

Letícia Parente

(Salvador, Brazil, 1930 – Rio de Janeiro, 1991)

Letícia Parente was over forty years old when she debuted in contemporary art: up until that point she had dealt largely with chemistry, and even following the success of her early solo shows, she would continue to devote her time to teaching and studying for her master's degree. After initially approaching printing techniques, it would be the video experimentation of a group of independent artists from Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s to lead her towards this medium.

Just as her colleagues did in the Europe and the United States at that time, Parente also placed her own body before the camera: compared to the traditional arts, video allowed her to investigate the female condition with greater freedom, a theme on which the pressure of social expectations inside and outside the home was concentrated. Her works share a number of common features: they are shot in a single sequence right inside the domestic space; they are bereft of dialogues and the artist rarely lets her face be framed. In *Preparação I* (1975), we see her as she gets ready in front of a mirror before going out. Instead of applying her makeup straight onto her face, she sticks a piece of adhesive tape over her mouth and traces the form of her lips with her lipstick; she then repeats the same procedure over both her eyes, touches up her hair and finally leaves the room. This preparation becomes one of a medical nature in *Preparação II* (1976), which shows the artist as she injects various transparent liquids into herself. From the notes that she left on a notebook, we learn that these were vaccines against racism, cultural colonialism, political mystification and the mythification of art. In *Marca Registrada* (1975), which is perhaps her best-known work, she takes needle and thread and onto the sole of her foot sews the words 'MADE IN BRASIL', as if to transform her body into a commercial product. Even though she makes use of English to represent Brazil's adhesion to the dynamics of the new global economy, she writes the name of her country with the letter 'S' in keeping with Portuguese spelling, thus vindicating her origins and cultural appurtenance. In *Tarefa I* (1982), she wears a long dress, lying belly-down on an ironing board, while another woman, whose face is never framed, passes over her body several times with an iron. The artist does not move and does not complain: the iron is almost certainly off, but it's easy to imagine the level of pain provoked by such an experience. Parente lives and works in a country oppressed by a military dictatorship: while *Marca Registrada* reminds us of the slogans used by the government to reinforce national identity during the years of the economic miracle, *Tarefa I* seems to deploy the strategies of terror and torture used on the opponents of the regime.

As well as her videos, the artist also produced a number of works on paper that live side by side with photo collages, textual and Xerograph inserts: the series *Mulheres* (1975), for example, investigates the ways women are represented in newspapers and advertising and their adhesion to given canons of beauty.

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