

On October 21st, 2008 Heidi Voet (HV) interviewed Alicia Framis (AF) about the work 'A whole new world a go-go' she was preparing for the exhibition 'Un-scene in Wiels', Brussels.

Heidi Voet: Is this a construction site?

Alicia Framis: It is the transformation of a construction site into desire.

HV: Is desire always related to the future?

AF: Yes, desire is always placed in the future because it is something you want, something you don't have.

HV: So in that sense it is related to the construction site, which also holds a promise for the future.

AF: Yes

HV: And why are there images of Chinese girls on the flowers?

AF: The important question of the work is why the construction material, Ytong, becomes one with the naked girls. I think the power of the work is how both are transformed into something else. This material is so basic that you would never think about combining it with naked Chinese girls. But they fit very well together and it makes it look like an ideal world. By putting the girls in a bouquet of flowers you make them part of another world. Another world that, I think, only exists in art.

What I like about this work is that the vases with the flowers are at first very beautiful and the essence of the work only becomes visible when you look at them very closely.

When you see the naked girls all of a sudden a lot of questions arise. The interesting thing is that pornography is always specific. You see what there is and here it becomes again erotic.

You put the girls in another state, the same as you did with the material.

The material to construct interior walls becomes something to use in a domestic space, something beautiful.

HV: Where were those images found?

AF: You have to tell me because in China it is very difficult to find this.

HV: I found the magazines in a regular newsstand and later on the Internet, knowing that it is forbidden to show nudity in China. Even in museums it is very difficult to show that, the content of shows is inspected before the show can open to the public. I thought it was interesting to work with something from the edge of this restriction. A restriction or a limit tells so much about the actual desires and fears that are present in that society. It pronounces where the fears are, there are no restrictions needed if there is no desire to act out what is restricted. If people were not interested in nudity, free speech or getting drunk for example, there would be no reason to ban it. That idea was very fascinating for me.

I also found it interesting that these erotic images came across as being so 'natural'. They are just naked girls 'photoshop-ed' in a bamboo or blossom environment. In the West the women in erotic magazines have enlarged breasts and their vagina is shaved, things are magnified... In these Chinese magazines there was nothing like that. It is a picture of a naked woman placed in an ideal setting. I thought that was so remarkable and says so much about cultural differences.

Do you identify with the girls on the photos?

AF: No, no because they are specifically from Asia and it makes the work more interesting for me. These women are always a mystery for me.

HV: Are they exotic for you?

AF: Exotic, but not in a bad way because I am living here and I don't see them as exotic the way tourists do. For me they are exotic in the sense that they are really, really different. Even when we try or want to understand them, there is still a big gap.

HV: How do you see this in relation to the shape of the vases, which mostly refer to the shape of western vases?

AF: Of course if you ask me this I think about all the couples I see here in Shanghai, old western man with young Chinese girls (laughs). I think it can be a very beautiful metaphor of the real life here (laughs). Do you think your work was about this?

HV: Not as far as I know (laughs)... For me, in the beginning, it could have been any image we use to project our desires on. I even thought about using images of cars or nature... just

images that take us away. Images that have the capacity to receive our fantasy, so we can build on them and then generate more images in our heads... But because I was here and was fascinated by these magazines, I started to work with them.

AF: And what do you think is their desire?

HV: *You mean the women? Money, I think. It's similar to the construction sites here. The goal is to make money and not too many other concerns are involved. You don't have to look much further.*

But the work is not just about cultural differences. For example the title of the installation 'A whole new world a go-go' is a play with a line from a pop song and I added 'a go-go' to refer to the rhythm of change that we experience and also hint to the sexy side of the work. Beside the title of the whole installation, I wanted each vase to have a separate title too. Which is also a line from a pop song, as if the vases have a name as a group and also have an individual name.

Do you see pop songs as contemporary poetry, or how do you see them?

AF: Yes, I think more and more people need this contact with music to know what they feel. Before, we had poetry or we would read more and were more in touch with our feelings but a lot of things happened in the last century. We are estranged from our own feelings. Therefore we need films or songs to remind us what exactly we feel.

HV: *And do you agree that at the same time these films and songs tell us what to feel, that for example, they shape the way we see romance?*

AF: Yes, I think that a lot of romance we see in movies is a 'sick' kind of romance and I am crazy about it because then we can feel again. Society tells us to be brave and good and to behave. We are more and more escaping our feelings and music reminds us how it is to feel good or to feel bad or how it is to miss somebody. The songs give us our feelings back.

HV: *And how do you see this in combination with the installation?*

AF: For me the girls and the songs go well together. How do you see it?

HV: *Initially I was looking for lines from poems but felt then that I was so detached from the language that was used. So I turned to pop songs.*

The song lines I use have to do with love or desire but there is something twisted about them. For example in a previous series of vases I used lyrics about a pig that had sex with a man so their kids have hoofs instead of hands. I like letting in the irrational and absurd. There is something uncanny in the lyrics I choose, something not right. They are about how desire and real life doesn't follow rules. It contrasts the beautiful vases and elegance of the flowers and makes the image of the vases more complete, more like real life.