

## Rosebud #8

Ciudad Mujer Ciudad van Pola Weiss

"First of all, I am teleasta. For me, video is like my other voice, my other gaze, my other self", thus Pola Weiss (MX, 1947-1990) introduced herself early in her career. From the mid 1970s, Weiss produced video art and television programs in which she experimented with dance, performance, music and innovative visual effects, such as chroma-key and solarization effects. Weiss was Mexico's first video art pioneer and became particularly known for her 'video dances', in which she combined performance and dance and performed while filming herself, and the audience. As with many female video artists, video attracted her because of the medium's lack of history. The camera offered her the opportunity to work outside existing male (art) traditions. The female body and the position of women played an important role in her work. More than criticizing the oppression and objectification of women, however, the common mission of feminist female artists at the time, Weiss was interested in showing the woman as a character who enjoys looking and being watched. This way she undermined the binary dichotomy between (male) subject and (female) object, performer and spectator, and introduced a female gaze. Or as artist Mónica Mayer noted at the time after seeing *Ciudad Mujer Ciudad*: "I was surprised to see that the protagonist was a real (not idealized) woman (...) It was a woman seen by a woman."

In *Ciudad Mujer Ciudad* (City, Woman, City; 1978) Weiss draws a parallel between the exploited, polluted, dry, restless city and the fertile, naked, female body. This, by the way, without directly seeing herself as an advocate of ecofeminism. In an experimental, layered and psychedelic style, we see the image of the seductively dancing actress Vivienne Blackmore superimposed on the urban landscape of Mexico City. The Alameda, Zócalo and the Palace of Fine Arts, among others, appear in the picture, along with bustling streets and hurried throngs of people. The shots are interspersed with fragments of rural areas, shown with the sounds of splashing water, birds and laughing children. Her soft natural body stands out against the Mexican streets, the hard concrete and the screaming, iridescent colors Weiss used. A woman in the background says, "there is no water", "water, you are not flowing", "so many cars, I can't breathe" and "I want to live!" Through her increasingly (sexually) free movements, she seems to want to escape the intrusion of urban life on body and nature. Finally, after a moment of catharsis she nevertheless presents herself crucified as a martyr. Her tears may bring the healing fluid the city lacks.

Weiss studied communication sciences at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She graduated with a thesis on video art. In 1977 she met Shigeo Kubota and Nam June Paik in New York. Notably with Kubota, 'the mother of video art' with whom she became close friends, she shared a feminizing approach to her art practice. A year later she founded her own television production company; artTV. In 1979 she presented nine works at the Center Pompidou, after which interest in her work grew in Europe. She was invited to the Venice Biennale in 1979 and 1984. In the early 1980s, Weiss also taught at the Academy of Fine Arts, Sint Joost in Breda and the Academy of Fine Arts AKI in Enschede. Furthermore, she worked for the VPRO for some time. Although it has never been proven, she is said to have committed suicide on camera in 1990. After her untimely death, her work fell into oblivion. The traveling exhibition *Radical Women* (Hammer Museum, Brooklyn Museum and Pinacoteca de São Paulo in 2017-2018) brought her back to the spotlight a few years ago.

This exhibition marks the beginning of a collaboration between LIMA platform for media art and ROZENSTRAAT.

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