

Film Review

**Ariane Lopez-Huici: The Body Close Up****A Film by Marilia Destot**

REVIEW BY DEBORAH GARWOOD



Ariane Lopez-Huici *Rebelles*, Paris 2007. Edition of 8, Black & White Photography, 20 x 24 inches. cover JUNE 2009: *Maki & Hiroko*, Paris 2007. Edition of 8, Black & White Photography, 8 x 10 inches. images courtesy of the artist.

Marilia Destot's engrossing documentary film on the life and work of Paris- and New York-based, French-born photographer Ariane Lopez-Huici is shot entirely in black and white and structured as a succession of chapters. *The Body Close Up* offers an in-depth retrospective of Ms. Lopez-Huici's notable projects from the 1970s to 2008. Ms. Destot, herself a French-born photographer and media artist based in New York, draws a highly personal portrait that succeeds in unveiling sensual and metaphysical currents at the root of the artist's oeuvre.

The film's superb editing combines still imagery with Lopez-Huici's voice-overs, while a specially-composed soundtrack reflects her devotion to music and dance. Initially, the camera pans over a contemporary portrait of the artist seated on a carved African chair. In a confident voice, she attributes her long-standing fascination with art and eros to her upbringing in the Mediterranean, "the cradle of nudity". She further asserts that she's proud to be a woman, heir to Mediterranean culture's focus on the body as the locus of human experience and understanding.

This frank and engaging monologue continues in subsequent chapters. Works described include the early series "Solo Absolu," "Aviva," a steamy sequence called "The Lovers," and numerous other projects carried out in Paris, New York, and Africa. We learn how each project evolved and how viewers responded—elated in some cases, disturbed in others. Imagery is interspersed with critical responses to the work by such luminaries as Arthur Danto, Edmund White, Guy Tosatto, and Carter Ratcliff. Their comments add to the film's intellectual breadth.

Critics, and Lopez-Huici herself, have associated her imagery with the paintings of Cézanne, Rubens, Ingres; I would add that the artist's themes of nonconformity and psychology bring Courbet's nudes to mind, even the late work of John Coplans. But whereas Coplans's photographs of his own aging body were influenced by a similar fascination with European painting and African sculpture, Lopez-Huici works with non-professional models—people who share her deep regard for the body as a vehicle of the soul's sensual, transcendent capacity. Cultivating a friendship and a working relationship with her models during the shoot and editing process, sometimes over a period of years, the photographs become a spontaneous record of their artist-performer collaboration.

Thus the film's live footage of Lopez-Huici and her models at a studio session is important because it brings her working process to life. Having studied film and cinematography early in her career, the photographic series comes naturally. Insight into the relationship between abstraction, the body, and photography drives her to photograph not only what is seen, but also to reveal what is hidden from view. Lopez-Huici belongs to a generation of artists who often placed the body at the center of experimental art forms combining dance, performance art, sculpture, video, and photography. If sexuality and non-conformity are abiding topics in Lopez-Huici's oeuvre, Destot's remarkable film asserts that the body's jubilation, exuberance, and self-acceptance are themes that lie at its heart. It is truly a collaborative documentary.