but will find out about in the future. It is on loop. I participated with the past and the future, to be productive for my society and for my audience. This is my "do-it-yourself" way.

HO—And since you've put yourself into the context, how did that make you feel physically?

JK—I chose one of the coldest days of the winter to perform. It was -1 degrees at the Black Sea coast where we went to shoot. I was barefoot, and believe me, it was a lovely decision. I did not change the date because I think when the conditions are harder, the work comes out better. That is my absolute know-how. It took me a few hours to warm up to the situation. In reality, every time I threw the spear, I saw it drop, of course. If that means I'm a cheater, then I'm only cheating for the higher good.

HO—How does social media affect the new generation of women?

JK—In my opinion, there is an awakening. The society is learning some things from popular culture. If Beyoncé is a feminist, then they become sort of feminist. They respect and support whatever she does. This is the standard format we've been observing with regards to social media. But there is a younger generation of women who are using media against the socially 'acceptable' norms of beauty or sexuality. For example on Instagram I follow these accounts, which offer a different female perception. They are not ashamed with their appearance. They don't care if they have hair on their legs or pimples on their chins. They exhibit these bravely, and are followed by so many people. The comments under the pictures are surprisingly not hateful, like "beauty fades, ugly is forever." The new generation specifically points out these new subjects without any approval from the society. They become whoever they want to be.

There are other examples of this shift already in place, like Vice magazine's "broadly" channel that works with only female subjects and contributors. They even came to Turkey to shoot an episode with Adnan Hoca. Dazed Digital has changed its content to cater to a more female audience. These developments will affect the future generations of women.

HO—Do you feel comfortable being under the gaze of your audience? What does it mean to be in front of the lens for you?

JK—First of all, I live in Turkey and we have some real problems here. Our social structures depend on religion, ethics and taboos. Other people's opinions are far too important than what we ourselves think in this society. For example, the first time I made a performance, I showed it in an art fair and I saw that my open-minded friends turned their back on my work and did not comment about it. They didn't want to get involved. Sharing anything publically is a problem, from your friends to family to art critics. Well, if judgment is a brick on this wall, I do not mind as I am made of stone.

Looking at the camera is very comfortable for me, because we don't judge each other. I do whatever I want and I become whoever I want to be. That makes me feel super confident and powerful; but being viewed is another level. Exhibiting yourself to the viewer is like an uncomfortable silence. When I say "being viewed," actually what I am doing is super simple; I am basically acting as a bridge between my story and the viewer, and I am no one but what I aim to tell. Roxane Gay in her recent book Bad Feminist sums it up so well:

"I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I'm right. I am just trying—trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself."
—Roxane Gay, Bad Feminist

I still wish that the word "feminist" did not exist. Hopefully it can be replaced with human.



'SOULED OUT', DETAIL, LINEN&COTTON THREADS AND STONES IN PLEXIGLASS FRAME, EACH 70 X 100 CM, 2016

LIFE FOR RENT
JOANA KOHEN

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UN-KNOWN

