

Ramaya Tegegne

I is we, we is them, them is us, us is I, I is you and you is I

Date

13.09.2019
26.10.2019

Location

Milano

Istituto Svizzero

Information

Opening reception
12.09.2019
H18:30

Category

Solo exhibition, Art

Questioning authorship for Ramaya Tegegne is a way to reveal the mechanisms of a dominant model within the art world. This central notion in the creative field, which potentially transforms all of us in speculative individuals, serves as a starting point to question our place and role in this world. Our perception is generally considered as dependent on stories that are different for each individual, at the crossroads of many others: the ones we have been taught, the ones we share in our community, our family, as well as through our intimate and individual experiences. Also, most of the stories are often built on the margins of established discourses, where discussions and information sharing are not regulated: conversations, disseminations, social networks, gossips, etc. This is where the works by Ramaya Tegegne act, by taking our convictions in reverse, and revealing some of the hidden aspects of our perception.

The artist takes into consideration some well-known artists of the last decades, insinuating doubt into certain dominant narratives, forcing us to look differently at or adjust our focus on existing works. As the discourses surrounding them are never unequivocal, they are used as conscious or unconscious vehicles to denounce a certain ideology. Ramaya works on intersectionality, rethinking some of these models that force us to share this knowledge in a critical and collective way, based on feminist activist theories; like the iconic Nefertiti's portrait, projection medium par excellence, beauty icon that embodies the feminine power in its most superficial representation and which is still today the subject of all fantasies.

Often portrayed as a white woman by Hollywood, it turned out that she was actually black—this issue is an ongoing debate in the intellectual community. Nefertiti is considered as a symbol of pride by the Afro-descendant communities. This sculpture—currently exhibited at the Neues Museum, Berlin—raises, moreover, the central question of cultural spoliation in favour of colonisation and imperialism, object of raging discussion between Germany and Egypt. The latter, since several years, has been demanding its restitution to the Cairo Egyptian Museum. By bringing together the works of German artist Isa Genzken, “Nofretete” series (2012-18), and American artist Fred Wilson, *Grey Area (Brown version)* (1993), Ramaya readjusts the place of this iconic sculpture in our contemporaneity between cultural appropriation, economic politics of the institution and black feminist interests. This work calls the governing discourse of art history to make itself accountable for the history of race and to rethink the foundational structures of how modern and contemporary art has been constructed.

The work *The Dinner Party* is an example of the paradox of authorship. In representing a universal feminist history, Judy Chicago forgets to take into consideration patriarchal and dominant history patterns, the same ones that excluded most women. This masterpiece, exhibited permanently at the Brooklyn Museum in New York since 2002, is the result of a collective realization of 400 volunteer women whose work has never been recognised at its fair value. By trying to give women their rightful place in the historical narrative, Judy Chicago reproduces some schemes that seem to denounce unpaid work, exploitation, authorship and, last but not least, omission. Out of the thirty-nine great women guests of *The Dinner Party*, only two of them were women of colour, the ones most affected by these practices. By re-enacting *The Dinner Party*, Ramaya restores value to the artist's intention—to gather around the table a number of black women and women of colour with whom she would like to share this dinner—replacing it in her individual story.

Ramaya examines the universal story of women bodies in the publication *Our Bodies Ourselves*. First published by American feminists in the late sixties, this independent bestseller and well-illustrated book contains information related to many aspects of women's health, sexuality and agency, including sexual orientation, gender identity, birth control, abortion, pregnancy and childbirth, violence and abuse, menopause, reproductive rights, lesbian sexuality, and sexual independence. The artist is interested in the collective effort that led to the making of this book “for women, by women”, while also stressing that such imagery is not part of our collective education, and that women-centred representation in the art is rare. By dissecting and exhibiting this book, Ramaya immerses us in the core story of our intimacy as woman-identified bodies.

This reversal of perceptions is directly linked to a central concern of Ramaya's practice, the sharing of knowledge, as slogans, quotations and texts, through dissemination of editions and printed matter, stickers or booklets. The focus is not only on where this knowledge comes from, but also on how it echoes in our lives, as different human beings—women, men, children, older or younger person, black person, trans person, lesbian, etc.—thus questioning the power of artistic institutions and inclusiveness as a cultural vector of diffusion. In this context, the publication is often a way to escape the limited time and space of the exhibition framework, and the exhibition a pretext to focus on current research of a much wider multidisciplinary practice.

Tiphane Blanc