

Massiel Leza
Portfolio selected works
2019-2021

SELF-PORTRAIT OF AN ANDROGYNOUS WOMAN

Self-portrait

Watercolour on Fabriano 200g paper

210x110 cm; 2020

My self-portraits born as a response to the need I have to represent all the people - male or female - that I find in me through the «mental transit», that is to say the person - male or female - that I'm every day, a different person each time. My paintings are works that I do in a single day, the smearing in this case means that the features are not defined and the faces do not represent a specific gender.

The white background is reminiscent of the passport photo in documents, the frontal aspect of the face has always been used for identification. My portraits therefore seek, in the ephemeral, to represent an identity that lives in me, but which tries to live in constant movement between one gender and another, thus creating a break with the socially imposed binary idea of identity.





The genre of the portrait and the portrait of the genre

Perhaps there is a precise point at which the image of a human face, subjected to a progressive evanescence, loses its individual characters to become the common basis of any face.

Well before arriving at this physiognomic crossroads, following this hypothetical experiment, one would have to encounter other bifurcations of identity, concerning age, skin colour, sex and various other categories within which the human race is usually described.

Portraiture is one of the oldest genres that art has spawned, but it can be argued that the funerary portrait tradition developed in ancient Rome and the centuries of its empire laid the foundations for the artistic interpretation of an individual, depicted through characters that distinguish him or her from any other person. Not even Greece and not even the sculptors of Hellenism had achieved this, because of an idea of beauty that led every face towards what we call idealisation.

That Greek principle of correction was, after all, an ancient and successful attempt to

reduce identities and differences to a kind of common root through a highly sought-after canon of Beauty.

There are faces of ephēbes in some sculptures, from the 4th and 5th centuries BC, that remain perfectly suspended between male and female, telling us of a youth that united the genders at a crossroads in the springtime of human existence.

Massiel Leza's recent works attempt in their own way to investigate the borderline between feminine and masculine, acting precisely on the terrain of the evanescence of a face. Using the watercolour technique, which is by no means simple, they subject individual characters to a washout that dilutes and smudges them, like a lipstick that comes out of the edges of the mouth to invade the cheeks.

The reduced definition, however, is not only a subtractive act, but adds a sense of movement that in some cases becomes a real breath of the image.

It can also be said that this loss creates a new identity, placing it in the terrain of interpretation, of a voluntary transfiguration that seeks to go beyond that agreed limit.

Massimo Pulini.



Watercolour on Fabriano 300gr paper 21x29,7. Installation view Festival Gender Bender N° 17, Cassero Bologna 2019.



Three self-portraits 220x110cm, 54 self-portraits 21x29.7. Installation view Nuovo Forno de Pane, MAMbo Bologna 2020. the series counts more than 100 paintings.

ID Memento

«Choice is composition.» Italo Zuffi.

Protagonist of our times in the field of cyber security and marketing profiling, face detection is a biometric identification and recognition technique, which proceeds by comparing the human face to a pattern, describing and identifying it according to several nodal visual points.

The success of the current biometrics industry lies in its promise to quickly measure an objective, truthful and fundamental identity from the surface of a human body: an algorithmic system «maps» a face using 2D and 3D biometric techniques, digitally sees, describes and recognises a face from elements that can be associated with physiognomic characteristics. The face has always been the lintel for defining the individual. But how much does a multimedia representation say about us today? How do contemporary technologies influence the representation of the self, the portrait - figurative and narrative - that each person presents to their community of reference?

Massiel Leza develops a research on the theme of identity and portraits in the times of the Internet; her works are the final result of a very personal creative process, carried out from a visual and relational investigation, through what she herself calls «mental transit» of the information acquired.

Choosing a personal and positive use of the most common digital tools, following a hybrid method between intuitive spontaneity and algorithmic-like process, Leza randomly selects candidates on the Internet to portray: first based exclusively on the information posted on their social profiles - following like a detective the metanarrative flow of data, images, links, places, songs, memories; then she enters into a virtual relationship with the subjects to subject them to a close interview, borrowed from the classic online registration forms and seasoned with personal notes and curiosities. Each stage of this slow exploration is marked with a low digital portrait, this time handmade on a graphic tablet, each time with an evanescent, hazy aesthetic restitution like the appearance of a distant memory.

Inspired both by the age-old tradition of traditional portraiture and by the cross-media poetics of artists such as Mario Klingermann and Zach Blass, the finalisation of Leza's artistic research involves collaboration with artists LOREM and Kamilia Kard, for the declination of the method and portraits also as video morphing and Instagram filters.

Federica Patti

Video ID Memento duration: 25.51 min in Loop. Self-portrait Digital watercolour, handmade paper print 140x110cm; 2021.





DIGITAL SELF-PORTRAIT OF A ANDROGYNOUS

Self-portrait

Digital watercolour, print on uncoated paper

210x110 cm; 2020

The image we have of ourselves is an accumulation of socio-cultural creations, but above all of desires to be or look like someone else. My self-portraits speak of all the people within me who create an identity, which is always varying and in constant movement. I speak of gender identity but also of political identity, through what I call «mental transit».

Transit appears as a response to the concern of defining the passage of models and imagery from one sex to another, in the oscillation of sexual identity, which has led me to discover the presence of different sexual identities in my body and in my mind at the same time, understood as the same individual oscillating between a wide margin marked by two opposite poles, which generate infinite possibilities between them: I call this mental transit, these portraits represent different Massiels with many faces, those that I constantly change according to my desires.

In my digital paintings, in order to bring out the character, the nuances, the expressions, in other words the singularity of each work, I approach a deliberately erroneous use of software in my digital painting practice: in fact, I do not make the paintings in layers, but mix everything in a single layer to recreate sketches and imperfections similar to those of the analogue technique.

I practically force myself to paint incorrectly here, as I usually do: on paper I do not follow the rule that teaches you to let the surfaces dry before adding details, but I take advantage of the humidity to add and smudge all the features of the faces; digitally then I do not use the layers usually provided by painting software to separate the layers, I intervene instead on a single environment - a choice that makes the creation process unique, less controllable and longer than expected. I am also interested here in the transitory nature of the work itself, which finds multiple forms of exposure and sharing through both analogue and digital and social media.





RELICARIO DE BESOS

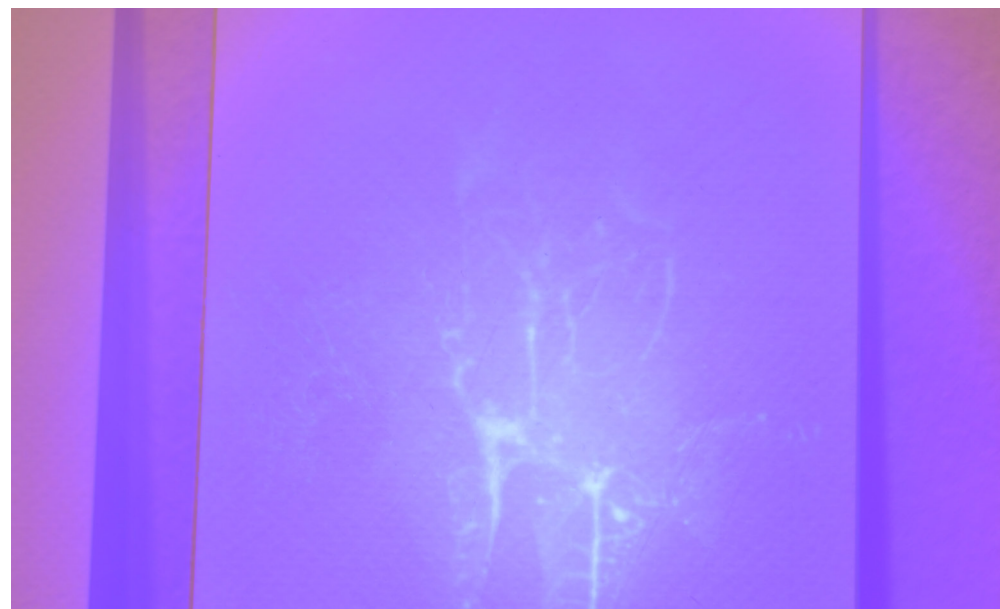
Relicario de besos, body fluids on watercolour paper 10.5x14.8 cm - 320 postcards approx, collection in progress since 2019.

It was born as a collection of intimate archives, i.e. every time my partner and I have sexual intercourse I take impressions of our genitals, which - being wet - leave an almost landscape-like drawing. This collection is done by me on postcards, on the back of which I write the date of the intercourse and I sign it, as one would do in a travel postcard that tells of the experiences lived in a place. In this way the landscape first appears, and then becomes transparent - reaching an invisibility that takes shape with time, like body fluids - and later again, with further passing of time, becomes a little yellow, appearing again. The other method of visibility that I use to make landscapes visible is that of ultraviolet light, which makes body fluids visible.

I'm interested in thinking about the idea of an invisible landscape.

This is a calendar-like story, the purpose of which is to create a map of Bologna, since the postcards are only collected in this city. The postcards will be installed on transparent panels that allow a glimpse of their two sides, thus creating, on the one hand, a map made up of the postcards, which will intertwine with each other, creating a Bologna that appears only through ultraviolet light and becomes invisible without it, and on the other hand, the temporary story of the collection.





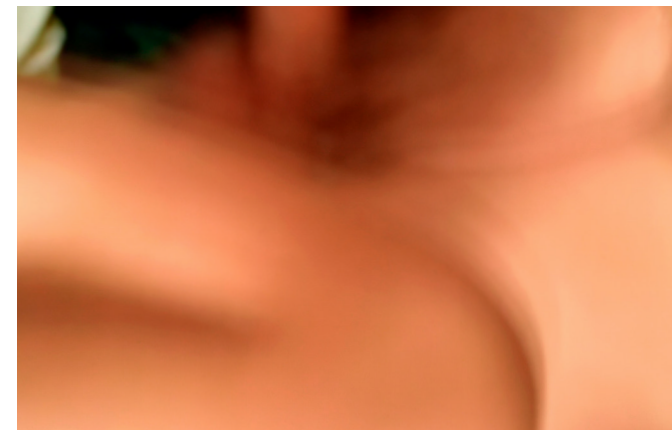
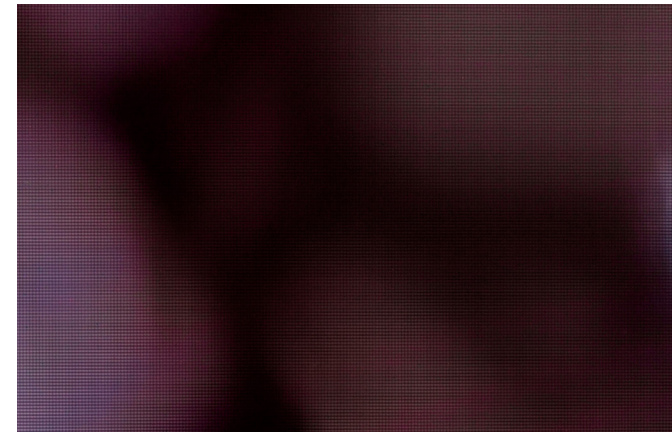
Bodily fluids on watercolour paper 10.5x14.8 cm - detail of the work
Image of fluids subjected to a source of ultraviolet light .

Eros (o)

Digital photography, print 140x110cm, 2020

I try to highlight the work of erosion that I carry out starting from pornographic videos, where - through long-exposure photography - I dig into the surface of the image, scratching away any belonging to its universe to leave only a trace, a sort of epidermal essence, made up of textures and colours, which does not betray the original eroticism but reinvents it, reinterprets it through a process of abstraction.

Above all, I am interested in denaturalising pornography, presenting it in an almost abstract way, reducing it to colour and turning it into painting through long-exposure photography. The print is reminiscent of the typical snapshots that served as souvenirs and that were always on display, as opposed to photographs that represent the sexual act, which is socially seen as something to be kept hidden.





Digital photography, handmade paper print 140x110cm, 2020



Digital photography, handmade paper print 140x110cm, 2020



TRANS, ME? SI! ONE

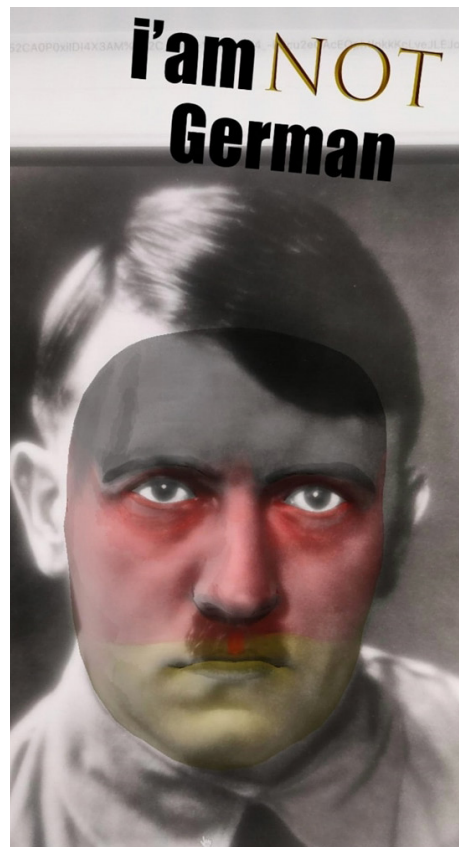
Instagram filters on profile @massielleza, watercolour masks and national flags, exhibition Transmission, Bologna, 2020.

Sua cuique persona, to each their own mask: thus declares a motto on a 15th century coperta, a wood panel decorated with oil painting that was used to cover and protect portraits from the weather. Those who wear a mask want to hide their identity while assuming another one or, as in the case of the coperta, they want to protect themselves from the outside world. Massiel Leza's artwork reflects on this very concept: with her Instagram page Trans.me? Si! one, she invites visitors to wear a mask, a filter to be precise, and to become someone else.

A simple and ephemeral game that becomes part of the artwork itself. Whoever decides to take part in this "game" will capture a selfie, which will then be published: so, starting as an active actor, each participant will become the object of contemplation of the next visitor. But a more profound reflection lies behind this little digital Carnival: the first element of this reflection is related to the use of Social Media. As much as one can propose a theme, a reflection that desecrates the system of social media, this system tends in any case to flatten everything down and to make everything superficial: the ephemeral becomes everything. It is for this reason that the artist uses Instagram filters as an expression of this transition of identities.

The filters present national and fictional identities that the visitors wear and then throw away. Technology put the ephemeral at the center of all our digital activity. This implies that the artwork is not understood in its totality, but it is seen as a little divertissement that must be consumed quickly. Massiel's work underlines how this tendency to transformation, to the transition and change of our faces, identities and values fits perfectly in a digital system such as that of social media, places where nothing matters, nothing stays but everything changes and transforms at the same time

Emma Puliti





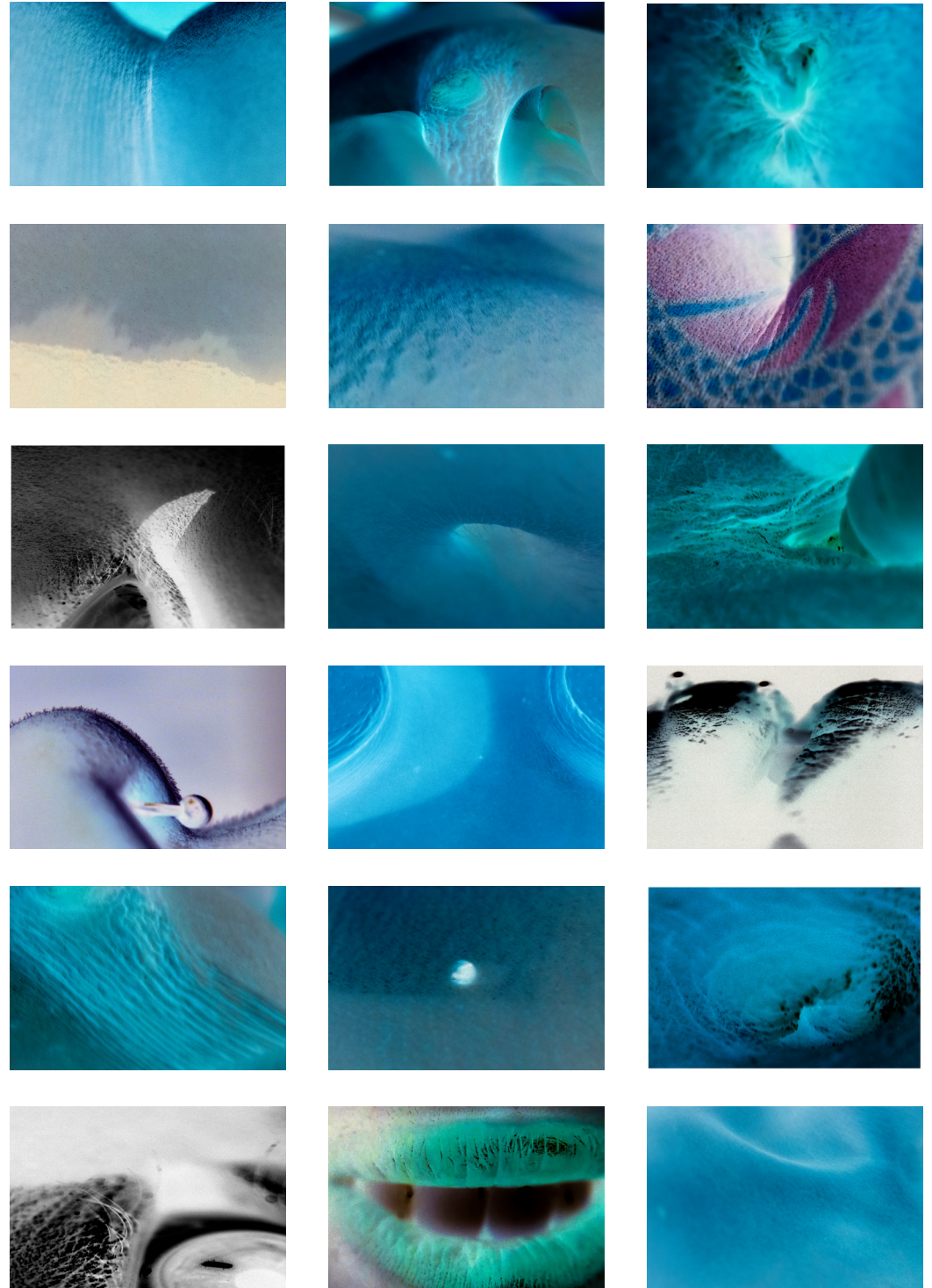
Instagram filters on profile @massielleza, national flags, 2020.

FALSE POSITIVES

Macro Digital photography, print 30x25cm, 2019

The False Positives Scandal is the name given to the scandal that emerged in the late of 2008, involving members of the Colombian National Army who were held responsible for the murder of innocent civilians who were labeled as guerrillas killed in combat, as part of the armed conflict. Subsequent investigations revealed that these killings were aimed at enhancing the repressive achievements of the Army in order to gain benefits and recognition. It was not until the end of 2008 that it was discovered that the bodies of the 19 young men who disappeared in Soacha, on the outskirts of Bogotá, had been catalogued as guerrillas killed in combat by the Army of another Department of Colombia.

An image is always recognised for what it represents. Through these macro photographs I try to make an abstraction of the body surface, achieving a visual decomposition, then obtaining a small photograph by approaching the epidermis, which is then visualised as a landscape, making it impossible to recognise certain parts of the body and allowing the spectator to create her/his own image on top of the revealed photograph. These images are about NN bodies, characterised by a very cold colour, «postmortem», which I present on the ground as the corpses of the murdered boys. The title «falsos positivos» is juxtaposed to the fact that the photographs are real negatives, but digital and in colour.





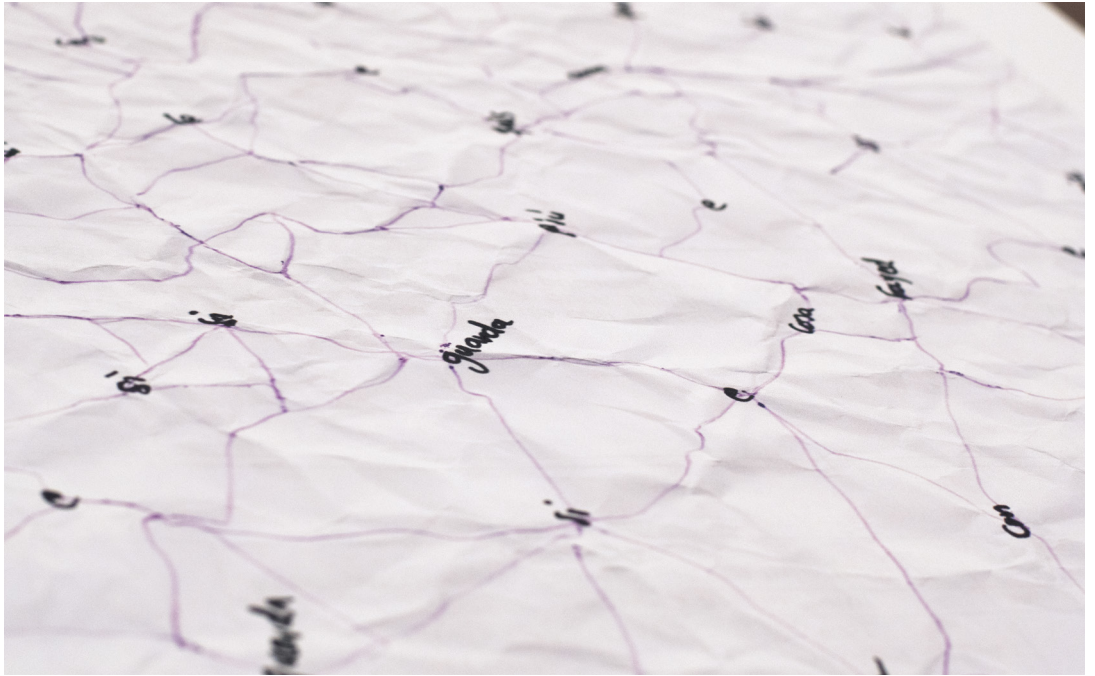
THREE MINUTES OF EMPTINESS

Sound and visual installation - digital photo - maps on uncoated paper
200 x100 cm; 2020

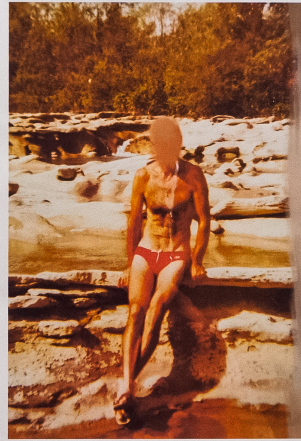
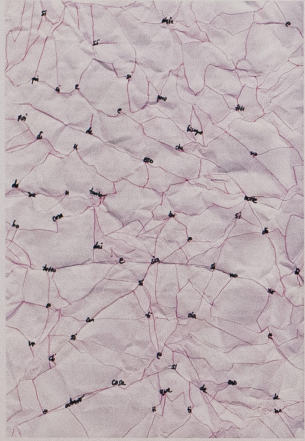
I met a woman who suffers from Alzheimer's. She cannot make herself understood and has forgotten almost everything. Her lack of memory made me immediately think of the light and shadows found in memories; what we cannot see and what is so clear that it shows easily. For the creation of the work, I recorded her voice for three minutes, during which time I managed to get her to speak without interruption, and I was careful about her habits, which included taking her handkerchiefs and crease them so that they could be ironed or folded properly.

Returning to the memory and knowing that it needs to be full for a later emptying, I thought of 'granny's' head which is now partially empty, with no apparent light, I photographed her old pictures and then removed the faces, as she does not remember anyone; then I crumpled up the paper and afterwards I tried to draw the folds that formed, as if it were a map of her thoughts; then I transferred the audio into nonsense words, spoken by her, so the image is her writing with real and disordered words, with real but unrecognisable images: they are Bruna's emptiness.

In this work I try to analyse the idea of one's own image, which is told through what we do and how we pose in public. In this sense, old photographs become a treasure that helps to preserve the memory of what one has been, a means of proving one's identity. The erasure of the face not only signifies the loss of memory, but also reminds us that the structure of the face is used to identify and classify us through the political structure of social identification.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B05w1jb4jw>



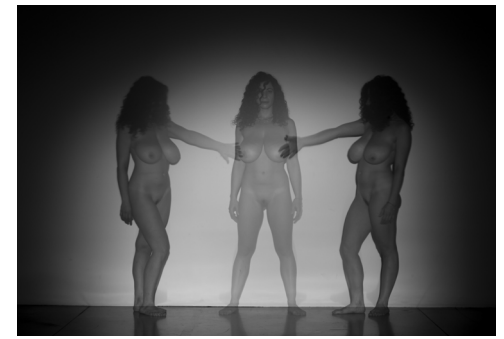
LE TRE GRAZIE

Long exposure digital photography,
2021

Through her series The Three Graces, Massiel intends to make visible the beauty that is everywhere and in everyone, the real beauty that is present in everyday life, a timeless beauty that is therefore always current. The artist - in open contrast with the aesthetic canons which, in the history of art, have determined the choice of exclusively female figures as ideal for the representation of this subject - has chosen young, adult and elderly models, women, men and identities in transit for her shots and has stripped them of any possible reference to the period and historical context in which they were taken, portraying their naked bodies. The twelve photographs in the series are in natural continuity and development with respect to the artist's broader research, which, through different media and techniques, uses the body as a material to develop the theme of identity, both social and gender, and movement as an expedient to evoke the idea of transit.

Maria Chiara Wang





Photographic series of 12 long-exposure digital shots, 2021.

STATEMENT

Massiel's work is the final result of a creative and very personal process, based on self-knowledge, on a search that is both artistic and identity-based, on what she herself calls mental transit, i.e. the idealisation of the many people she finds within herself. In her work, she analyses the barrier of the body, which is broken down by the ability of different techniques to deal with themes such as social and gender identity through transit or movement.

Massiel Leza (Madrid 1990) grew up surrounded by magic realism in Colombia. After a degree in Law, she graduated in Photography, Painting and Visual Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas in Bogotá-Colombia, then she studied at DAMS - degree course in Disciplines of Arts, Music and Performance Art of the University of Bologna - through the Erasmus programme. She's currently attending the Two-year Specialisation Course in Visual Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna and also - thanks to another Erasmus programme - the Master of Gender Studies at the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

Her first exhibition in Italy - »*Autoritratto di una Androgina*«, curated by Carmen Lorenzetti, with critical text by Massimo Pulini - took place in 2019 on the occasion of Gender Bender No.17 festival. Later on her paintings and photographs have been exhibited in group exhibitions, among the most important: *L'Europa Min(i)ata in Civico 32* - Sbadiglio - Bologna/Italy (2019), *Talenti di genere* at the Ecomuseo Urbano Mare Memoria Viva, Palermo/Italy (2019), ArtCity 2020 - *INdipendenze* - Bologna/Italy (2020), *AMAC Transmission*-Exhibition, curated by Emma Puliti (2020). During the 2020 lockdown she participated in several virtual exhibitions, including *La Collezione* mtn* | museo temporaneo navile, project mtn collection, *Geografia Domestica* by Domestic Incident, and *ZirArtMag*- Eros(o) «smart» version by M.T.A shows (2020). In the last period she has been working in the installations of MAMbo Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Bologna, as 13° Artist in the Nuovo Forno del Pane. The latest exhibition in which she participated is: L'emozione femminile nelle arti, Poetiche, tecniche e materiali in contemporary research in Emilia Romagna, curated by Sandro Malossini in the Legislative Assembly of the Emilia Romagna Region, (March 2021). She's currently working on several projects that will be released in mid2021-, including a collaboration with several Italian poets to create a book that will dialogue with and through some of her drawings.

CONTACT

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Bologna Italy | Bogotá Colombia

MASSIEL LEZA

born in Madrid Spain, 1990
grew up in Bogotá Colombia

EDUCATION

-Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain, Erasmus project 01/02/2021- 30/06/2021.
-Accademia di Belle Arti di Bologna, II Level in Painting and Visual Arts 2019- enrolled.
-Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna DAMS One-year Erasmus programme (2017)
-University District Francisco Jose de Caldas Plastic and Visual Arts
-Università Militar "Nueva Granada" Jurisprudence

AWARDS

Young Art Award 3rd prize Confindustria Emilia Area Centro, 25 May 2021.

MAMbo Bologna- Nuovo forno del pane 13th space, **Fondazione Zucchelli**. project id: me- mento, curator: Federica Patti, artistic residence 01/09/2020 - 14/02/2021.

Lo spazio vissuto - Cambi di prospettiva per il decennio che verrà Italian Institute of Culture Tirana - Albania. 20/10/2020.

Art and Act - Prize Marie Marzloff Edition 2019 "Talents of gender" at the Urban Ecomuseum Mare Memoria Viva, Palermo, with the work "Self-portrait of a mental transit". 18 December -18 January 2019.

PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS

Festival GenderBender - Diario de una andrógina curated by Carmen Lorenzetti, commentary by Massimo Pulini, Cassero LGBT Center- Bologna, 23 October - 03 November 2019.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

L'emozione femminile nelle arti curated by Sandro Malossini. Legislative Assembly Emilia Romagna Region. 27 July - 06 September 2021.

noMAD, 29 June 2021, at Instabile culture in movimento, Florence.

L'emozione femminile nelle arti, Poetiche, tecniche e materiali nelle ricerche contemporanee in Emilia Romagna, curated by Sandro Malossini. Legislative Assembly Emilia Romagna Region. 02 March -03 March 2021.

Pandemica, Casa delle donne Terni, Racconto corale per immagini (Choral story through images), a collective female photography project, curated by Elena Chiochia and Sara Casna. 20 November 2020.

AMAC Exhibition-Transmission, curated by Emma Puliti, 5 November - 20 November 2020.

ArtCity 2020 - INdependencies - Bologna-Italy, 24 - 26 January 2020

Art and Act - Premio Marie Marzloff Edizione 2019 "Talenti di genere" at the Ecomuseo Urbano Mare Memoria Viva, Palermo, with the work "Autoritratto di un transito mentale". , 18 December -18 January 2019.

L'Europa Min(i)ata Civico 32 - Sbadiglio - Bologna-Italy, 08-27 November 2019

Colonial, No tan Colonial, Decolonial, Aduanilla de Paiba, Bogotá-Colombia 30 October- 27 November 2019.

Cento Linguaggi per L'educazione, Rho Milano, Sono due ad imparare, 05 October 2019.

Antefestival, Novellara-Italy, -Escala de Grises - 6,7,8 September 2019.

Workshop of photographic and contemporary art Dada Boom, Viareggio-Tuscany, Intima Relazione, 30,31 March 2019.

VIRTUAL EXHIBITIONS

-Collection* mtn I temporary museum navile, mtn collection project, march, april 2020.

-Domestic Geography- by Incidente Domestico, february june 2020.

-ZirArtMag- Eros(o) "smart" version of M.T.A fixed exhibition 2020.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INTERVIEWS

NEU RADIO Artist Frequencies - Massiel Leza + Maria Grazia Vincitorio, 20 February 2021.

ZIRART Zirartmag - Massiel Leza I Interview with the artist of the 13th Space of the Nuovo Forno del Pane, 12 December 2020.

Patto per la lettura Bologna - #LETTURESULTAVOLO I MASSIEL LEZA, 09 December 2020.

Breaking bread NEU RADIO Interneu w/ Massiel Leza, 19 November 2020.

Radio città fujiko - Coxo Spaziale #333: Home Massiel Leza w/ Stefano W. Pasquini, 26 October 2020.

Beauty has no Gender Magazine DAS Design-Arte-Society edited by Alessia Pendini and Melita Antony , Experimental Magazine, Rimini, 2020

Generi d'incontro - incontro con l'artista Massiel Leza Dialogano con lei Carmen Lorenzetti e Umberto Casas, a cura di Centro di Documentazione Flavia Madaschi , Gender Bender, Bologna, 2019. <https://genderbender.it/events/generi-dincontro-incontro-con-lartista-massiel-leza/>

Thesis Omega Subjectivity. Sara Pagliero, Issues of presence, representation and self-representation of non-binary people within the Bologna LGBTQ+ context, 2018-2019, Ca'Foscari University Venice.

The Confraternita Collection, Original Writing from fourteen countries in nine languages, Edited by Matt Appleby, "Gloria", La Confraternita Dell'uva, 2017.

WORKSHOP

Instruments and Skills for Artistic Practice, workshop with Lorenzo Balbi, from 23 April 2021 to 15 June 2021.

Instruments for Inquiring into the Wind and the Shaking Hearth
workshop with Andrea Galvani, curated by Carmen Lorenzetti, Ababo, 2019

"Art is cynical by essence" Attitude in practice Anselm Kiefer
Cristina Principale - Prof. S.Pellegrini, Ababo, 22 May 2020

Impression Nature
Lucia Baldini - Prof. M.Pulini, Ababo, 25 May 2020

Attention Monument.
Anna - Gianni Moretti, artist, in dialogue with Luigi Ficacci, Art Historian and Massimo Giovanardi, owner Giovanardi s.p.a. - Prof. P.Vannini, Ababo, 26 May 2020

The discovery of oil painting on canvas. "Stories of painters and dyers".
Prof. Eleonora Frattarolo - Ababo, 27 May 2020

Zara Audiello
Prof. I.Spinelli, Ababo, 28 May 2020

Art in a box - Scatola ad Arte
Conference-workshop by Franco Antolini, with the collaboration Prof. N.Bonini, Ababo, 30 May 2020

LANGUAGES

. Spanish: Mother tongue
- Italian: Advanced level
- English: Intermediate level