

Vanessa Safavi
Velvet
04.05 - 30.06.2019

Rubber Ghosts : A conversation between Yann Chateigné and Vanessa Safavi
Originally published in *Mousse 67* / Spring 2019

YC: There is something hypnotic in *Velvet*: the slow, repetitive rhythm of it, the absence of human body, these rubber gloves moving in the dark, like dancing. Where does the idea of it come from?

VS: I was looking how to fabricate my own latex. I wanted to make sheets of latex that I could use as raw material in my sculptures. I saw this video from a glove manufacture in China and went completely bananas. Of course, it is fascinating to watch these hands dancing, their shape, comical and odd at the same time, dipping slowly in big latex tanks. But more than the hypnotic effect that their "ballet-like" movement induces, these hands were revealing so many layers of narration I wanted to dig into.

YC: It is your first movie. Though it looks so different from your previous works, it also appears to be very consistent with what you have been working on in recent years.

VS: The decision to make this film was pretty practical, I wanted to minimise working too physically since I had health reasons to do so. I started to re-question my work and my system of production. I became very conscious of the perception of my own body in my surrounding and in a larger sense; in the physical space and in interaction with others. Working with video was an ideal opportunity to continue and develop on my researches around materialities that compose my work and confronting them with the reality of the factory and mass production.

YC: There is a tension, in the movie, between the gloves, as ghost images of "hands" involving tactility, and the coldness of the mechanic apparatus that also seems the very subject of it.

VS: The relation between the mechanics and the ceramic hands attached is quite strong, evoking a hybrid prosthesis, twitchy, dysfunctional but rather de-humanized. The whiteness of the ceramic hands however makes also them look absurd and funny like Mickey Mouse mitts or the big oily bolts of Chaplin's *Modern Times*. The factory is immersed in the dark and so increase a theatrical effect. But at the same time there is no reality as harsh as the one of a factory, where everything is controlled, measured and counted, perfectly organised and under hard working conditions. At the end it is being in the monster you're taking about. So, is it a phantasy to think that the phantom-like hands are communicating with the hands of the workers? The phantom-like hands certainly vehicle a "Nachleben" feeling, an unconscious memory transcending time, a phantom embodied in the shape of a hand.

YC: There is one aspect of your film that involves certain aspects of the documentary ethics (objectivity, long takes, attention to details, etc.). But there is also a certain poetics, as if time in it was extended to a point that the film could have no beginning nor end...

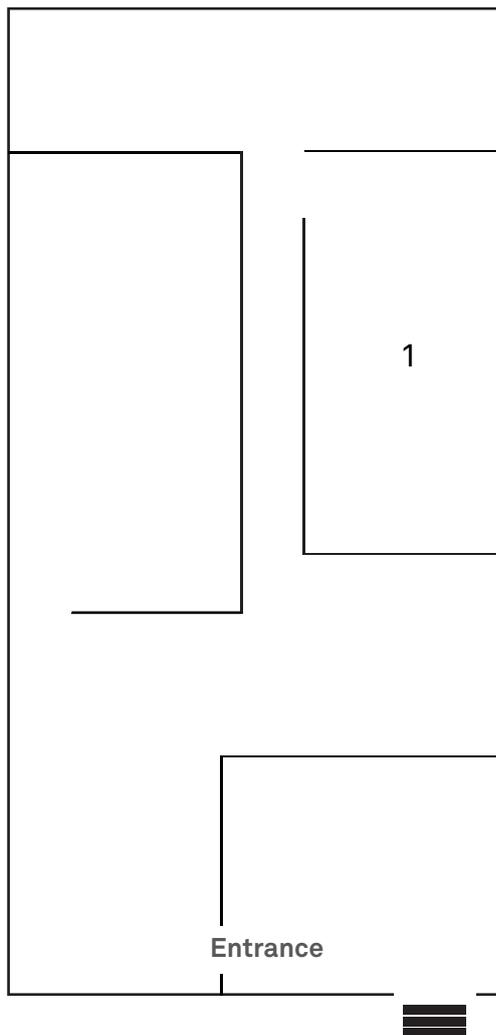
VS: My aim wasn't to make a documentary but it is true that I tried to stick to reality by keeping the speed and the chain rhythm original. Although some would argue that a film is made by editing it, as there is an endless range of possibilities, I found that it was hard for me to break the flow of that chain of production. This is really interesting. The film works in a loop because the production chain is a loop itself.

YC: *Velvet* documents a certain rationalization of labor, as well as it is a fascinating observation of the versatility of plastic itself, of the potentialities of this synthetic matter. It reminds me a passage of *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes, when he described plastic as an "alchemical substance".

VS: Latex is a bit different: it is natural. It comes from the rubber trees, although there are synthetic latex as well. What Barthes suggests is that plastic has no origin, or that you can't see the origin of the material in the material

itself, although plastic primer substance is petrol. What interest me is that the materiality of rubber holds a certain surface fetishism, through its analogy to the skin. The elastic envelope grasps the body and obscures the inside. Whether it is translucent or opaque, there is an unconscious force, a desire to transcend.

Vanessa Safavi exhibited at Fri Art in 2007, in the exhibition *Anathema* with Fabian Marti and Lauris Paulus. She recently showed her work in the solo exhibitions *The Approach*, London (CONDO with The Breeder) in 2019, *Turns and Returned*, The Breeder, Athens (2018), *The Cook and the Smoke Detector*, Chert-Lüdde, Berlin (2017), *Medulla Plaza*, Kunstverein Graftschaft, Bentheim (2016) or *Cloud Metal Cities*, Kunsthalle Sao Paulo (2014), *One Torino*, Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2013), *After the Monument Comes the People*, Kunsthalle Basel (2012), *Les Figures Autonomes*, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2011), *RESORTS*, Kunsthaus Glarus (2011). She was in invited in group exhibitions such as *Objects Like Us*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, USA (2018), *And as things fall apart, nobody paid much attention*, MONITOR, Lisbon (2018), *Macaroni*, WallRiss, Fribourg (2016), *Inflected Objects # 2 Circulation – Mise en Séance*, Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem, Netherlands (2016), *The transparent tortoiseshell and the un-ripe umbrella*, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Glasgow (2016), *A Month of Sundays*, Taylor Macklin, Zürich (2016).



**1. Velvet, 2019. HD video, 12'. Sound: Ariel Garcia.
Images: Xavier Ripolles and Vanessa Safavi
Produced by Vanessa Safavi, Fri Art and the Cultural Found of Fribourg.**