

21.09.2019 - 17.11.2019

**SUSANA PILAR**

**BODY PRESENT**

Cuban artist Susana Pilar (1984, Havana) bases her work in her own experience and history, in order to address topical and historical issues concerning migration, race and gender. Her personal background is a typical product of the history and particular demographic realities of her homeland, where colonisation and slavery have left pervasive marks. The exhibition *Body Present* brings together a number of works of a performative nature that are rooted in the artist's body and invoke the assertive, black woman.

The photographic series *Llave maestra* ('master key') shows Pilar posing with a machete. The Cuban war of independence, against the Spanish colonial rulers, was mainly fought with this common tool that has remained an important national symbol to this day. The artist's pose in the photographs is defiant, even provocative. But the self-assured pose is just as much that of a defensive shield to protect a woman against the everyday violence she is confronted with.

That continuous struggle of a black woman to claim her position in society, and the perseverance with which she seeks to liberate herself from different forms of oppression, are hinted at in the video *Resistencia* ('resistance'). The historical 19th-century round stables that are now part of the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago were the location for this performance — without an audience — in which the artist fought to resist the power of a high-pressure fan.

The expressive potential of the body is further explored in the series *Dibujos Robados* ('stolen drawings'). These drawings are the product of hand gestures resulting from moving the body. Yet they cannot be regarded as just the residue of a performative gesture, as they are also a form of recordings, in which the essence of the corporeal, the sensual and the personal is captured.

Susana Pilar's search for her own descent and identity as part of the African diaspora is the starting point for *Historias Negras* ('black histories'), a new work created specifically for the central dome room at KIOSK. The room is filled with origami figures, the result of a performance on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition in which the artist folded these paper objects, one by one, using her feet. The work links Belgian colonial history with the artist's own childhood and her descent from slaves from Sierra Leone and Congo.

The performance *Re-territorialización* ('reterritorialization'), realized in 2016 in the Sicilian capital Palermo and shown here on video, refers to the present-day diaspora of migrants and refugees from the African continent to Europe. In this performance, Pilar's body represents the current polarized Western view of the world with its stark opposition between North and South, with head and vagina symbolizing the two geographical areas. The swapping places of head hair and pubic hair reflects the individual and collective mobility and the symbolic exchange between guest and host.

In *Body Present*, Susana Pilar deploys her own body, as an instrument as much as an object of study, to question prevailing conventions and power structures. The body is decisive in the construction of identity but at the same time it is continually subjected to scrutiny and judgement by others, shaping notions of gender, race and more. Susana Pilar's work is based on her own identity, as Cuban, as Afro-Caribbean, as black, as a woman. But her understanding of the shifting significance of identity in different geographical contexts, and her linking individual and collective memory to present-day reality make sure that the work resists being contained by narrow identity politics. Instead, it invites the viewer to reflect on the ways in which we interact with, and judge, 'the other'.

**List of works**

***Llave maestra***

**2012**

**Series of 5 unique B/W photo's on dibond aluminium  
199,5 x 149,5 cm (each)**

**Courtesy: private collection, Belgium**

***Re-territorialización***

**2016**

**Digital video**

**15'49"**

**Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Continua**

***Resistencia***

**2019**

**Digital video**

**32'48"**

**Courtesy: the artist**

***Untitled***

**From the series *Dibujos robados***

**2018**

**Graphite on paper**

**150 x 336 cm**

**Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Continua**

***Untitled***

**From the series *Dibujos robados***

**2018**

**Graphite on paper**

**150 x 314 cm**

**Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Continua**

***Historias negras***

**2019**

**Performance and paper objects**

**Variable dimensions**

**Courtesy: the artist**