

SHE DEVIL



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INTRODUCTION

This book tells the story of SHE DEVIL, the video exhibition created by STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI. She Devil is the name of a heroine in the Marvel Comics universe, Shanna the She Devil, and title of the famous film from 1989 by Susan Seidelman. The name alludes in a playful way to the diabolical and bizarre spirit with which artistic experience investigates day-to-day life. The videos focus on a female research and place the various fields of investigation in direct contrast to one another. The purpose of the initiative is to stress – at times using irony, at times realism – the collective consciousness on themes such as female identity, the body as repository of representation and meaning, and personal experiences on universal dimensions, even when the very intimacy of the artists is at the forefront of their works.

SHE DEVIL was initiated in 2006 thanks to an idea of Stefania Miscetti, and involves artists and curators, both Italian and international, from emerging young talents to highly acclaimed personalities. The various works and different critical perspectives coexist within a discourse of many voices, in which the multiplicity of feminine worlds and visions emerges.

After the first two editions, in 2006 and in 2007, respectively with four and six curators (and the same number of artists), since 2009, with the third edition, Stefania Miscetti has decided to get more curators involved. The success of the initiative was confirmed that year by a special international edition held at the MNAC, National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, Romania. In 2010, after the fourth edition of the project, SHE DEVIL was selected for the show *The Madness of Art* at the Ravello Festival. The fifth edition of the project took place in the summer of 2011 at MACRO, Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome. In 2014 the sixth edition received extensive media coverage. In 2015, the seventh edition was organised in Rome, as well as the SHE DEVIL ON TOUR at Palazzo Primavera, in Terni (Italy), and at the Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast (UK). The eighth edition and SHE DEVIL. *Leipziger Edition: Home*, at the Galerie KUB were held in 2016. In 2017, SHE DEVIL landed in Lithuania, at the National Gallery of Art, in Vilnius and the ninth edition took place at the Studio. In 2018, the tenth edition was held at the gallery and two great selections were presented in Italy, the first one at the National Institute of Graphics, Rome, and the second one, SHE DEVIL Remix, at the Center for Contemporary Art Luigi Pecci, Prato. In 2019, the eleventh edition, SHE DEVIL. *We Will Survive*, took place at the gallery.

PREFACE

Stefania Miscetti

In my 30 years of gallerist experience I have never made distinctions based on gender; and however unintentional it may have been, I have alternated between a roughly equal number of artists of both sexes.

Yet there are some subjects which have a more profound connection to the poetics of female artists. One of the most significant concerns the examination of our most intimate casing: the body. It's a body that has been glorified, used and exhibited to such an extent that it wants to break through and destroy the limits imposed on it – limits which women themselves have perhaps unconsciously accepted.

The first contact I had with art was through Maria Lai, an artist who showed me that the only boundary to the field was rigor: discipline, the rhythmic exercise of continuous making and the search for concentrated thought through isolation, albeit one that aimed for fruitful dialogue with the work and ideas of others. Her attitude founded on joint participation and sharing has always led me to seek out points of view that were different and yet could speak to one another. It proved to be a fundamental lesson during the birth of SHE DEVIL.

Pursuing my own personal explorations into an area of research I like to term – perhaps simplistically – a ritualistic and spiritual expression of the body, I presented the first solo exhibitions of the work of Nancy Spero, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic, ORLAN and VALIE EXPORT in Rome. They are artists whom I consider, despite all the significant differences in their individual poetics, pioneers in the use of their own body – or the female body generally – as a genuine tool with which to transform profound, individual experience into a shared heritage. In the work of a more recent, younger generation of artists, the body is almost absent; it is only alluded to, or mourned.

It's therefore worth asking ourselves where we are headed, and the role of the artist today in a world where, thanks to biotechnology, even the body seems to have no limits: our identities are more fluid; the gender binary is less and less clear-cut. Young female artists are faced with an important task; the time when space was reclaimed and roles were redefined is behind them, and they enter a field apparently free from preconceptions, where the right to belong to the art world is taken for granted.

But it is precisely this artistic terrain – which in idealistic terms claims to be totally free – that we find ourselves constantly faced with pitfalls and perils. As Nancy Spero reminds us: "There are multiple instances of self-censorship, implicit rules to the game, and near-invisible but nonetheless very tangible boundaries as to how much is acceptable at any given time. While they're not imposed by the State, as in repressive regimes, they are imposed by the climate of the art world, however varied it may be. That's when you get moments of rupture. Art is always the last bastion of individual freedom of expression."

Starting from this notion of freedom, the idea of reading the 'stuff' of the world from a female perspective began to take shape in 2006, with video as the medium. For me, video is the closest thing to intimate, personal writing; it's almost a diary (Sylvia Plath comes to mind), even when it reflects on socially or politically pertinent topics, or reworks ancient myths.

The project of SHE DEVIL has allowed me (and still allows me) to have consistent contact with curators. There have been moments when even the

notion of the female perspective was called into question, and I was seen as the 'old guard' that always felt the need to stress the female element – I still do make a claim for it, but do so in order to be inclusive, rather than the reverse. Over the years the artists' curators, whether young or old, have realized that this continual, dogged reference is not about clinging on to some old trend – it wasn't willful self-isolation, but the need to reaffirm things which, though deemed to have been achieved, have to be continually put into practice so as not to be forgotten. That's what young artists are doing: they're looking for a process that can find ways of using history as a means of moving forward, in order to identify other points of view that take into account everything that has already happened. In this early part of our century, art has truly reached all four corners of the globe: there are huge numbers of fairs, biennials and artists from other worlds – China, South America, Africa, India – who can relate to the language of contemporary art as it has been codified by a prevailing Western culture over the last 100 years. They are the new actors who can both use this language and yet remain connected to their roots.

One day we will be able to tell the story of contemporary culture: just as air travel (as opposed to over land or sea) gave us a different sense of the world, so the globalized era is changing perceptions of past and present in artists' approaches to their work.

The most urgent thing now is to redefine our own identity amid all these cultures being compared for the first time. We must tap into a deep – and no doubt archaic – root, one whose origin lies in the source and belonging of all female artists: motherhood, the relationship to nature and how we relate to one another. The comparison of distinct, apparently irreconcilable points of view only makes sense if it contributes to the adoption of a 'governing' responsibility, without fear of revisiting errors that are unfortunately all too plain for women to see.

To avoid falling into the trap of denying difference – as fatal as it is paradoxical – in this age of political correctness and unfashionable feminism I like to quote Yoko Ono, who offered the following provocation in a recent interview: "I'd like to remind you of something I said once in the 1970s: – I don't want to be equal to men, because men are inferior – and I don't want equality with men today either: I want to keep being a woman."

Finally, whatever gender one identifies as, whether fluid or not, it's important to maintain a vision with which the artist can investigate and move through the world – one that's ironic, transgressive, provocative, playful and offbeat... In a word: 'female.'

The visions I have been privileged enough to host over the years, and the results of the work of the curators (male and female) and artists that have taken part in SHE DEVIL are brought together in this book; it would have been impossible without your fundamental collaboration, that has been attentive, energetic, keen, exciting, engaging, dynamic... I can think of no other words than a most sincere thank you!

GRIMANESA AMORÓS

Preoccupation

2008, single-channel video, 1'12"
courtesy of the artist
curated by Manuela Pacella



The pupil, known as "little doll" in Latin, works like a pinhole camera which, calibrating light, reflects a miniature of the image in front of it and projects that picture in the inner of the ocular bulb, on the retina, which in turn sends it back to the brain for elaboration, decoding and comparing it with our visual and cognitive experience. In the video *Preoccupation* the reflected image on the enlarged pupil is highly iconic; its symbolic strength prevents from dissuading the gaze, not caring if masculine or feminine. That shape is by now listed in the general imaginary as a signal of erotic subjugation.

Pupilla, bambolina (questo il suo significato in latino), quel foro stenopeico che calibra la luce, che riflette in miniatura l'immagine che ha di fronte e la proietta all'interno del bulbo oculare, sulla retina che a sua volta la invia al cervello per elaborarla, decodificarla e confrontarla col nostro vissuto visivo e conoscitivo. In *Preoccupation* l'immagine riflessa sulla pupilla ingrandita è altamente iconica e la sua carica simbolica impedisce di distogliere lo sguardo, non importa se maschile o femminile; quella sagoma è ormai catalogata nell'immaginario collettivo come segnale di sottomissione erotica.

Many thanks are given to the artists, the curatorial team and all those who collaborated on the project for their precious contribution.

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Questo volume racconta le undici edizioni di SHE DEVIL, rassegna video al femminile ideata e promossa dallo STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI. SHE DEVIL nasce nel 2006 da un'idea di Stefania Miscetti, coinvolgendo artiste e curatrici sia italiane sia internazionali, dalle più giovani alle più affermate.

Le varie opere e le differenti prospettive critiche convivono all'interno di un discorso a più voci, in cui emergono le molteplicità dei mondi e delle visioni femminili.

Nome di un'eroina della Marvel e titolo del famoso film del 1989 di Susan Seidelman, SHE DEVIL allude in modo giocoso allo spirito diabolico e bizzarro con cui l'esperienza artistica indaga e attraversa il quotidiano. I video si focalizzano su una ricerca al femminile e mettono a diretto confronto i diversi percorsi di indagine. Scopo dell'iniziativa è di sollecitare, a volte con ironia, a volte con realismo, la coscienza collettiva su temi come l'identità femminile, il corpo come luogo di rappresentazione e significato, l'esperienza personale che assurge a dimensione universale anche quando è l'intimità delle artiste a essere portata in primo piano.

This book recounts the eleven editions of SHE DEVIL, female video exhibition created and promoted by STUDIO STEFANIA MISCETTI. SHE DEVIL was initiated in 2006 thanks to an idea of Stefania Miscetti, and involves artists and curators, both Italian and international, from emerging young talents to highly acclaimed personalities. The various works and different critical perspectives coexist within a discourse of many voices, in which the multiplicity of feminine worlds and visions emerges.

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