

Interview of Clara Scherrer in the newspaper of the exhibition ***Growing Up, Being, Ageing***

By Anne Malherbe (Extract), June 2014

**Who are these women you are showing? Do they come from a particular or universal background?**

C.S: In *Ageing* there are photos of my maternal family from 5 generations. But I hid some faces with flowers so they can become universal. This work came from my life but at the end it should not talk about me. People must be able to project themselves. What I want is for people who go in these rooms to find an echo with their own history.

Besides I only used objects I found in flea markets. They were used before. The life of their former owners is also part of my installations. It is important for me to have the visitors think: "my grand-mother also had something like this!"

The personal history is mixed with the collective memory. Both are inseparable. Collective memory is a recurring theme in my work. Do you know that traumas modify DNA? That's how they pass through generations.

**When you have an idea, how do you choose your materials?**

Before making my video *Break in* I had a dress I had found some time ago. While I was wondering how to use it to talk about violence against women, especially female genital mutilation, I watched in the evening Jane Campion's movie "Bright Star", with its opening scene showing a girl who is sewing and tearing. What better image than sewing to talk about female genital mutilation. The day after, I shot my movie. That's how a process starts.

Creation is made in the present. As I am completely self-educated, I have no inhibition. I remember when I hung 1600 meters of threads to a painting: it was like a trance, a dance in the present. For the installation *The Heritage*, I paid a particular attention to clean, tear then sew again the white clothes the people from the village where the exhibition was taking place gave me. It was like meditating, a ritual creating a relation between these people and myself.

**What can explain the central part of women in your work?**

It is the collective memory: the injustice faced by women and also the history of my family. However when I made *Break in* for example, it had nothing to do with my life. It came more from the astonishment I feel when I see women's condition today is still the same. But I am not a spokesperson, I only raise a fact.

**Actually it is as if the reality of the women's condition was part of you?**

Yes, I feel connected to all these oppressed women. I have this agitation, this deep anger inside myself, but I can't really explain why. However I do not express it in an activist way, but more through poetry, metaphor, a kind of softness.

I need to clear this cruel and hardly understandable reality, maybe to exorcise it. For example my painting *Beslan* comes from the upset I felt for this hostage taking that happened in a school in Beslan in 2004, and that ended in tragedy. This work is covered in white because I felt the need to wash all this. I know that if I wanted to express beauty, joy, happiness, love, I would always fall short. However, everything that is incredibly violent, like female genital mutilation, like the bloodshed in Beslan, I want to purify it, to take something out of it.