

# Wilma Kun

## Studio-talk about the “figurative textile and silicon installation” “Memories #3” and stations in the artpraxis

15. June 2014

**H.Th.** (Heyer Thurnheer)

*When talking about your work you immediately use to mention that it is about „identity“. How did this theme become part of your artistic praxis?*

**W. K.** (Wilma Kun)

I started in 1991 when I moved from Brazil to Italy. First of all I had to learn Italian as a new language, I spoke Portuguese before. (I consider language an important way to know and change one's approach towards the culture of another country. In consequence, your identity starts to shift during this process.) After my university studies my goal was to confront my Brazilian culture with the European one. With that in mind, I began to study art in Milan anew at the Brera Academy as student of Luciano Fabro. In his course, philosophy was an important content of study. It was a kind of total update of the art discussion in relation to what I had learned in Brazil. The perspective there was delayed by 50 years, whereas in Italy the debate was taking place in the present moment.

There I started my work in the field of identity. In the first installation I made I was using African masks and masks that I have made of my own face in plaster. In that same period, I think I made my first own-body-moulding-work. It was very important to me. I often use the metaphor of a snake whose skin changes from time to time.

Later on my work became more focused on society and sexuality as aspects of identity, like for example the conditions of women and their oppression. I made artworks using relevant newspapers articles with the objective to focus on that part of the painful history we all know.

**H.Th.:** *In Brazil you mainly created sculptures in stone, reflecting about abstract forms and not at all about the content of societal conditions.*

**W. K.:** Yes, the studies at the art academy in Brazil were more focused on the technique in sculpting and the discourse of drawing and form. In Milan, this was completely different, the study was mainly focused on philosophy, anthropology, and art history. It was hard work to achieve my goals and meet these new standards. It was a real challenge of concentration.

In Brazil in contrast, it was impossible to concentrate with so many distractions like its hedonistic culture, nice weather, nice environment, funny people etc.

**H.Th.:** *I understand that from my own experience. With temperatures more than 32 degrees your brain starts to float away and your perception gets different.....*

**W. K.:** .....In contrast to that, Europeans maybe have more this tendency to get depressed and they don't really have this capability of doing nothing. But yes, for me it is definitely easier to concentrate when it is cold outside. This reality has changed my point of view towards art a lot. Still, I can't say that all was useless what I have learned at the university in Brazil. What I really have learned there is how to handle the space when installing work as well as various well-founded technical skills.

**H.Th.:** *Where there other stations following in your artpraxis?*

**W. K.:** Yes. Plastic surgery started to become popular in the 90's and had a big impact on society and influenced also my work and research about women's behavior and identity a lot. In one of my installations I changed the moulding of my head, including the position of the nose and lips, to create a kind of mutation. In this way the work was multiplied for this installation of 25 self portraits..

And as next, 2009, subsequent to arriving in The Netherlands, I started to focus on the theme of memory. It's about the way to remember one's own history as identification impact. For the figurative textile and silicon installation “Memories #3”, that I made in that period, I took an old photograph of my family and transformed the photographic image into three-dimensional objects of dolls. The photo-image was printed on the textile and afterwards I sewed silicone masks onto the heads.

**H.Th.:** *And from whom did you take the silicone masks?*

**W. K.:** It's always taken of my own face. A mask absorbs the identity of the other and reflects a different personal interpretation; as the interpreter, the other became part of me. I did this work as an attempt or experiment for self-understanding, to open a kind of “relational bridge” of exchange and communication with myself, as well as with others. It is about life-history as a source of reflection for public information.

**H.Th.:** *Europeans' communication habits are very different from Brazilian ones. In Brazil everybody talks about everything with everybody. The communication here follows another line....*

**W. K. :** ....definitely, there is less empathy here in Europe. One is more focused on oneself. As I said before, I had to learn this and it has been quite a challenge. For me it is easier to be open and to exchange or talk about experiences.

**H.Th. :** *This your general positive attitude, is it rooted in philosophy?*

**W. K. :** Well, I would say that I am an active fatalist. I do what there is to do but at the same time I'm a fatalist. Many situations one can't force. You also learn this in practicing art. To find the right moment to do something is a great thing to think about.

**H.Th. :** *Have you ever worked with somebody who is professionally busy in the field of the three-dimensional form in plastic-surgery?*

**W. K. :** No, the scientific influence in my work comes from my childhood. My father was a veterinarian at the University, so I often had the opportunity to hang around the anatomy laboratories where animals and human bodies were conserved in formaldehyde. I was completely fascinated by those objects. In my youth I thought I wanted to study biology.

**H.Th. :** *....and now, that you develop the series of works like "Memories #3", how comes?*

**W. K. :** It's often a book or looking for information on the internet, that makes me go. Actual examples are books about the vision and perception of children of different ages in relation to themselves and others, or on the concept of forgiveness in Christianity, or of historical figures like Sisyphus from the Greek myths. Another area

where I gain inspiration is on the history and the role of women and men in society..... these are all subjects that attract my thinking a lot and push me to realize a new group of work, wherein I try to create a sensation so that the spectator is participating in the work from really close by and not just as an observer.

**H.Th. :** *Maybe as a last question, still about the masks in your work, because as we know, they originate from different cultures. What is it that attracts you?*

**W. K. :** In etymology there is a connotation made between the word "mask" and Greek masks, in which a reference is made to the concept of image. Masks were originally made of the face of an important person who had passed away. Nowadays, with the use of photography we can take images that are extremely connected to the same idea, namely, to maintain in life something or someone who is dead. The mask suggests somebody who is not here in a physical body. It isn't the actual person but the image of that person. This all of course refers to the idea of identity.

thanks to Betsy M. Blan for edit-assistance