



Youth



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Resignation



Sacrifice



Submissiveness

## Photographs by Julia Bonanni

Shubhalakshmi Shukla

Most often, self portrayal of an artist is connected to representations, which are self-revealing or autobiographical. In the sense that the representation stands by truth/s about the self which may be either truly autobiographical or creates pointers for the larger social constructs. The recent series of photographs by Julia Bonanni for that matter create a different experience. They are about representing the self camouflaging with the divine figure of 'Virgin Mary.' Here photography can be an act of concealing the self underneath what is created as sacred - a moment of strange stillness which prolongs the diving into divinity by creating its long frozen impact.

Such a representation brings forth subtle observations around medium, method and the act of reasoning around the subject itself. There is a fine line within the photographed self that provides information about the figure as breathing, real subject as 'staged,' trying to invoke a memory and yet

negotiate a distance with the traditional sculptures of 'Virgin Mary.' What has this breathing subject got to do with the (reproduced) photographs of the traditional sculptures? One may ask. Or can the camera portray a breathing subject like a painted sculpture? There are subtle and yet distinct gaps between these elements here. Both the facts get construed as real and exist simultaneously on the same plane.

The innocent and altruistic portrayal of Julia as 'Virgin Mary' enhances human emotions of surrender, touch, submission and sacrifice, which have been identified as *feminine* qualities in the history (of Christianity). The history also deifies these emotions (while dismissing others, including sexuality as 'negative') to construe the figure as sacred. A feminist history of women's art reconciles all that which has been eliminated or negated to represent and re-write about femininity as a more humane subject. At times 'self-representation' is the best suited conduit for such assertions of which Julia is well aware.

However, in her representations, Julia does not diminish the need or the impact of these emotions. She rather emphasizes upon them through the created light, poetic subtlety of gestures in poise and yet simultaneously creates an authority of removing such a mask. She does not delve into the loud or cathartic which can be equally significant human elements within the self; but these expressions get highlighted in her later series of works where she indulges to understand the *possessed* women or those in *trance* on the streets and temples of India.

It is important to understand Julia's journey within the self or more correctly 'femininity' through the medium of photography as she is able to illuminate the need and the impact of the 'frozen' moment as valuable to human psychology. Here she transgresses the framed identity of 'photography as a medium for documentation or journalism.'

Probably self reflection is the most critical strategy for upbringing an edge about the (feminine) self. For example searching the layers rather than a singular core that construe the self could be a playful attempt for marking all the understated qualities that create a human make-up.

To observe certain details in the works of Julia - its larger body extends dimension on sexuality. The series in focus brings about an expression of entropy as related to human emotion. Transgression may invoke pain (too much pain may elude its interest) and so the separation from the mask of the divine qualities. Her right hand rests on the heart while she literally removes the mask which must have become one with her personal self. There is an unlocking of a certain truth that prevails in most of us individuals here – the ordinary, the mundane, the divinity and recognition of its illusion or the need to know what remains 'unknown' about the self. If that is goodness, or emotions that heal then let it prevail. Julia does not question these. She allows the sacred within, she shifts and returns to her search again in the natural forms of trees and stones – the 'created' vulvas or mother goddesses, and that which created the mystery around the feminine identity.

Julia is from Spain. She has been living and working between Madrid and India for the past five years.