

DOMOBAAL

Mining the Seam

Rebecca Geldard pieces together the origins, settings and implications of Haris Epaminonda's *Nemesis 52*

The original incarnations of Haris Epaminonda's chosen objects for her 2003 video *Nemesis 52*, may be familiar, but the effect they collectively create sits between this world and somewhere yet to be discovered. This multipartite piece, with its semi-abstract biomorphic forms, is visually reminiscent of several moments already catalogued in art history but is hard to pin down. From out of its short sequence of precise, carefully edited movements it is possible to make an associative orbit of performative disciplines and myriad human rituals infinitely replayed. From certain angles, the pink fleshy tones and focus on material invention bring to mind Matthew Barney's equally prop-reliant universe, albeit freshly laundered of suspect stains, mystery fluids and overt humanity. But where Barney is often the central figure within his complex narratives, Epaminonda, in all aspects of her practice appears a vaguely present puppeteer of actions and gestures: a vital conduit, perhaps, in a semantic experiment.

The video begins with a curious sequence that builds and dissipates with a silent, orgasmic tension. All action is mirrored centrally to create an uneasy organic synergy at odds with the everyday nature of the animated props. A pair of blue balloons slowly inflates from a strangely explicit mollusc-like entity on a fleur-de-lis textile-covered tabletop until they eventually pop uniformly from its rosy, satin-pleated core. The basic structural elements of the film (swathes of fabric, a table, bodily movements) are all re-framed and reordered in the ensuing segments resulting in a mesmeric meddley of acts that takes us reverentially from the peep/freak show to the trousseau, by way of the pulpit. Dildo-esque surgical-gloved forms and female hands - which at one point emerge from the imagined ecclesiastical pockets like the hesitant subjects of a new world order - undermine the subjugatory implications of such displays. The objects and codified gestures combined describe a sense of being driven by inherited impulse over individual rationale in the creation, perhaps, of what the late american performance artist Stuart Sherman, described as 'language without language'.

In this piece, and in the wider context of a practice which includes an extensive series of photographic collages, Epaminonda appears egalitarian in her treatment of the material she manipulates. While the formal position of her work implies a seasoned eye (though this video was made while she was studying at the RCA) the pace and curiosity with which she negotiate these hybrid curios suggest that they are being experienced for the first time. A quote from Sherman about his use of objects in performance included in his *New York Times* obituary, aptly illustrates this form of physical enquiry: 'it [the object] turns into the thing itself and all the possible associations that go with it - all the natural metaphorical resonances of an object'. In *Nemesis 52*, the rubber-coated digits cautiously probing an expertly folding are still hands in medical gloves, and the silky origami kite (jerkily pulled into the textile beyond) still redolent of domestic interiors, but witnessed out of context and/or in combination with other elements) can, for a moment at least be understood as sensory entities irrespective of purpose.

Epaminonda, quite rightly seems a little wary of words certainly of the critical labels (such as feminist or 'political') that, once delivered, can metaphorically suck everything within close range into their definite midst. On the other hand, with the abundance of bodily and seemingly sociological references, it is hard not to compare Epaminonda to her female video art predecessors (Wilke, Anderson): on the other, an inherent sense of fascination with the material properties of objects directs the focus to the non-gender specific nature of making. Ultimately, though, the sensory incongruity of the formal arrangement of the scenes with the refernces inspired by these devices - seductive surface textures

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and fantastical forms, perfunctory purpose and prayer-like meditation - assists Epaminonda's safe passage through such territory. Are we to be aroused or historically informed by this ancient-cum-sci-fi display moved or unnerved?

Talking to the artist about the subject matter and ephemera she has so far been drawn to, it becomes apparent that Epaminonda is not interested in predefined theoretical agendas. Rather it is the random discovery and placement of things, and how easily meaning can be implied or skewed, that attract her. While this does not absolve her of all narrative responsibility for the way her works are received, her inscrutable positioning and editing of second hand material, though naturally complicit in our assumptions, serve also to remind us of how culpable we are in the interpretive process. For example, once aware of Epaminonda's Greek-Cypriot heritage, it is convenient to assume that the raven-haired, dark-eyed daytime television heroine in *Tarahi II* was borrowed from local soap footage. But this paired-down slow-motion study of filmic guise was in fact sliced from Egyptian televisual output. Such knowledge is not considered vital by the artist to the way we interact with this moment of slowly thawing dramatic action, but is perhaps an acknowledgement of how perceptual beliefs are made.

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