Facing the lens of the camera: bodies, self-portraiture, portraiture and identity in women artists' video.

LEUZZI, L.

2023

Facing the Lens of the Camera: Bodies, Self-portraiture, Portraiture, and Identity in Women Artists' Video

Laura Leuzzi

The availability and commercialization of the portable video recorder in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with an important phase in the feminist movement: women worldwide were fighting for civil rights and a change in the recognition of the role of women within society. Many women artists saw the advantages arising from the new technology as offering an opportunity to explore feminist issues in a new guise.

The "new" apparatus, free as it was from the burden of a patriarchal tradition, offered several technical features that made it particularly flexible and well-suited to independent, limited budget and autonomous productions. It was transportable (although still relatively heavy), it did not need printing or a large crew and, at first, editing was not available. Also, feedback on a small monitor made it possible to check the shot constantly, whereas the video was immediately available to be played once the shoot was finished. Since then, thanks to major improvements in the technology, many artists have been led to choose video for the autonomy and the low budget opportunities it allows (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 2011).

Looking at the body of work produced with video by women artists in the 1960s, 1970s and later in the 1980s, it becomes clear that in connection with the aforementioned feminist movement, a major recurring theme is identity and representation of the self from both an intimate and a public perspective: for example, women artists engaged with notions of how women had been misrepresented and objectified in the visual arts and media, and how

their role in society was reduced to that of mothers and spouses. Their themes and approaches reflected second-wave feminist battles: they rejected the sanitized and aiming-to-please representations of women's bodies, sexualities, and roles—that had been perpetuated for centuries by male colleagues—in many different mediums and art forms. Video served as a powerful tool to question and explore identity and self-portrait, to reflect and self-reflect on women's bodies, their status and their inner selves, echoing the popular metaphor of video as a mirror. From the 1960s to today, women's approach and these themes have endured and evolved with the medium, echoing current battles for civil rights as developing from the pioneers.

As discussed in a large body of literature, women have profoundly innovated the genre of portraiture and self-portraiture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Meskimmon 1996; Borzello 1998). In the 1970s, a heated debate regarding approaches to representing women in traditional Western art history was prompted by a number of different writers, thinkers, activists, and critics—including, for example John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Marina Warner with her famous *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976). These books and theories have informed and inspired and have been complemented by the work of women artists active at the time and many who came thereafter.

In this chapter, I will explore the reception of these instances in women's contemporary video art through the analysis of three key case studies: three European women artists—born in the 1960s, two in particular in the wake of the 1968 protests.[1] My aim is to show how video has been a pivotal medium for exploration and innovation in the fields of portraiture and self-portraiture for a generation that has been deeply informed—consciously

---

or subconsciously—by the very early feminist video pioneers, performers, and theorists of the 1970s and who have developed different approaches to common issues arising from the renegotiation of the representation of their body and image. This chapter will focus on identity as a theme that has been developed, how this approach innovated the genre of self-portrait, questioning its tropes and *topoi* with tradition-defying approaches and perspectives and ultimately contributed in a distinct fashion to the development of video as an art form.

Engaging with the body: desire and pleasure at the intersection of portraiture

Women artists have traditionally worked in the genres of portraiture and self-portraiture, exploring identities, bodies, and representation with a particular focus on the self, fellow women and children, and intimate and personal emotions and attitudes. Women's self-portraits have been more than mere representations of the portrayed person's physical features: they conveyed a deeper exploration of identity and inner life but were also conceived as a statement of their professional status.

In the twentieth century this tradition was continued by several artists who used it as a tool to challenge conventions and stereotypes in relation to roles and aesthetic canons, to renegotiate representations, to reject stereotyped models, and to reclaim their own perspective and voice. Video served as a potent medium for several women artists exploring and renewing portraiture and self-portraiture, although in many cases not specifically referencing the traditional genres in either their titles or statements. As mentioned, a key feature of video was the possibility of working alone, allowing intimacy and enhancing control over the material—something that was key when working with their own bodies, especially for nudes.

This greatly empowered many women artists working with performance and specifically with body art.[2]

Since its inception, video has been employed to question and challenge what Laura Mulvey (1975) so famously defined as the "male gaze," adopting a medium that was already being utilized by broadcast TV. The rejection of the male gaze and the adoption of the female gaze in women's video art—as well as in feminist filmmaking of course—has involved what could be defined as an ongoing fight and struggle for the reappropriation of women's own image as a way of self-representation. This feminist approach to the moving image has given rise to profound innovations within the genre of portraiture, understood in the broadest possible terms, engaging with many different themes including identity, eroticism, motherhood, and professional status.

Already in the 1970s, utilizing naked bodies in their works, however, raised several issues relating to the possible objectification and sexualization for women. Might such uses of nudity in fact serve to perpetuate the male gaze? Several women artists—as discussed for example by British artist and theorist Catherine Elwes—were profoundly aware of these problems and tried to explore and negotiate "new forms of visibility," adopting different strategies to avoid "sexual representation" (Elwes 2005: 48–49).

Video performers, and in particular those women artists who were using their own body, were also aware of the issues raised by Rosalind Krauss's foundational essay, *The Aesthetics of Narcissism* (1976). Developing her points from an analysis of Vito Acconci's *Centers* (1971), Krauss, utilizing a mirror-like metaphor, associated the loop created by the camera and the video feedback to a narcissistic quality that in her view would in some way be intrinsic to video. Although at the end of her essay, Krauss seemed to mitigate this opinion, it

---

[2] Already in 1976, the American video artist Hermine Freed had pointed out that artists used their own bodies because it enhanced a sense of control, allowing the artist to work alone.

cast a shadow over the the perception of the use of bodies in video art. Although Krauss's piece remains a milestone in the field, since then much ink has been spilled in questioning and debunking it. For example, Michael Rush reinterpreted Acconci's approach, insisting that the artist was instead addressing an invisible audience located somewhere beyond the camera. In *Sexy Lies in Videotapes* (2003), Anja Osswald also observed that the metaphor of video-as-mirror is not completely accurate because video doesn't offer a reversed image (as a mirror would), but instead a double one. Therefore the "other" breaks the narcissistic loop (Westgeest 2015: 55). Osswald argues that only a few videos include the term "self-portrait" in their title and that the artist would be relegated to the depersonalized role of "an empty container," exposing the "rhetorical artificiality of self-images" (including the doubling or splitting that is an integral part of our analysis) and what she defines as the "paradox of 'self-less self-images'" (Westgeest 2015: 56). Nonetheless, we might argue that several early videos as well as other, later works engage with notions of representation and portraiture, especially those by feminist artists.

Over the course of her career, and on several different occasions, Swiss feminist video art pioneer Pipilotti Rist (born 1962) has worked with the body, utilizing close-ups of body parts, mostly involving uncanny and destabilizing effects. She has thus placed her own image or portrait in front of the camera, adopting unusual (and non-hierarchical) points of view and thereby offering a profound investigation into desire, pleasure and the human sensorial experience. Her approach and imagination have freed the representation of the body from the canon and delved into the use of the body as a vehicle for sensations and emotions.

In the last decade, in her most successful and important exhibition retrospectives, Pipilotti Rist has worked on installations that place the experience and the body of the viewer as a part of—and at the center of—the artwork: environments with large-scale projections and

with reflected light "caress ourselves" (FADlive 2011), envelop the visitors' bodies in an immersive experience and turn them into a sculptural part of the work.

As discussed by David Riley, Pipilotti Rist has transposed sound and image features—"the language of the anti-elite"—that were already popular in the "outside world"—into the art world, in the space of museums and galleries. In installations such as *Do Not Abandon Me Again* (2015), both the environment as well as the audience become the screen for the projection: "The viewer having a physical lived experience, one to one, being in the space with the work, being three-dimensionally in the work. Being of the work. […] You are the screen" (Risley 2019: 73).

The theme and the use of the body has evolved from Rist's early practice of the 1980s and 1990s, where she had more explicitly engaged with empowerment, the female body, sexuality, desire, and the self, offering in many of her works—especially in the first two decades—a portrait of women in charge of their pleasures, their emotions, and their representation.

In 2005 in *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, Rist explored feminist empowerment through a Garden of Eden inhabited by two Eves (the Catholic Church forced the closure of the exhibition in the Church of San Stae when the work was presented for the first time at the Venice Biennale). The bodies, captured with close-ups and unusual perspectives, intermingled with plants and objects in a glorious feast of colors and sounds, with its erotic charge, tactile quality, and sumptuousness, overwhelmed the viewers who lay on the floor in a state of relaxation. As Massimiliano Gioni has observed, "The fact that this work aroused the ire of the ecclesiastic patriarchy shows the subversive charge of Rist's imaginary, which with a few twists transforms the passive depiction of women found in traditional Christian iconography into the paean to a newly empowered femininity" (Gioni 2019: 57).

A key work that engages with these themes and notions is the famous *I Am Not The Girl Who Misses Much* (1986) by Pipilotti Rist. The artist modifies some famous lyrics from the renowned Beatles song *Happiness is a Warm Gun* (1968, "she's not the girl who misses much," which refers to Yoko Ono, a model and inspiration to the artist) and sings them, dancing frenziedly in front of the camera, dressed in black and with her breasts exposed (the dress might have been falling due to the dancing or might have been deliberately pulled down).

In post-production, the artist manipulates the image, changing the color balance, the velocity (by speeding up and slowing down some segments), therefore distorting the sound (with low and high pitch) to the point of rendering the lyrics unrecognizable and fragmenting the image. Instead of offering a sexualized image of the female body for the male gaze to peruse, objectification and fetishization are defied by blurring the image and by using signal disturbance. This strategy might have followed or been inspired by those devised by several women video pioneers, among them Nan Hoover (*Landscape*, 1983), who used close-ups of body parts to disrupt the unity of the female body with the same de-objectification/de-sexualization effect—a strategy deployed by Pipilotti Rist herself in a number of later works in which she utilizes body parts and close-ups that, despite the use of tactile and sensory effects, manage to avoid the pitfalls of voyeurism and a pornographic imaginary (for example in *Pickelporno* [Pimple Porno], 1992).

Although the artist herself has rejected the notion that contemporary music videos furnished a direct inspiration for *I Am Not The Girl Who Misses Much*, nonetheless, as Cinzia Cremona notes, Rist "responds directly to the ubiquitous male pop artist in the language of the pop promo" (Cremona 2019: 47). The modification of the original lyrics, of the "she" into "I," marks the empowering process that the artist is reclaiming. Enhanced by the repeating of this

mantra, we witness the shift of paradigm from the other's representation to self-expression and self-portraiture.

Rist has used these same strategies in many of her other videos shown since the 1980s. One example is the little known *Japsen* (1988), a video made in collaboration with Muda Mathis—founding member of the Basel-based feminist pop band and performance group Les Reines Prochaines that Pipilotti Rist joined from 1988 to 1994. The work is divided into five acts that develop the love story of the female protagonist (the delusion, the hysteria, the escape, the love, the laughter) (Zwick 2016). We note how the work displays several stylistic features that have been widely utilized by Pipilotti Rist in her work, including for example the aforementioned close-ups and unusual perspectives. In all the segments, for example, the camera follows the woman (Pipilotti Rist)—characterized by red boots and tights (the artist's statement says "the red colour is important")—with a close-up of her legs walking or cycling through the city. In "the Hysteria" stage, we find once again Pipilotti Rist moving/dancing frenziedly to the music, in images and sound manipulated in post-production.

More recently, unfiltered and unsanitized portraits of sexuality, pleasure, love, and desire have been explored and engaged with by American Glasgow-based artist Margaret Salmon in her 16 mm film *Two*. Salmon's work has been deeply influenced by Laura Mulvey and has adopted and explored the "female gaze" as an alternative model to perpetuating the male gaze in media and the culture at large. In *Two*, the artist manages to portray couples in the act of lovemaking while at the same time avoiding the male gaze and embracing a point of view that brings on the screen a true, loving, intimate, and connected relationship and mode of human contact. The bodies in the act are a conduit for deeper emotions, rejecting the machine-like sex-making of the pornographic imaginary. Close-ups and the gentle caress of the camera on the body offer the viewer a way to reflect upon the performers' touch instead of adopting a voyeuristic gaze.

The artist has also investigated the theme of relationship in her work *I you me we us* (2018, likewise filmed in 16 mm and then available in HD). The title of this double-screen installation represents the bond between people portrayed through images of contacts, objects, and words in a sort of progression and shift of focus from the individual to the couple. Although made with film, Salmon's *I you me we us* was installed in the galleries at the Dundee Contemporary Arts in 2018 on two monitors engaging with the domestic setting of the broadcast TV imaginary in a manner bearing some relation to what early women's video art sought to do.

The cultural imaginary, the body and feminist representation

The role of women in society and culture at large as well as the fetishization and objectification of bodies and body parts has been and continues to be at the center of much of women's art and video, the aim being to challenge cultural stereotypes deeply rooted in tradition and visual canons.

Since the 1990s, the Spanish artist Pilar Albarracín (born 1968) has been addressing these issues of identity, representation, and the role of women in traditional and modern culture—Spanish culture specifically, but with a message that can be translated into more universal terms—through multiple media. Albarracín truly embodies in her practice and work the fight for rights and recognition of those years of civic action and revolution (Albarracín 2018: 22).

The artist has used her own body as a field serving to represent the oppression of and the violence against women; the body becomes the actual territory where this violence and oppression—be it intangible, or physical—is enacted and therefore represented and exposed.

In her video performances,[3] Albarracín uses traditional Spanish visual tropes from popular culture as well as art history, and consequently the stereotypes attached to them, to address the liberation of women in their pursuit to regain power over their role, their bodies, their sexuality, and their relationships with the other sex in modern society. Her reflections upon identity range between the individual and the collectivity.

In the video *Punto de fuga*, (2012, Fig. 1), the artist proposes several close-ups of women's crossed legs that open so as to reveal their underwear. The performers chosen for the video as well as the underwear and clothes aim to defy patriarchal objectification of women's bodies and normative canons of beauty that promote perfection and youth: the skin that reveals signs of aging as well as the colorful and normal everyday clothes reclaim a feminist representation of women's bodies. The inquisitive camera explores between the legs, revealing real bodies in a spirit of inclusivity and a mode of representation that defies stereotypical points of views and portraiture.

[Figure 1 here]

For some visual and conceptual elements, one might recall Albaraccín's video *Furor latino* (2003) that specifically rejects the eroticization and fetishizing of the male gaze on women's bodies and openly addresses cultural stereotypes that place women—especially Latin women—as objects of masculine desire and erotic possession. The artist conveys these concepts using a very basic bodily manipulation and visual plot: the video shows the torso of a woman with large breasts dancing to Latin music, completely objectified through the close-up on the breast that does not allow her face to be seen. The music approaches a crescendo

---

[3] Ana Sedeño Valdellós argues that we encounter video performance in Albarracín that is "intended" to be documentation of a performance in an approach that focuses on the action—such as in *Furor Latino* and *Viva España*—and "as a genre where action and video as material go through a hybridisation in an inter-dependent way" as in *Musical Dancing Spanish Doll* (2001) (Sedeño Valdellós 2011: 38). Nonetheless, the relationship with the camera—the importance of the shot—in a work such as *Furor Latino* is fundamental and makes the work a video performance (and not mere documentation) in the strict sense.

that reflects the voyeuristic arousal in the viewer that is doomed to be shattered when it reaches its peak: the breasts are deflated with a pin that reveals them to be just balloons. The video—besides putting into question the objectification of bodies and the "male gaze"—also comments on constructed, stereotypical canons of beauty and the use and abuse of plastic surgery creating bodies that are ultimately "fake."

In the video performance *Le Duende volé* (2012), for example, we witness the awkward scene of a flamenco dancer (the Spanish term *duende* refers to the state of exaltation the dancer attains during their performance)—dressed in a traditional costume climbing down the side of an apartment building (Albarracín 2018: 69). The sense of surprise is enhanced by a *rumba flamenca* popular in the 1970s that tells the story of a group of common criminals who fled from the police.

The figure of the traditional flamenco dancer is recurrent in the artist's work: in *Musical Dancing Spanish Doll*, the real body of the artist, with her sensual movements, becomes confused with plastic dolls that are in movement—the viewer is at first not sure if one of the dancers is real—Albarracin once again engaging with objectification, sexualization, and cultural stereotypes. Cuauhtémoc Medina commented: "The image eloquently suggests the meaning of the notion of 'intervention': this entering of the territory of signs, in order to breath a new power of seduction into the seemingly inert" (Medina 2004).

A key work in Albarracín's career is the celebrated *fi* (2004, Fig. 2), a video performance that was shown at the 2005 Venice Biennale and is now in the Louis Vuitton Collection. In the piece, the artist strides through the streets of Madrid, dressed in a bright yellow coat, her eyes covered by stylish dark sunglasses, her face initially expressing a vague anxiety. She is followed by a male-only music band playing the tune *Eviva España/Y Viva*—a famous song popular in the 1970s that remind us of summer holidays in Spain. At first the men merely seem to be following her but little by little they become more invasive and

11

harassing, and she clearly tries to escape and lose them. The artist increases the pace, and in the end, she actually breaks into a run. This visually compelling scene symbolizes the violence of patriarchal culture on women and their struggle to evade it, as well as engaging with stereotypes about Spanish culture.

[Figure 2 here]

Albarracín's works in video and performance—as well as in other media—reflect the artist's profound knowledge of feminist art, in particular video art from second-wave feminism and its lexicon. Her attempts to engage with that vocabulary involved visual and conceptual references as well as homage, which she "deconstructs" and "claims and reworks [it] as if it were her own" (Albarracín 2018: 78).

Several critics and historians have suggested some common elements between Albarracín's performance documented on photography and video as *Tortilla a la española* (*Spanish tortilla*, 1999) and the now historic feminist video masterpiece by Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), with which the Spanish artist was no doubt familiar. Both works—beside the kitchen setting and implicit reference to the traditional role and space (both physical and metaphorical) in which society has confined women—are marked by a similar degree of staged violence that symbolizes violence against women as well as the need to combat and subvert this paradigm through empowerment and the feminist movement.

Body, portraiture and collective/personal memory

The innovation in portraiture led by women artists in video encompasses the possibility of incorporating memory—be it personal or collective—in order to explore identity at a deeper

level. The body is transformed into a powerful vessel of this memory, once again defying the sanitized image of beauty perpetuated in the traditional canon and media.

A significant example of this approach is *Dust Grains* (2014, Fig. 3) by the Italian artist Elisabetta Di Sopra (born 1969). The body and the genres of portraiture and self-portraiture are very much at the center of Di Sopra's work and the artist—as previously discussed in the case of Rist and many other women in video—likewise uses body parts in some of her videos: in *Dust Grains*, for example, the camera focus on a detail—the eye that stands for the artist in a visual synecdoche. The eye of the artist with its wrinkles and folds shows ageing, the mark that time has passed. The passing of time evoked in the moving images sequence is shown in the artist's greenish pupil: we seem to be viewing old amateur footage showing Di Sopra's childhood memory of time spent with her mother and father in the countryside. The sound is a distant echo of those moments. At the end of the work, the eye closes and a tear runs down her cheek.

[Figure 3 here]

Analyzing the use of the eye in this specific work, one might recall the popular phrase "the eyes are the mirror of the soul". Besides its popularized and even trite meaning, this phrase evokes in some way the metaphor of the mirror/video once again, with the eye acting metaphorically like a gateway to the soul, but more materially as a reflection/projection tool. This reference is enhanced by the low-quality image of the footage that recalls the quality of early video and Super 8—that the artist had re-used also in her *Mamma* (2008), an extract from an old Super 8 film migrated to digital and complemented by music. Furthermore, it recalls the use of the mirror in traditional self-portraits, an element that has been explored at length in much early women's video art. Examples include Elaine Shemilt's *Doppelgänger*,

Vanitas by Tamara Krikorian, and *Etre blonde c'est la perfection* (*Being Blonde is Perfection*) 1980 by Hungarian artist Klara Kutcha.

Body and portraiture are at the very center of Di Sopra's work. In her video *Temporary* (2013), for example, Di Sopra explores self-portraiture: the figure of the artist occupies what seems to be a room in an old Venetian palazzo. The artist starts taking her clothes off and little by little her image starts to dissolve until she is completely naked and disappears. The video once again deals with the passage of time but at the same time the topic of portraiture seems to be to the fore: her body is completely exposed to the viewer but the terms of its representation and visibility are renegotiated by the artist through a manipulation of the image and the choice of the background (a strategy utilized more utilized more cursorily in her *Variazioni minime*, 2009).

Di Sopra's work is particularly relevant in the Italian context which is still characterized by a strong macho culture and an objectification of the body of women (the famous found footage film *Il corpo delle donne – Women's Bodies –* by Lorella Zanardo, 2009, is still highly relevant) that relate in a sense to Spanish traditional and contemporary culture, the target of Pilar Albarracín's work.

Many works by Di Sopra explore collective and individual portraits as well as self-portraits, always proposing an investigation of the body that is realistic, unsanitized, and aims to convey the inner world of the person portrayed; one such example is *Why* (2018), in which portraits feature women screaming in nature, regaining their own voice (inspired by the case of one woman who had lost her voice due to trauma).

Motherhood is another key theme in Di Sopra's practice and following the example of many feminist artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—and, indeed, video artists— before her, Di Sopra explores it through the body of women, rejecting the abovementioned myth of the Mother/Madonna discussed by Marina Warner.

In *Untitled* (2007) the artist explores breastfeeding: the camera focuses on a close-up of the breast that starts expressing milk when the mother hears the cry of her baby. The image with the dark nipples and the milk flowing defies the objectification of women's breasts in the media and pornography. The work is somehow a celebration of the relationship and bond between mother and child, without implying unrealistic standards of perfection but rather capitalizing on the exploration of real bodies: it addresses the dependence of the child upon the mother and the labor—emotional and physical—that is an inextricable part of motherhood. The approach of the artist is very far from the traditional representation of breastfeeding in past centuries (the model of the *Madonna lactans* or Nursing Madonna that in no way portrayed the reality of breastfeeding) and relates to the work of many feminists on the topic that has challenged implicitly or explicitly the same tradition (Betterton 2010): a relevant example is *There is a Myth* (1984) by British artist Catherine Elwes (born 1952), which shows a close-up of the breast that is stimulated to lactate by the hand of her baby, providing a pioneering video portrait of motherhood and breastfeeding.

Women's labor of love is also portrayed by Di Sopra in her diptych *The Care* (2018), which engages with two prominent Christian iconographies of the Renaissance and the Baroque period: the Pietà—with a young woman bathing an elderly lady, and the Madonna and Child—with a mother bathing her child. Both the elderly body and the reaction of the child normalize and de-glamorize the myths around women as caregiver and pillar of the family—and the close-up to the chest, which crops the caregiver's body, focuses on the action depicted.

In one of her most recent installations—shown at the Venice National Archaeological Museum in San Marco Square (2021), *Il Limite* (The Limit, 2019), Di Sopra investigates once again portraiture and women's bodies in relation to art history in its more traditional forms and mediums, its canons of beauty, and the role of professional women artists.

The three-channel installation shows in the central screen the figure of a female professional model, who is elderly and naked—now retired, her shoulders towards the camera, posing for an invisible audience of students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice (who are, we suppose, in the place where the camera is) and on either side there are screens showing close-ups of her body: a detail of her legs, one bent in accordance with the sort of contrived pose that artists' models assume; and a shot of her profile, her face only partly visible, with her impenetrable expression, and her arm posed as well. The model is testing her body to the limit by holding this complex and tiring pose. Once again, the close-up and unusual (non-frontal and non-hierarchical) point of view is utilized by the artist to cleverly renegotiate representation and portraiture. The camera does not hide the signs of time passing which are perceptible on the model's skin: the unsanitized and realistic image defies all stereotypes and boundaries concerning the representation of women in the media and in traditional art history (where women models embodied beauty and perfection), following the example of many feminist artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as many video art pioneers. A counterpart to the model's body is what seems to be a copy of an ancient Greek male naked sculpture on her left—a copy that itself lays bare the memory of the original work from which it was taken. This clash between the sculpture and the elderly model once again references unattainable and artificial canons of beauty. Also, it is an indirect reference to both the art system and society at large that for centuries have excluded women from becoming professional artists, from having access to education, purchasing materials or hiring professional models. This effect is enhanced by the installation in the rooms of the Museo Nazionale Archeologico in Venice (Fig. 4).

[Figure 4 here]

In conclusion, the case studies discussed show how portraits are indeed at the very center of many contemporary feminist video artworks and how their approach to the representation of bodies and identity—although with different sensibilities and innovative perspectives—are rooted in and developed from feminist concerns and feminist works that have emerged from the pioneering experimentation of early feminist video art and theory.

Although some of the early videos by women had only a limited circulation, and although it is therefore not possible to trace with certainty their legacy or how they have influenced the succeeding generations, nonetheless they inaugurated, stimulated, and contributed to a discourse that has been developed further in subsequent decades and has reached—sometimes indirectly—younger artists.

The body is the battleground through which the terms of portraiture can be addressed and enacted through fragmentation, manipulation, and the adoption of different perspectives so as to convey an image that defies stereotypes, objectification, and the "male gaze," all still perpetuated by the media.

Video—with its innovations and technological advances—remains a medium that allows a certain degree of autonomy, independence, and freedom, at the same time enabling artists to challenge and engage critically with broadcast TV and mainstream cinema.

Through video women artists have challenged and continue to challenge the stereotypes governing the representation of their role and status, thereby claiming their rightful role as artists in the art history canon and system.

References

Albarracín, Pilar (2018) *Que me quiten lo bailao*, Madrid: Gobierno De España, Ministerio De Cultura Y Deporte, 20 August 2020. Available online: https://issuu.com/elvivero/docs/pilaralbarraci_n-190221-ok-lr (accessed 26 August 2021).

Betterton, Rosemary (2010), 'Maternal Embarrassment: Feminist Art and Maternal Affects', *Studies in the Maternal*, 2 (10). Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290233114_Maternal_Embarrassment_Feminist_Art_and_Maternal_Affects (accessed 26 August 2021).

Borzello, Frances (1998), *Seeing ourselves: women's self-portraits*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Cremona, Cinzia (2019), 'Desire for More', in Laura Leuzzi, Elaine Shemilt, and Stephen Partridge (eds), *EWVA European Women's Video Art*, 41–54, New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing.

Elwes, Catherine (2005), *Video Art: A Guided Tour*, London: I. B. Tauris.

FADLive (2011), *Pipilotti Rist, Eyeball Massage, Hayward Gallery*, YouTube. Video, 3:38. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmJBdLUN2eQ (accessed 26 August 2021).

Krauss, Rosalind (1976), 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', *October*, 1: 50–64.

Leuzzi, Laura (2019), 'Self/portraits: the Mirror, the Self and the Other. Identity and Representation in Early Women's Video Art in Europe', in Laura Leuzzi, Elaine Shemilt, and Stephen Partridge (eds), *EWVA European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s*, 7–24, New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing.

Medina, Cuauhtémoc (2004), 'La Perversión De La Spanish Doll', in *Pilar Albarracín: Del 16 De Septiembre Al 31 De Octubre De 2004, Reales Atarazanas De Sevilla*, Sevilla: Junta de Andalusía, Consejería de Cultura, Caja San Ferdinando. Available online: http://www.pilaralbarracin.com/textos/medina_eng.pdf (accessed 26 August 2021).

Meskimmon, Marsha (1996), *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists 'Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Risley, David (2019), 'Everything Flows', in Pipilotti Rist, Lærke Rydal Jørgensen and Tine Colstrup (eds), *Pipilotti Rist: Open My Glade,* Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, 1 March 2019 – 23 June 2019, [Exhibition catalog], 72–81, Humlebæk: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2011), *Why Pipilotti Rist works with video*, YouTube. Video, 1:43. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=br1C5ONEt_c (accessed 26 August 2021).

Sedeño Valdellós, Ana (2011), 'El videoarte en España y Andalucía: historia, contexto y artistas más destacados', in Ana Sedeño Valdellós, *Historia y estética del videoarte en España*, 25–42, Salamanca: Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones.

Westgeest, Helen (2015), *Video art theory: a comparative approach*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Zwick, Sus (2016), *Japsen 1988, Muda Mathis/ Pipilotti Rist,* Vimeo. Video, 11:48. Available online: https://vimeo.com/179321222 (accessed 26 August 2021).

Captions

Fig. 1 Pilar Albarracín, *Punto de fuga*, 2012, colour video with sound, 3' 34", 16:9 format. Images © Pilar Albarracín Courtesy of: Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois, Paris (Fr) and DACS/Artimage, London 2022.

.

Fig. 2 Pilar Albarracín, *Viva España*, 2004, performance, video and photo documentation, colour sound, 3 '30", 4:3 format. Images © Pilar Albarracín Courtesy of: Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois, Paris (Fr) and DACS/Artimage, London 2022..

Fig. 3 Elisabetta Di Sopra, *Dust Grains*, 2014, still from video. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4 Elisabetta Di Sopra, *Il Limite*, 2019, video installation at Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Venice. Courtesy of the artist.