

Sofia Greff: O U I Performance Event #0

By Victoria Gray

I cannot say that she has undressed, since there is no excitement of revelation, no unveiling. The skin she lives in in this work is, of course, a female skin; and like all skins it is not totally exempt from the ideologies of the cultural gaze. But her laying bare of this skin, its total giving over of itself, enables its use as a site where we might see more clearly, aside from our habitual ways of seeing, the relation between a phenomenological body and its becoming object, its cultural, mnemonic and ideological makeover.

(Heathfield, 2004, p.26)

The Ground Up

Cotton wool pads, round like soft matte pearls are placed carefully on Sofia's soles. The circular cushions perform a cushioning; a warming of her feet despite the cold hard tiles. They make plausible pillow-like shoes.

The order of 'things' is turned upside down. A back to front perspective. A reversal of planes. We start our gaze at the ground and work our way up as Sofia softly focusses (on us). She transforms herself (and us) with each careful circular cushioned placing.

Careful in the case of Sofia should not be confused with a performance of overly pronounced gestures; forced gestures that die as they describe, scribe and press too hard to be looked at. Careful Sofia presses the cotton to her skin with ease. A necessary task. No need for a needy showing (off).

Just doing the thing like it were the only thing that one would or could do.

Addressing A Dressing

We comply to drift in and out of each pearly placing until all skin that was bare is now not. Given that Sofia was given to us already bare there was a distinct lack of an unveiling. There was instead a veiling and we could see past this clearly. See Sofia as she troubled the order of looking. Sparing us of a dangerous spectacle.

As covering becomes uncovering in our new order of looking a veiling reveals an unveiling. The 'dressing', (a dual term used to refer to the object of cotton wool and to the physical act itself) exposes anatomical places that are as yet so underexposed.

In addressing anomalous body parts through a dressing of them we attune to them again. Or as if for the first time. Our right ankle bone, the left side of our hip, our stomach just left of the belly button, behind our right ear lobe, our right knee cap. Bones and senses burrowed beneath robes of inhibition (those that society and culture dress us in) come to back sensation.

We see more of 'Sofia' as we are exposed to less.

At Ease

There are gazes un-used and un-practiced to seeing anyone other than ourselves or those we allow closest. We are not used to Sofia here (so bare) and embarrassingly it shows, but she shows us it is ok. Her permission is endearing. A stillness offers complicity. A political movement of intensive not extensive affinity between Sofia and spectator. Eye to eye contact.

An easy smile smiles Sofia. It is a ritual, a preparatory moment to collect her 'self' and yet, gathers more use for an audience. We are an audience adjusting to a new visual plane that Sofia has opened to perception. The room lifts in this moment and the phase passes into performance (although we are not sure where or how this phasing happens).

A difficult transition is navigated, is seamless thanks to Sofia's ease. We smile with relief.

Denying A Body

Performance is difficult.

It is not easy to stand. I dislocate myself with a wanting alongside a watching and a waiting. I am jealous and I am sad.

The fear that prevents my own bareness proves itself. It rises in the waiting. I fail myself again and again and in my failure (which is really just fear) I remember my own denied body. I feel nostalgia for a brave body that I have never experienced or probably ever will.

Performance is wilfully denying and denied.

About A Body That We Cling To

Where pads don't stick they fall and this tells us something important about the body that they try to cling to. Their sticking and un-sticking processes perform the particularities of Sofia's un-form.

Our gaze holds onto curvatures where Sofia's surface is too formless thus rejecting the cotton pad form. We come to understand that the image and the completion of this task are futile, both are already bound to fail. I forfeit breath in the incipient space between each pad that stays and each pad that falls.

This is the point.

The Impossible Image

Sofia uses her body as an immaterial surface. Like the cotton wool it is porous, fibrous and full of potential. Such simplicity holds a simplicity and becomes the apparatus that produces our mutual attention.

I register the image, the accessible surface. It is (just) a woman's body being entirely covered in cotton wool pads. But in the shadow and shading of lines, curves, arcs and folds Sofia really shows us how an image of this 'woman body' has been made and unmade.

Has been feared and made to fear.

Modest

Sofia challenges an image of Aphrodite of Cnidus. Praxiteles's statue, (famous for its being the first full body female nude), stands with her right hand hovering over her pelvis, covering her vagina but without touching herself. Aphrodite's knee's face inwards and are covert like her eyes She averts us by gazing to her left.

This is modesty doubled. The modesty of covering is performed modestly.

But Sofia in her looking back is bold.

It is acknowledged that this is revelatory. The way in which Sofia has found a quality of pressing that acknowledges her vagina, her pelvis, her stomach, her breasts, her neck in a way that denies us the violence of an easy erotics or a spatially objectified woman body spectacle.

The Smallest Adjustment

It is necessary to say that such simplicity leaves so much more room for us to see-feel. To see-feel is an ethical task of looking that takes (more) time. And it did take time, 45 minutes or so.

To see-feel Sofia reminds me that performance has no place for and no need for a hurried erotics.

I ask myself, 'what is the smallest adjustment that can bring about the biggest change?'

Time. Time. Time. Time.

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Sofia Greff is a performance artist based in Frankfurt, Germany. She performed
at Oui Performance Live Event #0 on Saturday 9th October 2010.*