

Super Bodies

**3rd
Triennial
of
contem-**

many things and may take its images from many different sources, but the signals it transmits do not have an unambiguous meaning. They mostly solely indicate that it is about fashion. What is at stake in this game is social distinction, the social game of 'being in tune with the latest fashion and trends' in a world in which we are forever young, happy, rich and healthy.

However, not all fashion operates in this way. Some designers casually smuggle other messages into their designs. Such pieces may even develop into autonomous works, whereby it is not clear whether they are intended to be worn or not. See, for instance, the work of designers such as Martin Margiela, Angelo Figus, Junya Watanabe, Rei Kawakubo, Ginna Lee and also the work of jewellery designer Naomi Filmer. In her work, it is often difficult to draw a line with sculptures: her malleable objects rather seem to circumscribe the body and the space around that body.

It is also illustrated in the work of Christophe Coppens, even in his 'wearable' pieces. When he makes hats in the shape of a human face, clothing and face suddenly become one, as masks. Coppens is not only a fashion designer, but also an artist who has worked in different fields and has more often made impressive installations about the human body. For *SuperBodies* he will create a new installation in which he will elaborate on his vision of the body.

In *Childhood Storage*, the German fashion designer and performance artist Anna-Nicole Ziesche touches upon an area that we rarely consider: how space, as a second skin, can also model our experience of our place in the world. Ziesche rebuilds a full-scale model of her childhood bedroom, built by her father himself. Yet it is not a replica, the space has lost its entire colour: it is completely white, like a faded memory. Moreover, it is standing on its head, as an image in a camera obscura. From a distance, and through an unfocused lens, we see a room that has physically and psychologically defined its maker. In addition to the model of the room, there is also a film of the woman in her childhood clothes, but here again the images are deformed and undoubled, as an incomplete and distorted memory.

3.8 The face, the portrait

Yang Zhengzhong, Bernd Lohaus,
Michelangelo Pistoletto

The face is the part of the body that usually sucks up all the attention. It is where an exchange with others occurs, because, as the old saying goes, 'the face is the mirror of the soul'. At least that is what we automatically assume. However, such an aphorism does little more than turn the tables, or use words to extend an appearance of naturalness to an extraordinarily mysterious event by replacing them with the words 'mirror' and 'soul'. As if then we would understand what it precisely means. Meanwhile, we know that we use our face to a certain extent to hang up an image of ourselves to the world. In art, this is demonstrated, for example, in the (self) portrait: it is not a secret snapshot, but a representation of someone who is fully aware of the fact that he is being watched and that he will continue to be watched, and who consciously manipulates that image. The portrait, more than any other image, looks back at the viewer and thereby creates the impression that it is an essential image. Such an image erases every coincidence in order to promote a person's most characteristic qualities. If that really is the case, is hard to say, however. Nor can we ever completely control the image that we present of ourselves, certainly not if we are not in the atypical situation where a portrait is made of us. Many tics and unintentional actions such as blushing or sweating escape our will and thus 'expose' something. But then again: what is exposed in that case is not interpretable in an unambiguous way.

A slightly disconcerting example hereof is *Extras*, a work consisting of 25 portraits by the Chinese artist Yang Zhengzhong. The portraits show smiling faces, people who, without exception, radiate happiness and joy. The photographs are printed on a large format, 1m by 1m, and are extremely sharp, showing even the tiniest hairs or beads of sweat, wrinkles, pores and irregularities on these faces. They are not always as beautiful. For Zhengzhong did not specifically select his 'extras' on the basis of their looks. Thus there is an odd tension between experiencing the pure physicality of skin, hair and secretions in close-up, and the overall image of smiling people. As a result, the overwhelming feeling of happiness stirred up in the viewer is to some extent undermined. This is even more the case when you know how this series of portraits was made. Zhengzhong paid his 'extras'.