

Maria José Arjona

(Bogotá, Colombia, 1973)

Putting the body at the center of her artistic research, Maria José Arjona investigates the ways in which memory and culture vie with each other and the related dynamics tied to the production of meaning. For the artist, the body is “an agent for understanding space and time, as fundamental elements for confronting and belonging to the world we live in today.” Drawing upon her training as a ballerina, for some years the artist has identified performance as her ideal medium. “Performance art,” she says, “moves beyond the vocabulary of what we expect.”

In the performance and related video installation *All the Others in Me*, 2012, Arjona involves the viewers in an experience that catches them off guard and addresses preconceptions and stereotypes. Covered in a long, black tunic with a hood that hides her face, the artist moves about in the space, accompanied by the sound of a medley of classical and pop music. Her dance includes a striptease, executed as she takes off a series of undergarments without ever removing the long tunic. Although presented and confirmed by the scanty underwear that gradually falls to the floor, the striptease becomes above all a stimulus for the imagination, in that the artist’s body remains immutably covered by the thick tunic and, through her dance, the forms of her body are presented more as sculptural material than as desirable sexual object. However through the continuous reformulation of the performance space, the work solicits individual responses, including the different biases that different cultural, religious, and racial origins or age or sexual gender can impose on each viewer. As the title suggests, the artist intentionally seeks to open the work’s interpretation to this sort of plurality, and she chooses for this to be an integral part of her practice. “The viewer,” she states, “thus becomes the catalyst for a sensory exchange, necessary for understanding the significance of the body and the interaction itself, outside the boundaries of identity and representation, but within the passage of time.” (MB)