



Bullet, video 4.39 min. , 2010

TAUS MAKHACHEVA

Affirmative Action (mimesis)

curated by *Marco Scotini*

Opening on March 31st 2011, at 18.30
with a performance by the artist

The exhibition will run until May 7th, 2011

Opening times:
Tuesday - Saturday, 15.00 - 19.00
Mornings by appointment

Laura Bulian Gallery is pleased to announce the exhibition **Affirmative Action** (*mimesis*), the first solo exhibition in Italy by the Dagestani artist Taus Makhacheva (1983). The exhibition, which will open on Thursday 31 March, is part of the Gallery's series of exhibitions devoted to emerging artists from Central Asia. A broad selection of works covers the artist's output since 2006.

In her urban actions and video performances, Taus Makhacheva transforms urgent political issues in problems of representation, in elementary yet radical symbolic systems. Racial and gender minorities, inter-ethnic relations, the differentials of social dominance and conflict are condensed in semiotic processes, through performances where the artist is temporarily immersed in varyingly different costumes and contexts. This is a sort of anthropological theatre of camouflage, wherein the subject visualizes herself in some cases, whereas in others she is veiled or hides. This is brought about according to modes of cultural integration or processes of identity affirmation.

In a video from 2009, *RehIen*, we see a flock of sheep grazing on the Caucasus mountains and a strange anonymous being who, crawling and dressed in the traditional sheepskin coat, tries to approach the flock and blend in with it. Another strange being – both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic at the same time – appears in the video project *Karakul* (2007): we discover a female body hiding under a grey Astrakhan fur coat, a fabric usually used as a hat for men; her face and identity, however, remain hidden. The theatre of relations that this strange figure manages to establish with a horse links Taus Makhacheva's work to the rural and ritual culture of Dagestan, the primeval features of which are both natural and, at the same time, social. Another significant example is an Urban performance she enacted in Moscow in 2010, the artist roamed the streets dressed in the traditional costume and jewellery of the Avar Dagestani ethnic minority, of which she is a descendent. However, instead of being in the traditional red, the artist's costume was flesh-coloured, as though the costume were a sort of “second” skin recorded on her body.

Taus Makhecheva comes from one of the Russian Islamic republics with the greatest number of ethnic minorities, a region plagued by years of conflict, where clashes and violence are an everyday occurrence. She questions the processes of integration and discrimination which have failed to provide adequate answers under the political concept of Affirmative Action, used by governments all over the world as the approach to social justice. The symbols the artist engages in her performances reveal the fictitious nature of the forms with which we represent ourselves and with which we are represented. As such, it is unimportant whether the symbols used in camouflage are true or false, they are either a defence tactic or an ambush strategy.

A fundamental video from 2010 provides a perfect example of this artistic operation: a hand, the artist's, fires a shot into the sand at the city of Makhachkala, along the shores of the Caspian Sea. The shot leaves a large hole where the hand digs to find the bullet. The action may be fictitious, but it belongs to the common language used by the media to speak of the violence. In camouflage it is fundamental for symbols to be effective: it is of no importance whether they are true or false. What counts is the credibility of the simulacrum offered.

It is not by chance therefore, that the exhibition **Affirmative Action (mimesis)** appears like a completely fictional ethnographic museum.

Taus Makhacheva (1983) attended the Goldsmiths College, University of London from 2003 to 2007, and since 2008 lives and works in Moscow .

Selected exhibitions since 2006 :

2011 : Practice for everyday life - Young artists from Russia, Calvert 22 , London (UK)

2010 : Zones of Estrangement , LOT (Land of Tomorrow) , Lexington, KY, USA

Rare Species exhibition, Stop ! Who is coming ? II Biennial for Young Art, Proekt_Fabrika, Moscow

2009 : Aluminium, 4th International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Baku, Azerbaijan

Let me think ! , 3 Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art, Red October factory, Moscow, Russia

My love, My friends, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow , Russia

2006 : Caucasia , Centro Studi Mitreya, Fondazione Venezia per la ricerca sulla pace, VI° Salone dell' Editoria di Pace, Scuola Grande di S. Giovanni Evangelista, Venice, Italy

XII Interbifer , International Biennial Exhibition of Portrait Drawings and Graphic ' 06 , Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina