

I Challenge You to Love Me
a traveling retrospective 1975 - 2024
Diana Blok

DIANA BLOK

Dit retrospectief toont in chronologische volgorde de belangrijkste series en thema's uit het oeuvre van Diana Blok van de afgelopen vijftig jaar. Haar werk laat een nieuwsgierige en open geest zien, die tijdens haar reizen vol empathie naar de ander kijkt, maar ook de blik naar binnen richt. Fantasieën, magie en rauwe realiteit wisselen elkaar af. Voor Blok bestaan geen vastomlijnde esthetische principes, geen oordelen over seksuele voorkeur, gender, geloof of huidskleur. Niet alleen gebruikt zij de fotocamera als middel maar ook taal, film en theater.

Geboren in Montevideo (Uruguay, 1952) met een Nederlandse vader en een Argentijnse moeder, groeit Blok op in verschillende Latijns-Amerikaanse landen. In de jaren zeventig vestigt zij zich in Amsterdam. Daar begint de ontdekkingsreis naar haar identiteit, met de camera als metgezel. Als autodidact portretfotograaf richt ze eerst de blik op zichzelf, visualiseert mythes en dromen en legt vormen van verwantschap tussen mensen vast. Blok herkent haar eigen verhaal in dat van anderen. In landen waar slechts één seksuele norm geldt en elk ander gedrag wordt onderdrukt, maakt ze indringende portretten. Gender en verbeelding spelen een belangrijke rol in haar fotografisch werk en in haar filminstallatie. Voor Blok is fotografie een ritueel maar ook een archief vol herinneringen dat haar in staat stelt haar eigen afkomst te ontstutten. Haar blik keert zich tijdens de coronapandemie weer naar binnen wat leidt tot wonderlijke registraties van bladeren als metaforen van het leven.

Het werk van Blok gaat in essentie over dat ene bijzondere moment waarin iemand zich blootgeeft, gezien wil worden, gewaardeerd en bemind.

I Challenge You to Love Me

This retrospective exhibition presents, in chronological order, the most important series and themes in the oeuvre of Diana Blok over the last 50 years. Her work shows an inquisitive and open mind, empathising with others as she travels, but also looking inward. Fantasy, magic and raw reality alternate. For Blok there are no fixed aesthetic principles, no judgements about sexual preference, gender, religion or the colour of the skin. She uses not only the camera, but also language, film and theatre.

Born in Montevideo (Uruguay, 1952) to a Dutch father and an Argentine mother, Blok grows up in several Latin American countries. She settles in Amsterdam in the 1970s. There, with the camera as her companion, she begins the journey of discovering her own identity. A self-taught portrait photographer, she initially focuses on herself. She visualises myths and dreams and captures forms of kinship between people. Blok recognises her own story in the stories of others. In countries where there is only one sexual norm, and all other forms of behaviour are suppressed, she creates portraits that are striking and powerful. Gender and imagination play an important role in her photographic productions and film installation. For Blok, photography is a ritual, but also an archive full of memories that allows her to mind her own origins. During the corona pandemic, her gaze turns inward again, resulting in wondrous registrations of leaves as metaphor for life.

In essence, Blok's work is about that one special moment in which someone reveals themselves, wants to be seen, to be appreciated and to be loved.



This retrospective exhibition, first shown at the Cobra Museum (NL), presents in chronological order, the most important series and themes in the oeuvre of Diana Blok over the last 50 years. Her work shows an inquisitive and open mind, empathizing with others as she travels, but also looking inward.

Fantasy, magic and raw reality alternate. For Blok there are no fixed aesthetic principles, no judgements about sexual preference, gender, religion or the colour of the skin. She uses not only the camera, but also language, film and theatre.

This presentation is a impression of the exhibition which consists of circa 135 photographs, 5 films and a video installation (80 m2) and was shown on 150 running meters of wall space (in a 650 m2 exhibition space).



Self portrait in Arles - 1982

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This exhibition was curated by
Hripsimé Visser, former curator of photography at the
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, together with Diana Blok



Early work

1975 - 1979

The more intimate and passionate the expression the deeper you can feel it
(Diana Blok, 1977)

In 1974, Diana Blok moves from Mexico City, where she studies and works as a model, to Amsterdam. It is there, as a woman on her own, that she feels independent and free to explore her own identity for the first time. She discovers that photography is the perfect tool.

Her early self-portraits are shown here for the first time, and are serious, almost tangible portraits of the young photographer. Of particular note are two images of her first muse, Flor, which seem to



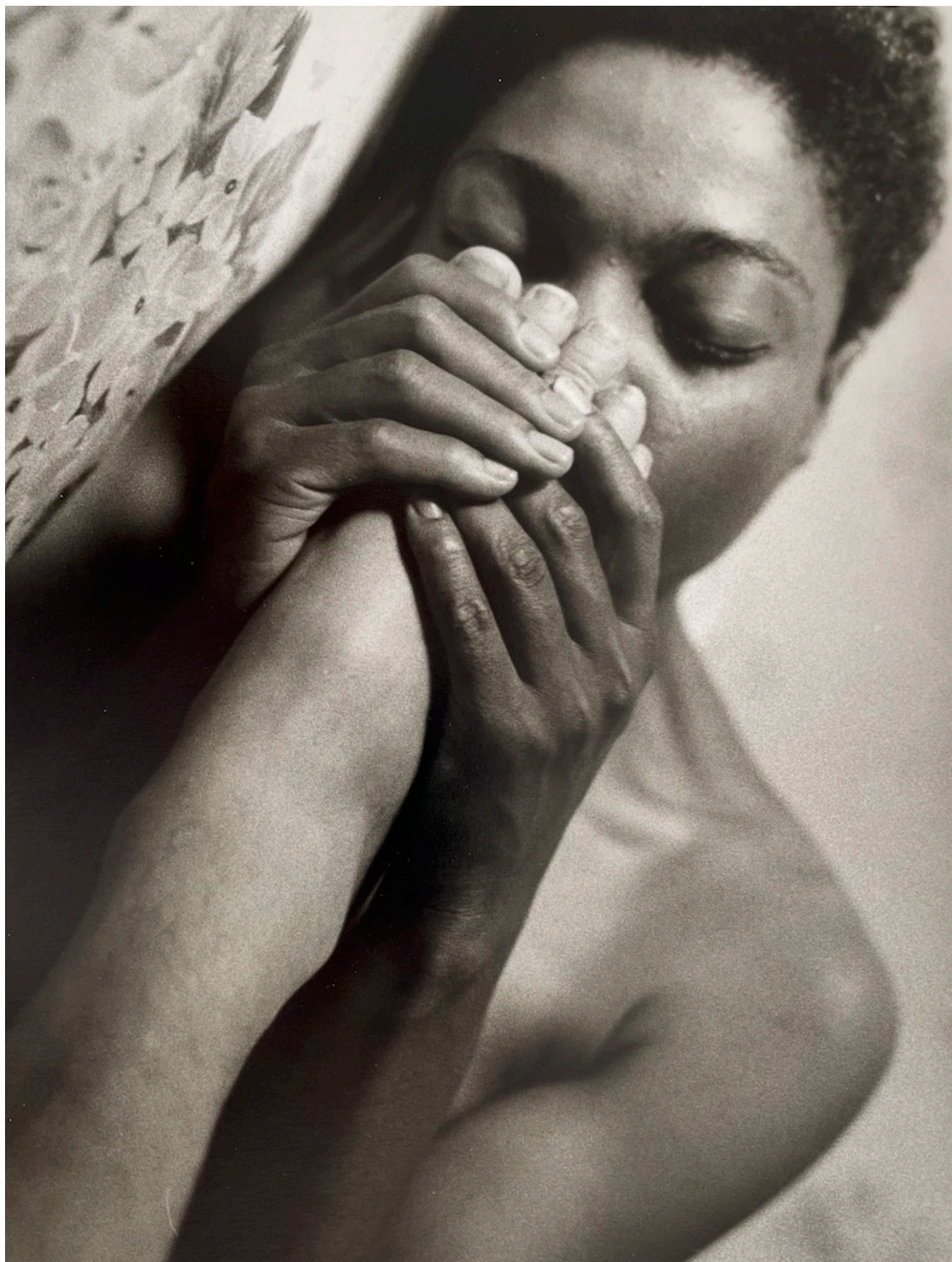
Self-portrait with Lilies, 1976



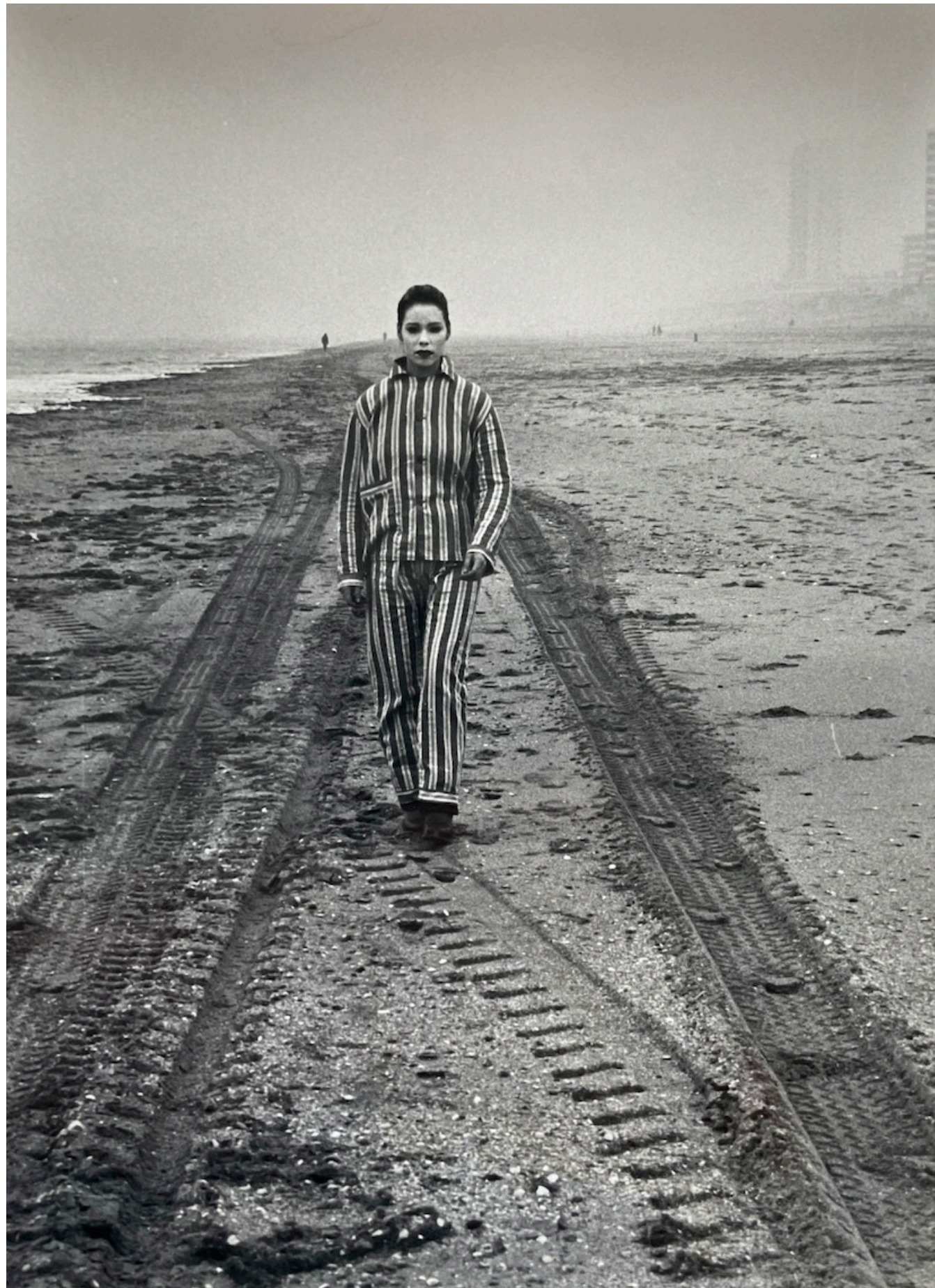
No Future, 1977



Self-portrait in Double Exposure, 1975



Untitled, 1995



Flashback in the Mist, 1976

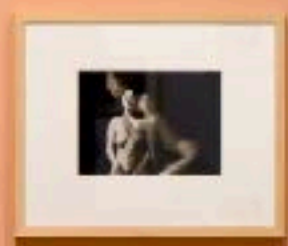


Hallo Diana, When you have a
look to the mirror you can
see that's a pity, but we didn't
continue. Sufi-camp was too much
for me, had to carry heavy things,
time was short, etc. But I totally
hope that we can do something
together for the film. What about
you and the end of my
of September

Invisible Forces

1979 - 1981

Diana Blok and Marlo Broekmans



In the 1980s, Diana Blok worked on two pioneering projects on intimacy and relationships, both of which resulted in publication. The first, *Invisible Forces* (1979 - 1981), was created in collaboration with photographer Marlo Broekmans. Blok and Broekmans live and work together, depicting their fantasies and giving female eroticism a stage.

The working process, developing concepts and staging the photographs have the signature of the two creators. This was a rare phenomenon in photography at the time. *Invisible Forces* is almost immediately exhibited, collected and published worldwide.



Untitled, 1981



Double Bind, 1980



The Mirror, 1979



Horses, 1980



The Bite, 1980

Blood Ties and Other Bonds

1985 - 1990

They pose naked, but the expression in their eyes is dressed

(Elena Poniatowska, Mexico 1990)



LAUGHTER

Three men, 1968. The three men are standing and holding a fourth man horizontally in front of them. The man being held is positioned horizontally, with his head to the right and feet to the left. The three men holding him are standing behind him, with their hands supporting his body. The man on the left is looking towards the camera, the man in the middle is looking slightly to the right, and the man on the right is looking towards the camera. The man being held has his head tilted back and eyes closed.

LAUGHTER

Three men, 1968. The three men are standing and holding a fourth man horizontally in front of them. The man being held is positioned horizontally, with his head to the right and feet to the left. The three men holding him are standing behind him, with their hands supporting his body. The man on the left is looking towards the camera, the man in the middle is looking slightly to the right, and the man on the right is looking towards the camera. The man being held has his head tilted back and eyes closed.



In *Blood Ties & Other Bonds* (1990), eroticism gives way to forms of kinship and love, both between generations within families as between friends and lovers. Remarkable is Blok's approach to the human body, an explicit critique of the idealized image we know from the media.

In *Blood Ties & Other Bonds*, for the first time, the focus is on the people portrayed, who pose for the photographer with an open and comfortable gaze.



Portrait of my Mother and Father, 1987



Mother with Six Daughters, 1986



Christmas Twins, 1986



Mother and Daughter, 1986



Mother and Son, 1987



Father and Daughter, 1987



door Don Bloch

Ze was acht toen ze voor het eerst de macht van foto's voelde. Haar keuze voor de fotografie was een keuze voor zelfontdekking. Maar nu hebben

zelfportretten vol decors en symboliek plaats gemaakt voor portretten van mensen die een werkelijkheid belichamen die je eerder zou kunnen vinden dan verzinnen. „Ik moest ophouden te wroeten in mijn eigen verbeelding, want die had voor mijn gevoel niets meer te bieden.”

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BLOCH

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Diana's vader is
land van de voorste
Worldwreck: hij r
Turkise ambassade
standplaats Argem
Enzwa door tot

10 Entfield Road
Portsmouth
Co. Dorset
BT55 7PL
Tel. 0705 400130

2nd September 1987

Dear Mr. Bloch,

I recently visited the 'Baby Blike' exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery and was very impressed by your collection of photographs. The exhibition came to my attention through the article in 'The Guardian' (2nd July), and it was 'Mother and Daughter' which caught my attention, even more than John Caplan's witty outrageous 'Self Portrait'. At the exhibition itself, it was exactly the same, your pictures stood head and shoulders above the rest.

Offerings from other photographers seemed to make a baseline for the outrageous, neglecting any sense of what is pleasing to the eye. One was left feeling 'Oh, so you've been outrageous - where do you go from here?'

which implies an acceptance of one another as physical beings. At a time when our country is being embroiled with the horror of child sexual abuse, a frightening failure to respect one another's bodies, your photos came as something of a refreshing antidote. For me they represent a hope of a time when we can all be much more open and accepting about our bodies, without all the attendant exploitation and nuances of Western society. 'Mother and Daughter' achieves this without, as to speak, 'showing anything' and 'Mother, Father and Son' does so while at the same time challenging expectative images of women by having the mother clothed. In 'Mother and six daughters' you achieve this intimacy again yet by having the mother clothed you seem to

Sequences

self-portrait 1985 - 1989

I sought to redefine the prevailing iconography of woman

(Diana Blok, 1984)



One of Blok's sources of inspiration is painting. This is most evident in *Sequences*, small photo series from the 1980s. She stages scenes and captures them in multiple shots, avoiding the decisive moment of a single photograph, and time lapse becomes important.

Gender and sexuality play a slightly surreal game. Blok re-interprets certain images of women in well-known works by artists such as Titian Vecellio, Francisco Goya and Édouard Manet. In later work, the staging takes on constantly changing forms. Thus in her photographs for the Expo 92 in Seville, Dutch stereotypes become part of magically realistic scenes against a typically Dutch cloudy sky.



Sacred and Profane Love, 1985



Self-portrait Sequence with Flora
as Mother and Father, 1975



Leda and the Swan, 1985



His Last Supper , 1989



Dejeuner sur l'herbe, 1989

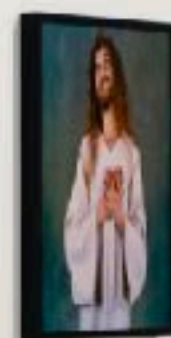
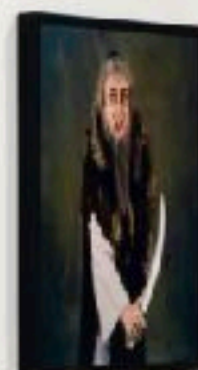
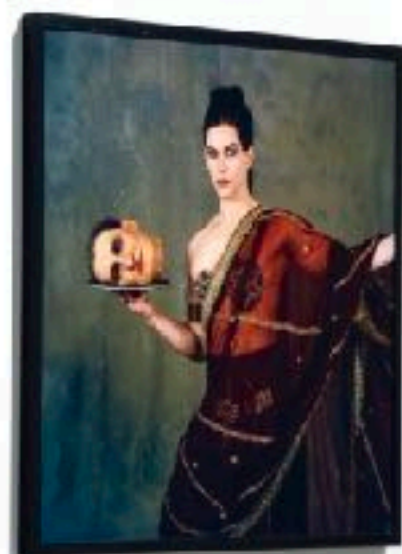
Adventures in Cross-Casting

1997 - 2014

Amsterdam, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia

My approach to staged photographs always feels like a ritual

(Diana Blok, 1997)



For *Adventures in Cross-Casting* (1997), a collaboration with novelist Don Bloch, Blok asks theatre actors which role of the opposite sex they would most like to play. The result is imaginative transformations, portraits in which the actors present themselves self-consciously, vulnerably, but always convincingly, as the person they would have liked to be. It is an exciting interplay between gender fluidity and imagination.



The Toreador in Steven Jeffries' *Carmen* / Alida Neslo, 1997



The Dumb Waiter incorporated by Marian Luif, 1996



Male Wet Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, 1996

Adventures in Cross-Casting Brasil

2013

My approach to staged photographs always feels like a ritual

(Diana Blok, 1997)





Fernando Pessoa / Iara Pietricovsky, 2014



Marie Antoinette / Enrique Diaz. 2014



Frida Kahlo / Alamo Faco, 2014

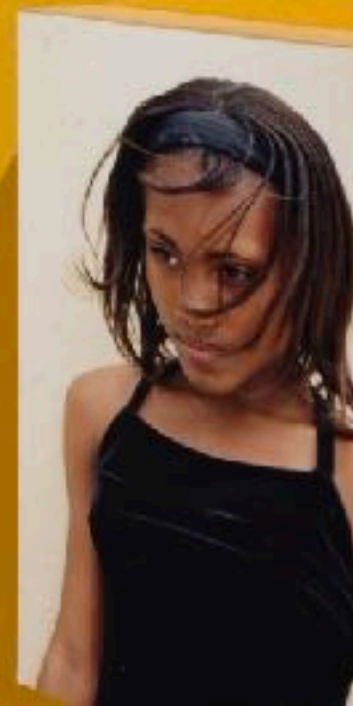
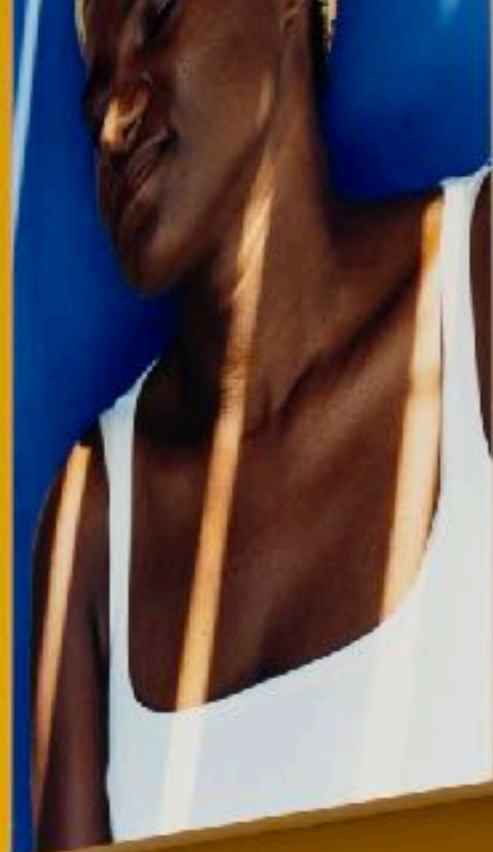
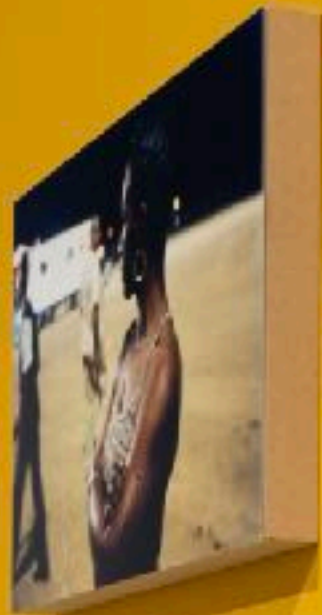
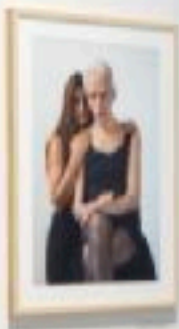
Ay Dios

2000

Curaçao, Corazon, Curación



My approach to staged photography
always feels like a risk.
—JENNIFER WATSON, 2017



Ay Dios (2001) is her most documentary work. It is a raw and compassionate account of a four-month artist in residence stay in Curaçao,

The publication includes powerful texts by Dutch author Jan Brokken, then living on the island.



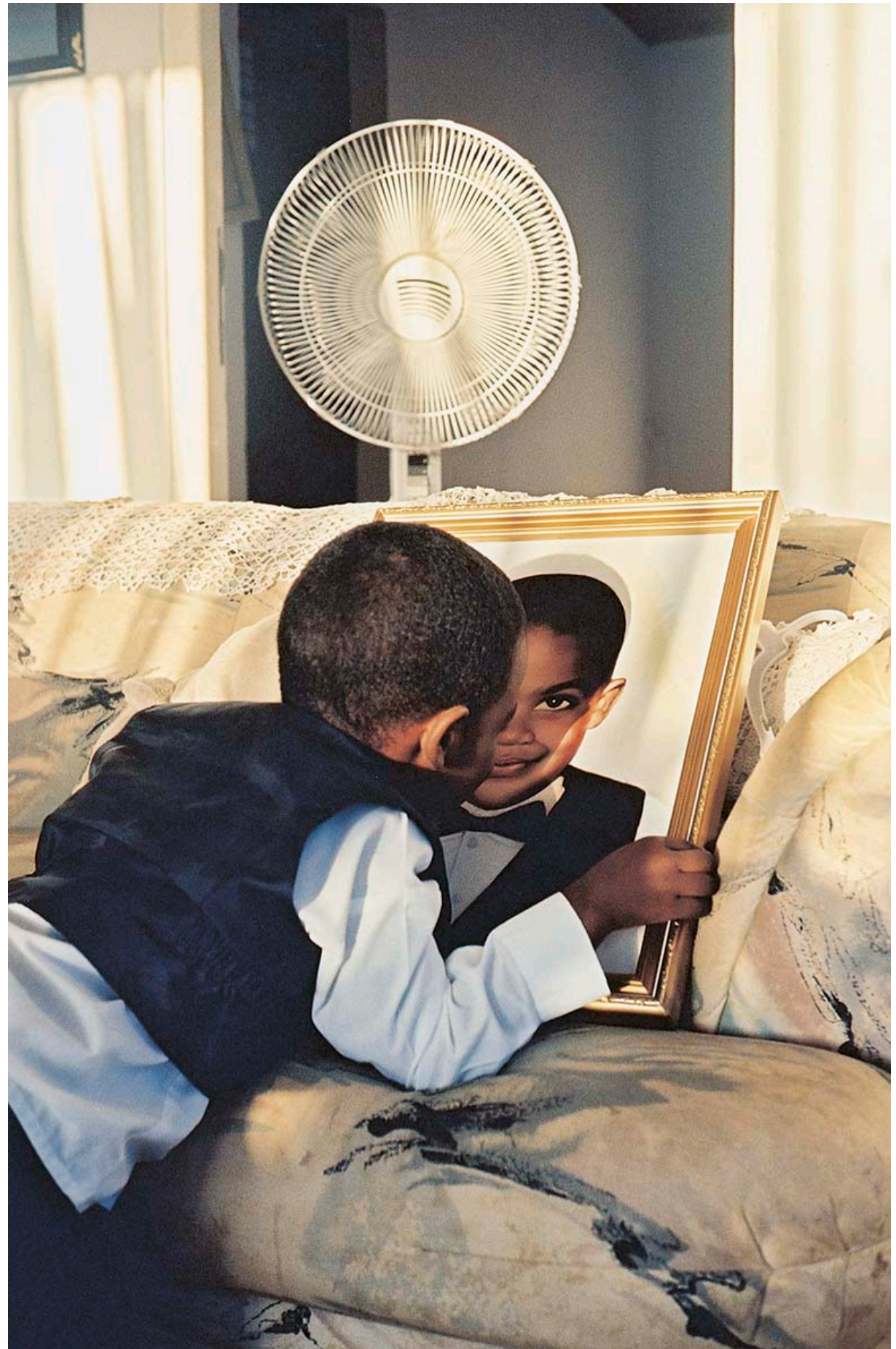
Lucia de Curacao, 2000

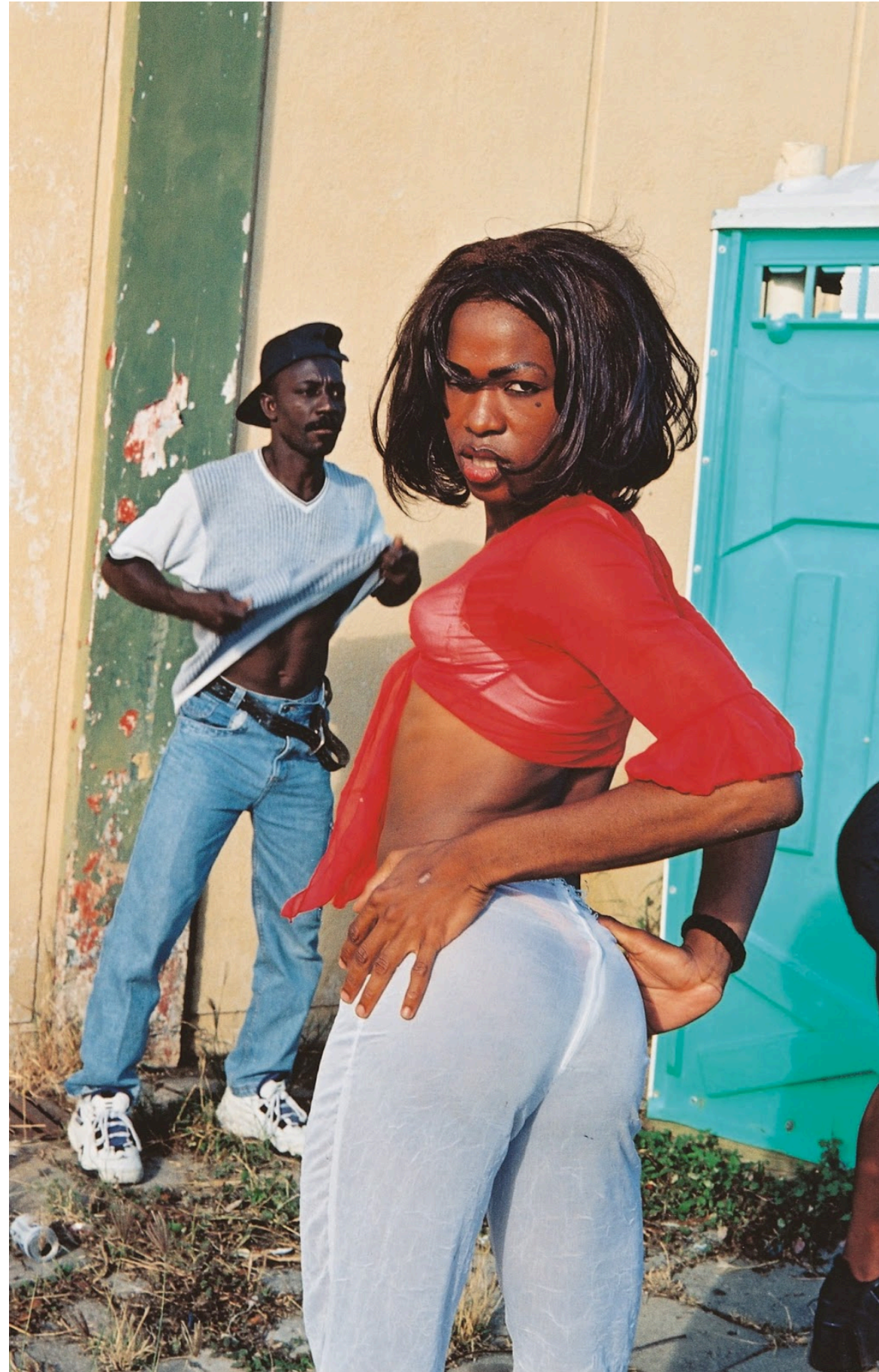


School Girls, 2000



Secret Mirror, 2000





Travesti, 2000

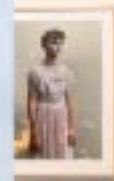
See through us

Turkey, 2007 - 2010

*We are the mirror, as well as the face in it.
We are the sweet cold water and the jar that pours.
We are pain and what cures pain.*

(Jalal ad-Din Rumi (philosopher and poet, Afghanistan, 1207 – Turkey, 1273))

SEE THROUGH US



I CHALLENGE YOU TO LOVE ME



See Through Us (Turkey, 2009) and *I Challenge You to Love Me* (Brazil, 2014) give people with different sexual orientations and preferences not only a stage, but also a voice.

The publications include moving interviews with those portrayed, many of whom are forced to live in the shadows. Blok's photographs are remarkable for their balance of distance and proximity, confrontation and modesty.



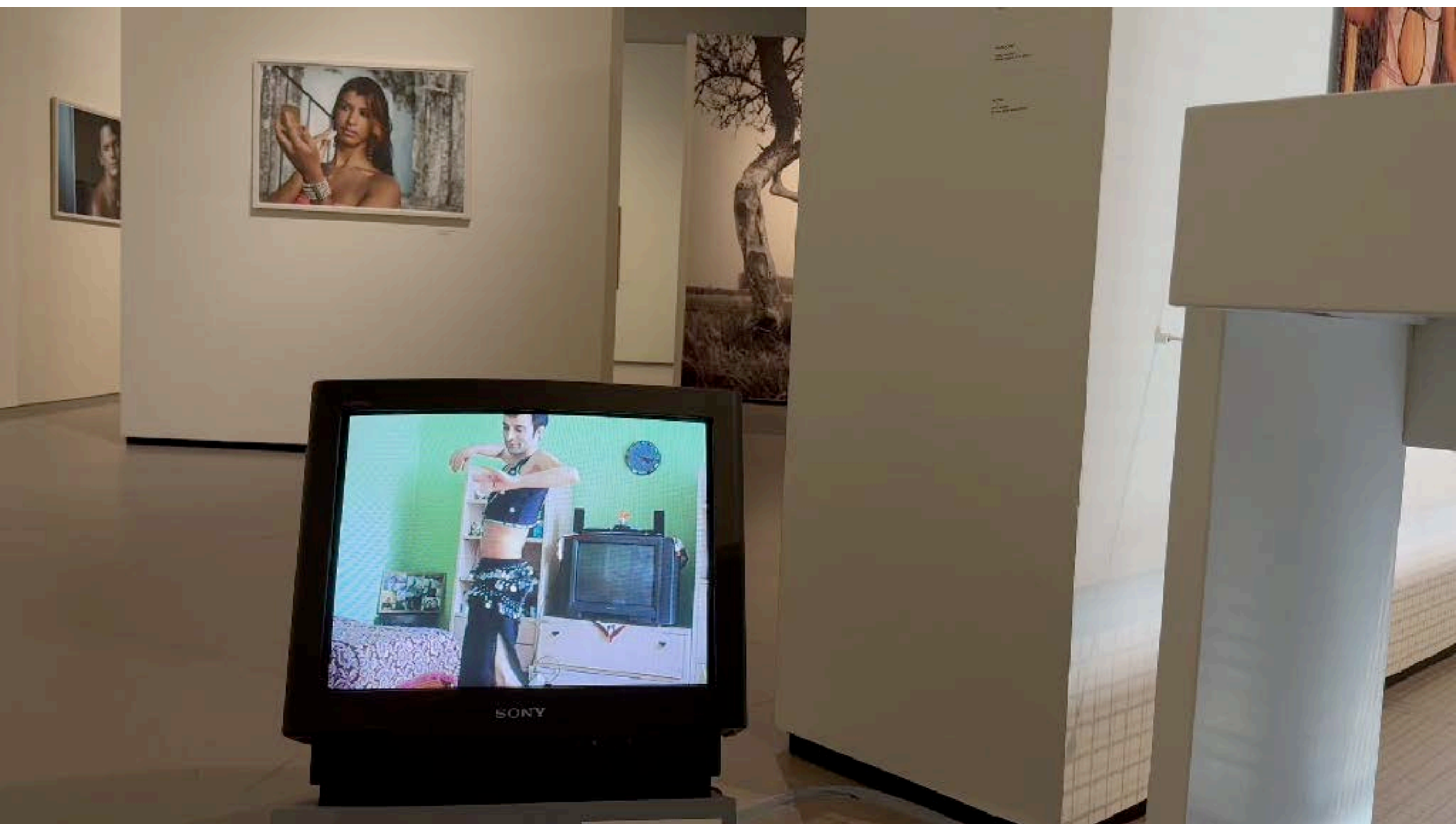
Buse, 2007



Oyku, 2007



Can, 2007



[Play Video](#)



Yazemin Oz, 2007



Nazlican, 2007

I Challenge You to Love Me

Brasil, 2011 - 2014

We must have the freedom to remain true to our unique individuality, at every stage of our lives

(Diana Blok, 2014)

*We are the mirror, as well as the face in it.
We are the sweet cold water and the jar that pours.
We are pain and what cures pain.*

*Navid on display (photography and postcard art for film)
Afghanistan, 1971 - Turkey - Turkey, 1973*



This body of work gave the title to the exhibition *I Challenge You to Love Me*. It is inspired by a Brazilian-Portuguese text *Eu te desafio a me amar*, tattooed onto a trans man's outstretched arm. 'I challenge you to love me' is a heart-felt invitation that inspired Blok to make these portraits.



I Challenge You to Love Me, 2014



Tabata Rios, 2011



Carlos, 2013



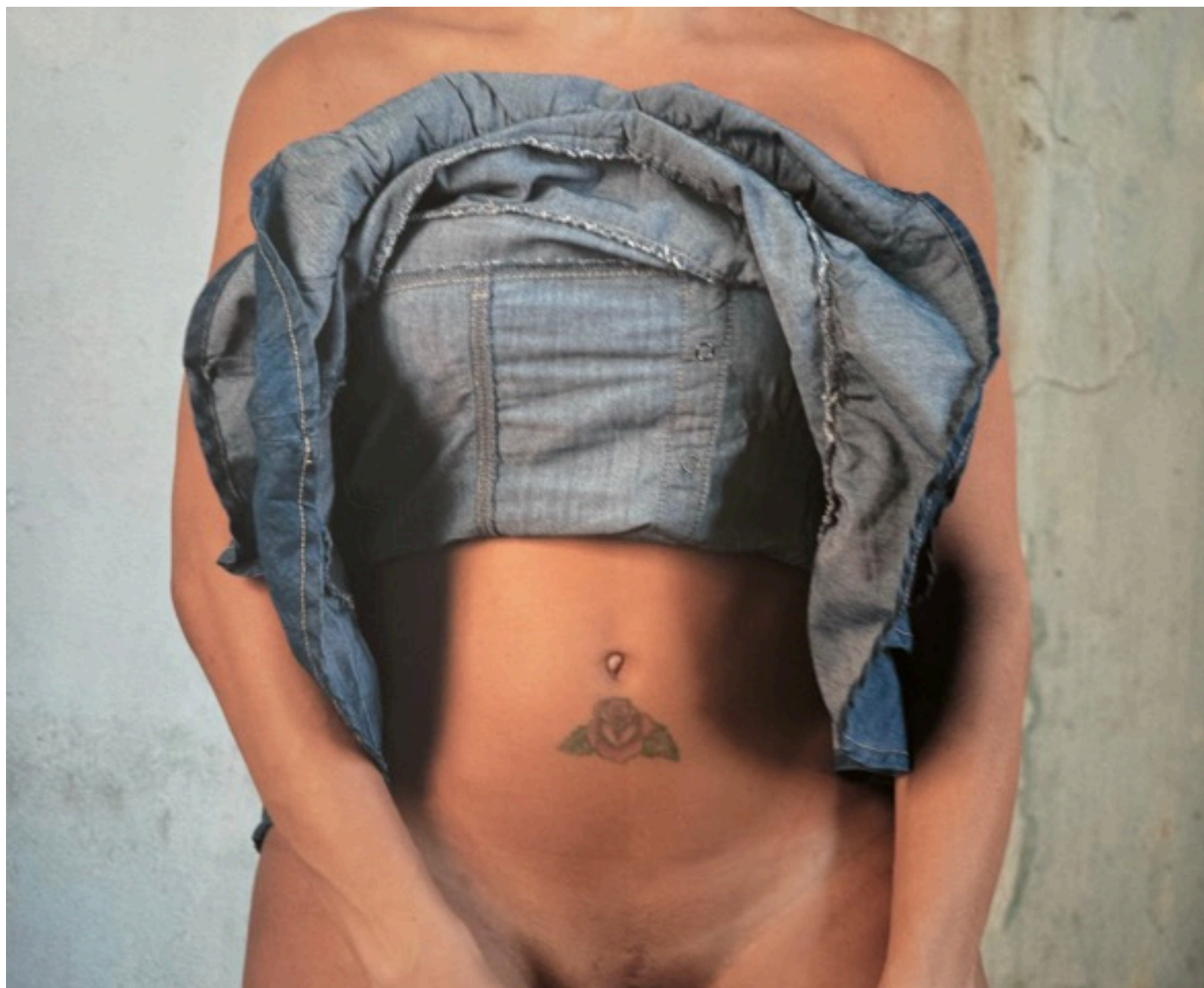
Ricco, 2011



Ketje, 2013



Loira Luana, 2011



L Shows Her Recent Transformation, 2011

Time Tells

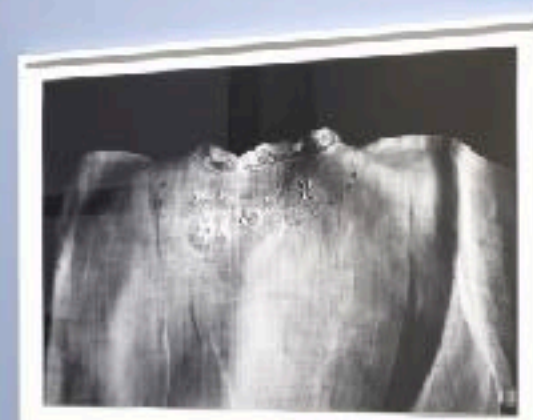
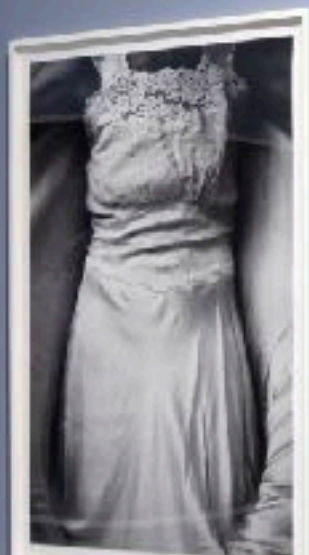
A family history, 2005 - 2012

*The many changes of universes, in spite of the suffering caused by what is left behind,
become an opportunity for renewal, of being transient, open to change and endless transformation.*

(Diana Blok / Oguthu Muraya, 2024)



TIME TELLS



Het verleden ontduken

De publicatie *Black Ties & Other Boudoirs* opent met een portret van Diana Vreeland (1903-1989). Na haar dood bleef het haar vroege jaren, rijk aan fantasie en creativiteit, een geheim. Het boek ontdekt haar eigen afkomst, haar familie, haar mode- en levenswijze, en de rol die zij speelde in de mode-industrie. Het boek is een ode aan haar levenswijze en de manier waarop zij de wereld van de mode veranderde.

Het ontwerp is in dit boek herzien naar het spoor van de jaren '50. De levenswijze van haar jongere zus, Doro, wordt hierin herontdekt. Het boek is een ode aan haar levenswijze en de manier waarop zij de wereld van de mode veranderde.

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Unpacking the Past

Black Ties & Other Boudoirs opens with a portrait of Diana Vreeland (1903-1989). After her death, her early years, rich in imagination and creativity, remained a mystery. The book uncovers her family, her life, and her role in the fashion industry. It is a tribute to her life and the way she changed the world of fashion.

The design in this book has been revised to follow the path of the 1950s. The life of her younger sister, Doro, is rediscovered here. The book is a tribute to her life and the way she changed the world of fashion.

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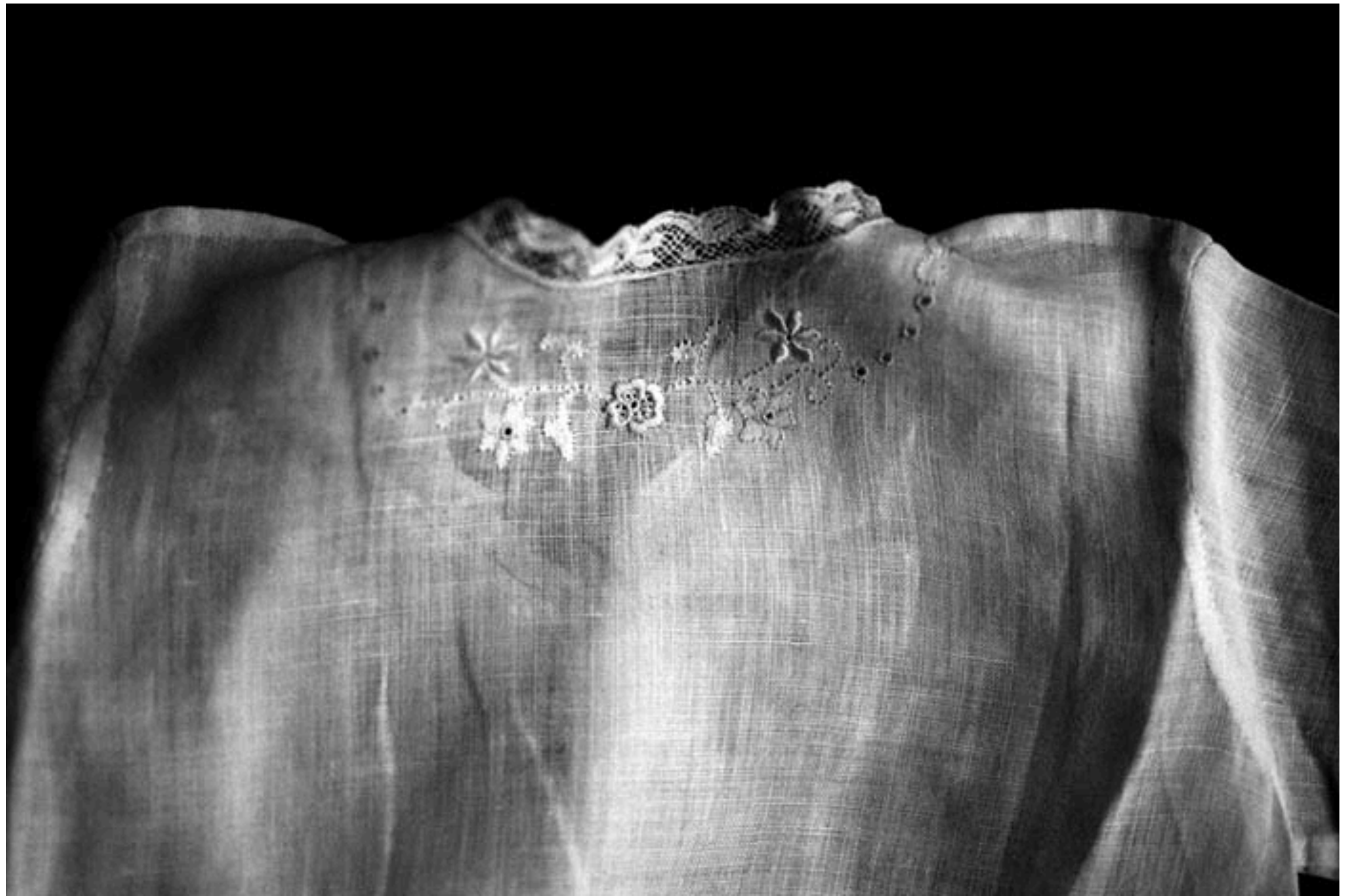
Following the death of her mother in 2005, Blok focuses her research on her own background and family. Her mother, an elegant woman, designed and made clothes for herself and her daughters. These garments are transformed in evocative black-and-white still lives. The luxurious fabrics, embroidery and lace are subtle signs of refined sensuality.

An encounter in Istanbul leads her to trace her Jewish father's miraculous life. To better understand her origins, she visits Jerusalem and takes detailed photographs of the Wailing Wall and the wishes written by pilgrims.

The results are initially disappointing; the images do not evoke the emotions she experienced at the wall. It is only when the photos accidentally appear on her computer screen in negative form that image and feeling coincide.



Self-portrait with Sisters in Mother's Dresses, 2006











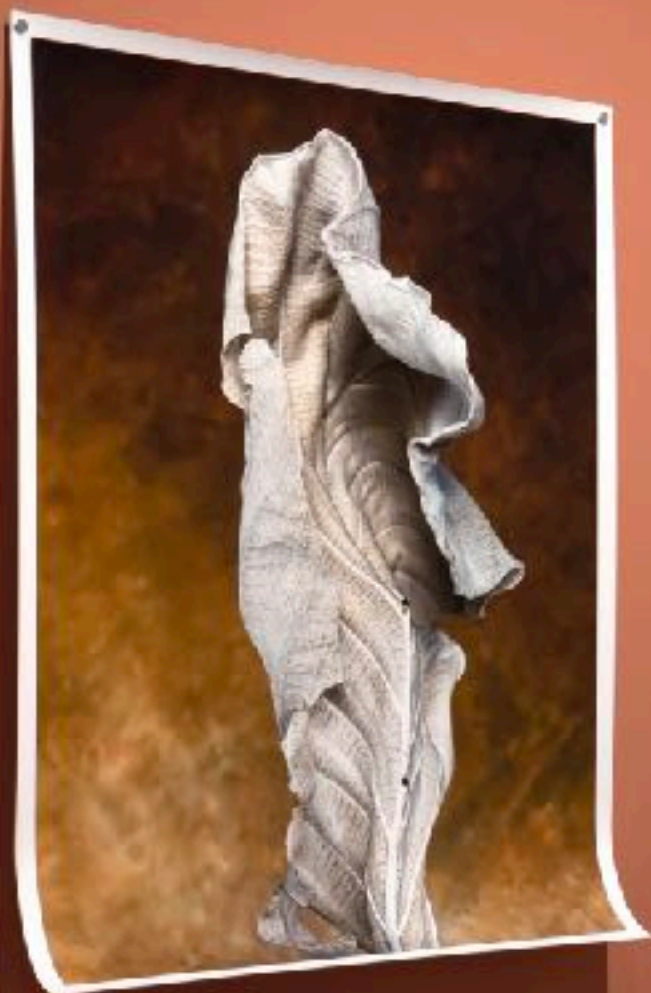
Living leaves

2022

Every fallen leaf becomes a conversation piece

(Diana Blok, 2022)

Every fallen leaf becomes a conversation piece.
Diane Blak - April, 2022



During a stay in Brazil, Blok photographs leaves at the end of their life cycle. Captured with a simple iPhone, the highly magnified autumn leaves become metaphors for the lives lost during the corona pandemic.

They are depicted as seductive sculptures, dancing bodies and mythological creatures of the imagination. This project, entitled *Living Leaves* (2024), is published as a limited edition cahier designed by Esther Noyons.









Living Leaves
Diana Blok



The Real Surreal

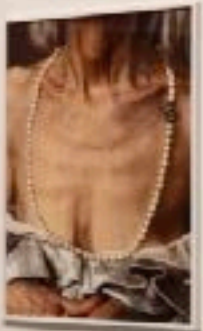
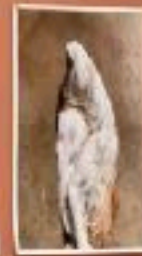
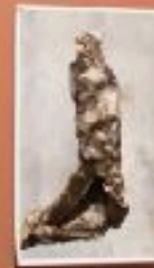
1985 -

Trees are forced into resignation; they need their roots. Men do not. We breathe light and covet the heavens.

(Amin Maalouf, *Origins - A memoir*, 2004)

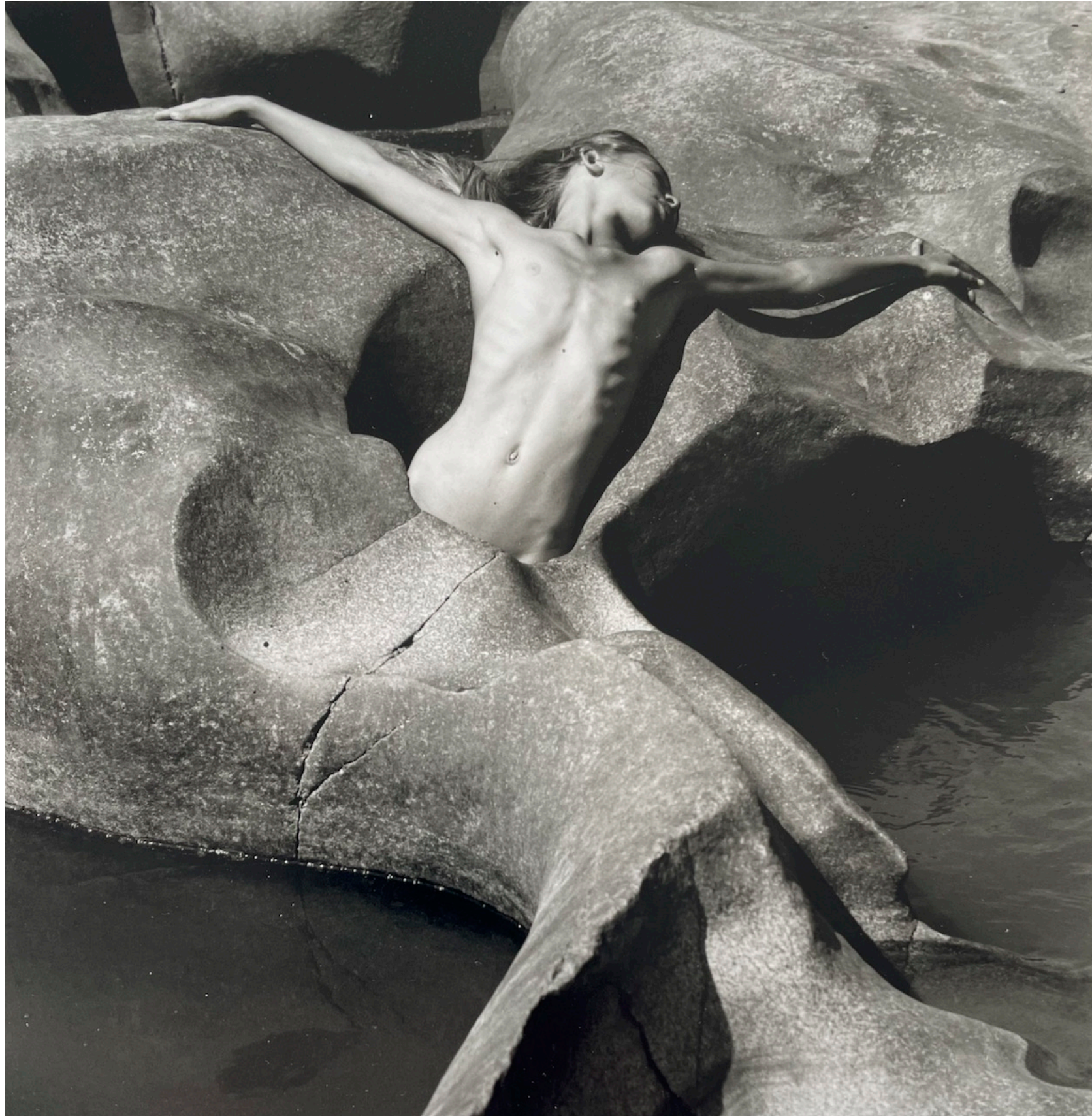


Every figure with its own character and place.
1960s, 1970s



Many of the encounters with people that Diana Blok photographs during her travels result in friendships. As the daughter of a diplomat, she lives in different countries where she is exposed to and becomes familiar with different cultures.

Her work reveals an artist with a sharp eye for people and situations that are surprising and unusual, as well as for objects with a magical or surreal dimension.



Little Venus, 1985



La Sagrada Familia, Sevilla 1992



Herring Eater, Sevilla 1992



Earth Angel, 2005



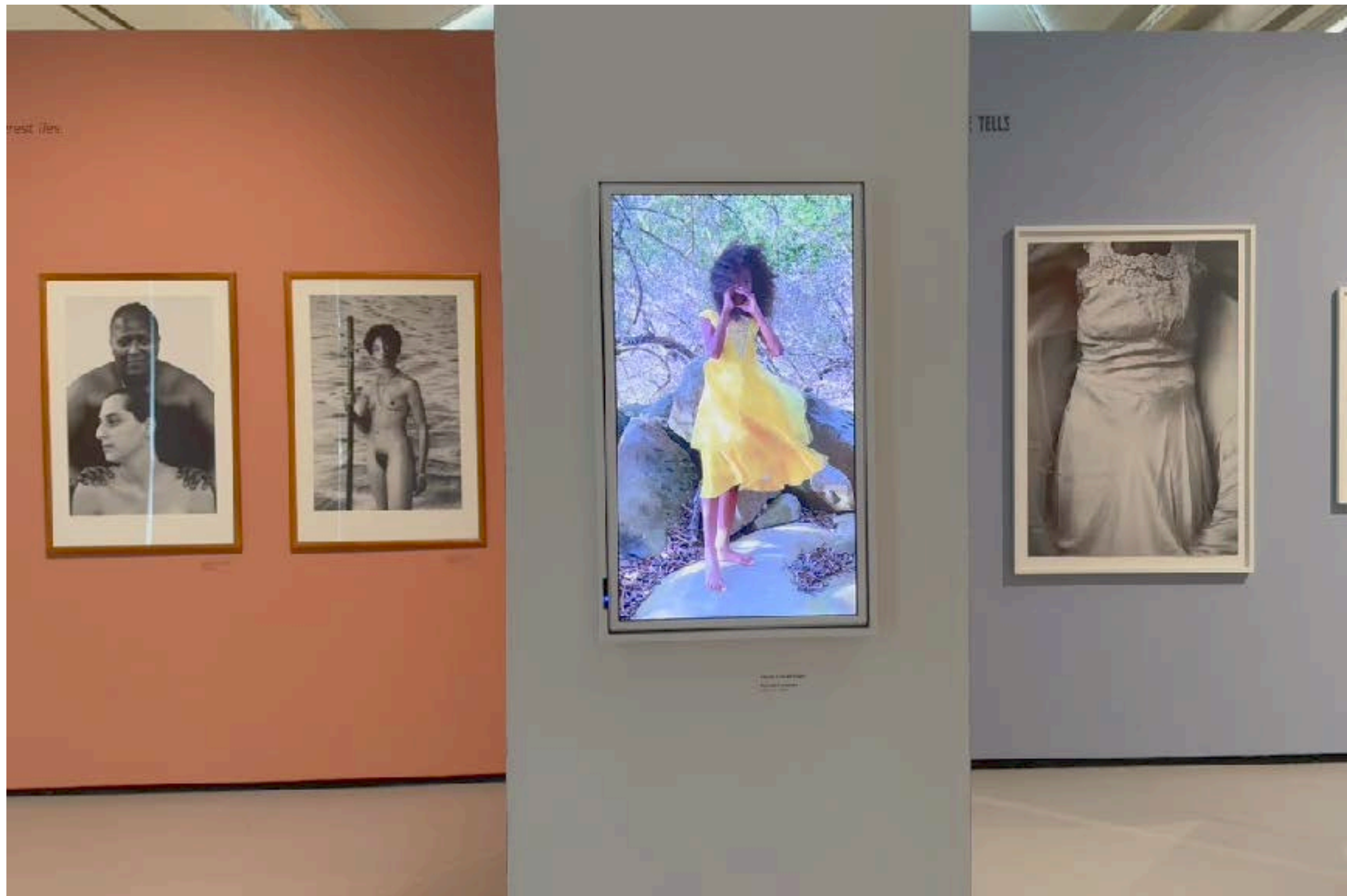
World Upside-down, 1987



Mother I, 1988



Incorporating Juliet, 2022



Play Video

The Return of Ophelia

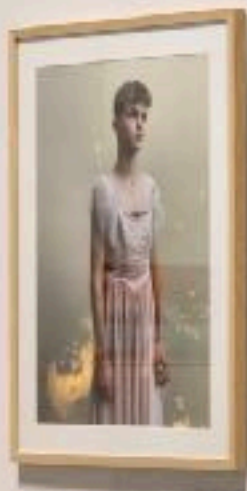
Gender Monologues

2016 -

a six screen video installation
featuring twelve international actors

*My approach to staged photographs
always feels like a ritual.*

Diana Elzh - Amsterdam, 1997



A media installation that shifts the binary cultural and gender conventions in an impressive and light-hearted manner, *Gender Monologues* is the continuation of the previous photographic series *Adventures in Cross-Casting*.

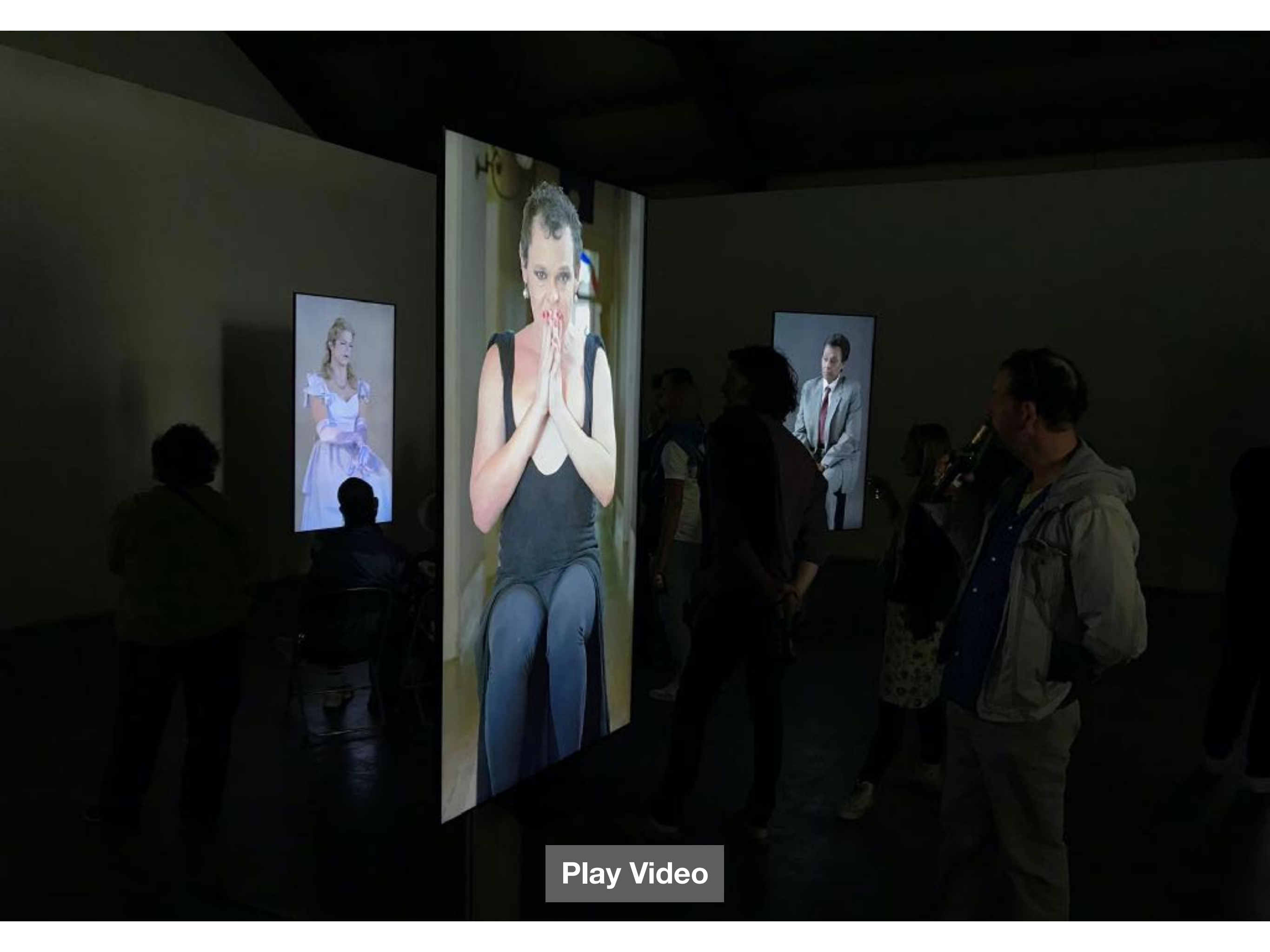
Twelve life-size video portraits of remarkable actors from different backgrounds, appear on six life size screens. Identifying themselves with their favorite character of the opposite sex, they each perform a six-minute monologue. Their texts are taken from or inspired by historical and contemporary theatre and literary figures.

In their monologues, they give free rein to their imagination, incorporating stereotypes and surprising the audience with their unusual interpretations of these characters.



[Play Video](#)

Pina Bausch (Levi de Kleer) with Orfeo Negro (Claron McFadden), Gender Monologues 2022



Play Video



[Play Video](#)

Martin Luther King Jr. (Grace Passo) with His Mother (Matheus Nachtergaele), Gender Monologues 2016

Links

Website: <http://www.dianablok.com/>

Gender Monologues: <https://www.gendermonologues.com/>

I Challenge You to Love Me : <https://vimeo.com/167531819>

Time Tells: <https://vimeo.com/video/647776115>