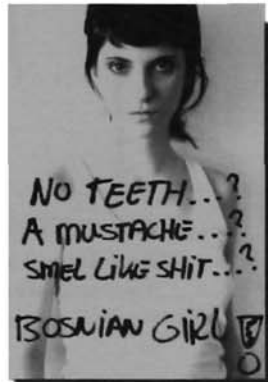


# Procreation/Postcreation - A Womenifesto Art Project



*Womanifesto 2003, an artist-initiated project, launched 'Procreation/Postcreation', an art box of personal stories, poems, beliefs and tales, advice and lullabies that contain thoughts and ideas from around the world concerning issues relating to procreating.*

**Keiko Sei reports.**

*"Bosnian Girl" by Selja Kamic, shows an image of herself with graffiti found in the army barracks in Srebrenica, Bosnia (courtesy of the artist)*

Female feticide is increasing at an alarming rate in India, according to the November 10 edition of *"India Today"*. This is, it says, in spite of improving educational standards and wealth of the nation. Contrary to the expectation that modern education will bring awareness of gender equality to a large number of the population, and contrary to the idea that poverty is the major factor in a family preferring a male child, it reveals that the biggest culprits of female feticide are found in the most prosperous areas of the country and among the most educated people.<sup>1</sup> In these cases, modern technology is helping people determine the sex in the uterus, to terminate female fetuses and in some circumstances, to produce a male child with chromosome manipulation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Well-off states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana recorded more than a 50 point decline in the child sex ratio (CSR—the number of girls in the 0-6 age group per 1,000 boys) since 1991, reports *India Today*, November 10, 2003. In urban capitals such as Delhi and Mumbai, the CSR figure is far below the national average of 927 (Delhi 850 and Mumbai 898 in 2001).

Coincidentally, on November 11, another publication 'Procreation/Postcreation' - produced by "Womanifesto 2003" as its 4<sup>th</sup> major project - was launched in Bangkok in celebration of womanhood, life, art and intelligence. At the well-attended launch of this publication, men consisted of half the audience.

The project itself is an archive. It collects and archives contributions, by both women and men, on this theme in the form of art pieces, poetry, graffiti, comments, ideas, stories, theories, et cetera. The statement of the project organisers also says that it is "about exploring old and new myths surrounding both *pro-* and *post-creation* and how these myths have influenced our thinking in the past, and continue to do so today and into the future." Eighty-eight contributions from different parts of the world are printed on separate papers, and are contained in a re-cycled cardboard box.

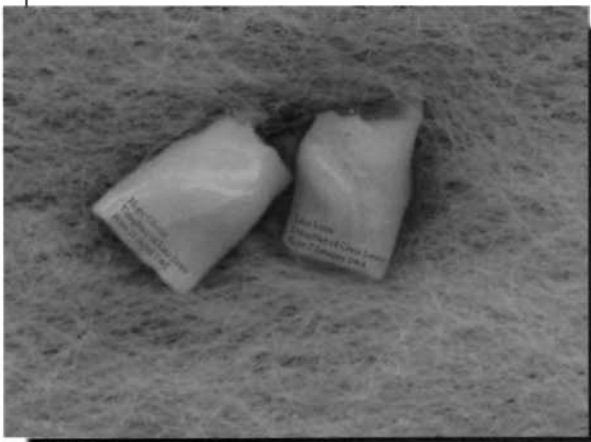
In today's world of Internet, we hit a button, and *voila*, out come so many different ideas, texts and pictures in so many different forms. Questions are often raised on the efficiency of search engines, such as "Am I missing something? Don't I need some filters to help me choose what is worthwhile?" A simple box, as created by Womanifesto, thus emerges as an interesting antithesis to the raging use or misuse of technology on the topic of procreation (and postcreation). The organisers didn't select by gender, race or quality; they only called for contributions and archive everything.



*Nilofar Akmut's sculpture*  
(courtesy of the artist)

We read a scholarly paper about the problematic perception of sexuality of Arab women (Mona Bur), about different textiles used for babies in China, India and Japan (Padmini Balaram), a Luganda (language of the Baganda people in Uganda) lullaby about a traditional way to give birth and a Mongolian proverb about bringing up a child (Hasi), to mention a few. There is a photo collage based on graffiti written by a Dutch soldier found in the army barracks in Srebrenica (Selja Kameric, Tarik Samarah and Grazia Neri); a drawing of a woman-like figure with one eye and sewn head and a string coming out of her navel that makes the word “uncondizhahnal love” (Bops); a photo of a young couple just after they had sex (Martine Stig); and a digital print of two teeth that fell out, one of which belonged to the mother and the other to her daughter (Lisa Jones). There are even recipes of foods related to birth customs, such as sweetened noodles with Tahini from Rhodes, that are traditionally prepared for nursing mothers (Dana Squires). Many contributions are about giving birth and having a child and some are tales and nuances of losing a baby and mistreatment of women.

*“Mother and Daughter”, a digital image by Lisa Jones  
(courtesy of the artist)*



There are as many personal stories, and emotions are more explicit than in a curated art show: excitement, happiness, sadness, bitterness, remorse and anger. Some make valuable documents of birth conditions in different places, such as one about a hospital in Alice Springs (Pamela Lofts). There are also metaphors, such as ‘occupied territory’ for example, woman, womb, and land-wise. A photo of a young Jewish woman who is

about to take a video of Arafat in Ramalla, entitled "Arafat and Me" (Tamara Moyzes) challenges probably one of the biggest myths in history and it reminds us that a myth equals an occupied territory itself in mind. For so many women and men, their bodies seem not to belong to them. A digital image by Varsha Nair, entitled Occupied Territory (a woman's body), shows the arm of a young woman, with a number of slashes resulting from her suicide attempt after a disastrous marriage. And there is also an anonymous contribution from Burma, a photo of a shopping bag made by political prisoners as prison labour. A poem by Nilofar Akmut, which is accompanied by a photo of an iron bed (or a chair-like object) with a cushion from which sharp nails stick out, says ".....Catch them [the silent voices]/Twist them around/The truth has a tendency of revelation."<sup>2</sup> One of the opening day performances, by Esther Ferrer, was about silence, or as she calls it, emptiness. She actively creates it: she looks around the audience, counting the numbers of women and men and placing a board that said "1<sup>st</sup> minute of performance" on a chair on the stage, and repeated the same action by placing a boards saying "2<sup>nd</sup> minute of performance", "3<sup>rd</sup> minute of performance"... This went on till the 7<sup>th</sup> minute of her performance. In this case emptiness is used as a space for everyone to fill in and to contemplate. An interesting effect of this performance was that the audience was talking and chatting

---

<sup>2</sup> "Wait, do not drop the veil/These silences are real voices/  
Hidden by threats/Innuendo and abuse/Grotesque/  
Bloody/Macabre/Catch them/Twist them around/The  
truth has a tendency of revelation" -Nilofar Akmut

*Exhibition installation view of the launch of the box  
(photo by Preenun Nana)*



*"Table is Ready", digital print  
by Ingrid AR, France  
(courtesy of the artist)*

*"Arafat and Me" by Tamara Moyzes, photography  
(courtesy of the artist)*



*"After" by Martine Stig of  
the Netherlands, taken by a  
couple after they had sex  
(courtesy of the artist)*

to each other while she was silently performing ("What is she doing? "What is this supposed to mean?") and so here, the positions of the performer and the audience are reversed. Don't let silence go without telling you anything. Catch it and twist it around. Don't let emptiness go without you saying something.

A performance by Mink Nopparat, entitled "Flowers", starts with her action to place voice bubbles onto characters from art or from general photos, which otherwise remain as mere objects for the gaze of the audience. So, Venus de Milo says "I don't care about my arms," and a photo of Muslim women clad in chadors pronounce "I could be a doctor if...." After this action, she folds the papers with the pictures and texts and makes a flower out of them: a silence thus becomes a flower. In another performance, "Control Your Brain" by Liliane Zunkemi, remote-controlled replica toys crawled as brains amongst the audience, knocking at their feet, as if stating that they've been forced to separate from bodies (in the performance the audience use remote controls to operate the brains).

A group from Chiang Mai called The Beauty Suit Team<sup>3</sup> took the subject of the myth of beauty for their performance. The group came together at an exhibition entitled "The Beauty Suit" which was curated by Katherine Olston, a member of the team. The exhibi-

---

<sup>3</sup> The members: Boondarik Sukhaboon, Katherine Olston and Estelle Cohenny-Vallier.

tion, at Chiang Mai University Art Museum, was about different perceptions of beauty, and about cultures and myths, and beliefs relating to it. In a partitioned room, three women look into mirrors, separately, and the audience can watch each of them through the transparent mirrors as the women face them but do not see them. The women are busy taking care of themselves - one is whitening herself, one is wearing black make-up to become darker and the other in a wedding dress grumbles to herself "Am I beautiful?" "Am I too fat?" The performance projects anxiety of every woman, about her image, and about a common myth in Asia that a woman must be white to be desired by men and society in general. The women talk only to themselves and to the mirrors about their problems, but the audience can catch their voices clearly.

The publication, 'Procreation/Postcreation' archives what we can call "eloquent silences" and, those who catch them. Yes, we live in the time when technology, such as Internet, helps to bring more voices out into public space, so much so that we cannot decide which to pick, read and to hear. But we also

live in the time when, again with the help of technology, more and more female voices are killed even before they are silenced. Given the current scenario, this plain box of diverse offerings make us slow down, think, and, possibly, care about the issues.

Womanifesto 2003 was funded by the Bangkok regional office of The Rockefeller Foundation, and organised by Preenun Nana and Varsha Nair. 'Procreation/Postcreation' is a limited edition. To order a copy, contact the organisers at: [info@womanifesto.com](mailto:info@womanifesto.com) Website: [www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)

*Womanifesto is a bi-annual project focusing on the work of woman artists from around the world. It has developed steadily since its first event in 1995, and has gained international recognition. Through various activities, including art exhibitions, workshops and seminars, Womanifesto links participating artists, and encourages interaction within urban and rural communities. Womanifesto 2003 was an art publication project in which eighty-eight individuals from different parts of the world participated. It also involved art performances and video screenings.*