



ANE LAN

VESTA









photography











video installation









VESTA - essay

“Where should my gaze go? What must I see to understand?” These are the main questions of Ane Lan in his project Vesta. In the vertical-screen video installation, a male hand holding brushes dipped in different colours of paint, moves through various tableaux vivants of female portraits linked to celebrated models of western Culture. Dressed in women attire, the artist sings a sad song in a falsetto voice, almost abstract in its impact, questioning the gaze applied to female models through the History of Art. The elements of this installation brings further the research in the Ane Lan project, devoted to the exploration of gender models as political devices for control. In Migrating Birds, premiered at The Venice Biennale - Theatre Section in September 2005, Ane Lan narrates the bewilderment of migrating birds in the face of the magnetic radiation provoked by the use of cellular phones. Performing songs accompanied by a band in experimental kraut rock/folk style, and in a set of hyper-cosy arrangement of domestic iconographies torn by video images of a harsh environmental reality, Ane Lan deconstructs the concept of a concert performance, providing an ambiguous political message.

In this new project references varies from the Flemish world (with a twist of Hugo van der Goes), to the pre-Raphaelites. As also goes for the female characters enacted by Ane Lan in Vesta, the representation of the female gaze in the History of Art hardly ever meets the audience. The figures look away, in other directions, with a gaze most often oblique, slanting. These images of averted gazes are deeply rooted in our western tradition. The first to change this gaze was in fact female painters or sitters who insisted on presenting an image of the woman other than purely that of an aestheticized object. This is why the aging Sofonisba Anguissola, met by an adoring Van Dyck in Palermo, continuously referred to her self-portraits

playing harpsichord, looking straight from the painting, confronting the viewer. The same goes for the female painters of Bologna: Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani (recently rediscovered), who staged themselves to depict different female characters. Another example is the XVIIIth century painter Giulia Lama from Venice. The very important contribution of women to XXth Century avant-gardes consisted of these same reflections: on gazes and their ownerships related to sexuality and gender issues. These were the Italian Carol Rama, who presented herself in images oozing of heavy sexual tension, or the Russian Varvara Stepanova and Ljubov Popova portrayed by Rodcenko or by themselves, or Meret Oppenheim, ambiguous model for Man Ray, portrayed in x-ray form with a cigarette. Vesta is an anthropological work: as a classical research of Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski. We are confronted with the ongoing fight between different perceptions of life, or rather; the classical conflicts between sexes. On one side the faceless gaze of the painter, as “the one who sees” and on the other, the women “the one who is seen” constantly trying to defy categories and myths. A flaming torch, with wax falling down at the rhythm of the song, is separating the various tableaux, in homage to the sacred fire of Purity, guarded by the Vestal Virgins in ancient Rome. The mythology of the Vestal Virgins is one of the most celebrated themes in the allegorical painting of Art History. According to the myth, the Vestals would often fall in fatal sin through love, as in the famous Gaspare Spontini's opera (patronized by the Empress Josephine Bonaparte), and if losing virginity facing certain death. Ane Lan's “Vestals”, try to comprehend, to define their own spaces, in a world whose colours change constantly according to the desires and whims of the painter. In the video installation the back drop changes from green to brown, from brown to red and so forth, concluding the full colour circle. Dresses and wigs are employed to give significance to eyes and hands, to poses that suggests prayer, ecstasy or seduction.

VESTA - essay

The very gazes themselves contribute with their own history and geography; regardless of what society or period of time there is always rules and regulations for how men and women utilize their gazes for social interactions. In many languages until the end of XIXth Century “to see”, was the verb to describe the act of courtship in societies where physical touch was considered a dangerous act, and where communication were equally based on movements or poses of hand and eye. Today, in the age that sociologists define as: “of seeing”, gazes are open and straightforward. Still, where every popular fashion icon, model, male or female, has to seduce the customers and viewer, the same devices of control, the same strategies for utilizing the gaze, applies once again.

Vesta, on the contrary, proposes a new map for sight. By applying the female gaze to the male artist, Vesta creates no easy feeling of identification or belonging. The work gives more space to the general enigma of social life by questioning: who is, after all, responsible for the look, the gaze? (giving to the word all the range of possible meanings). What do the female gaze that still is that of a man, or the other way around, represent? Vesta is asking the question of how it is possible to react to this situation, inventing new trajectories of vision, questioning social rules and idées reçues.

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VESTA

VESTA - documentation photo 1

VESTA - production photo #1

VESTA - production photo #2

VESTA - production photo #3

VESTA - production photo #4

VESTA - production photo #5

VESTA - video still #1

VESTA - video still #2

VESTA - video still #3

VESTA - video still #4

VESTA - video still #5

VESTA - documentation photo credit; Henie Onstad Art Centre

VESTA - production photo- photographer; Jan Tore Jensen

VESTA - video stills - Ane Lan

In between the burning flames of Vesta, various "Vestal Virgins" ask questions about the virtue of purity and the past and current state of the female appearance. Staging himself both as the painter and the female sitter, Ane Lan raises questions about the gaze of women in classical painting related to the gaze of the masculine eye.

VESTA video cast: Ane Lan

- music: Ane Lan

- set design: Ane Lan

- costume design: Ane Lan

- camera: Ane Lan

VESTA Production: Ane Lan &
Henie Onstad Art Centre

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Arts Council Norway

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