

I met you before you started making films. Originally you wrote about contemporary art and we published your articles in artpress. I would like you to tell me how you came to realize that the camera was your real tool?

I studied art history, then I wanted to get in to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. I had to put together an application, and it consisted mainly of photos and videos. All that came naturally to me. I tried to do a bit of sculpture but I gave up because I'm very clumsy, whereas as soon as I had a camera in my hands I knew what to do with it. It was a means of observing, following on from art criticism. The first time I really did something I liked was when I filmed bare-chested men from my window—a kind of murky scene amidst the trees. They were squatters, virile types, in the Récollets garden. I didn't really know what they were doing, but the sight fascinated me. There was this tension and, at the same time, nothing was happening. When gays see this video they think it's a cruising scene in a wood, but in fact they were men doing work. And yet you get the feeling that something louche is going on.

I belong to the generation that saw the appearance of those first little digital cameras that produced a good image and that were easy to carry around. You have the same kind of relation to this camera as an artist does when making quick sketches with a pencil. But now I no longer feel the need to have a recording apparatus with me at all times.

Did you have any models in the field of video art and cinema?

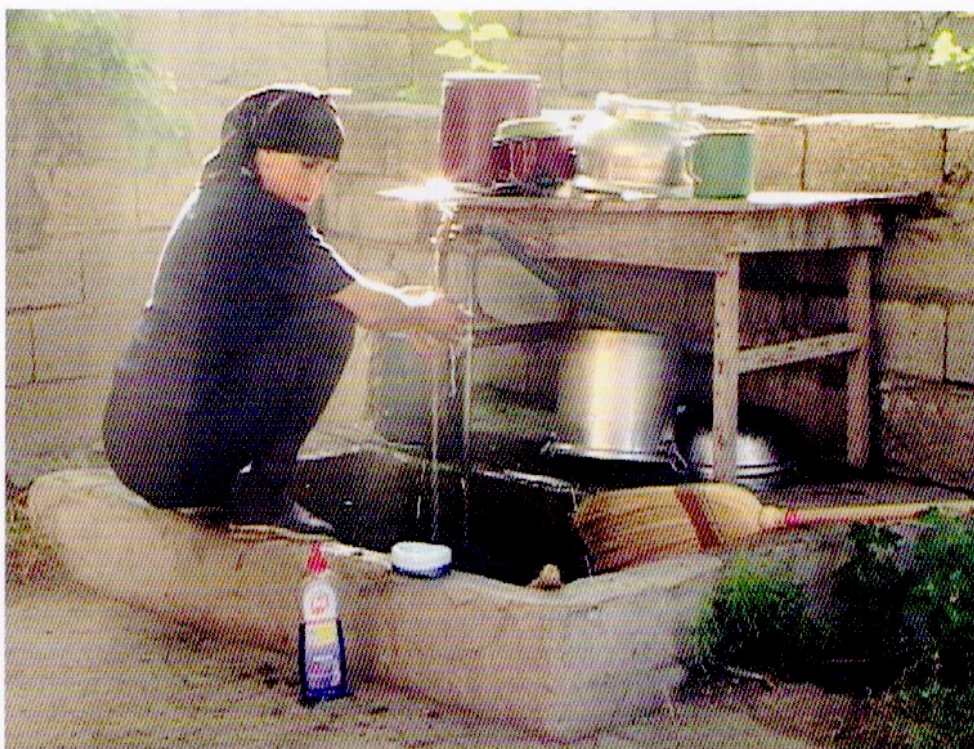
Warhol's film *Chelsea Girls* made a big impression, and is still with me.

That little film on the squatters is the first in a long and ongoing series. I really liked your exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. (1) Visitors went from one set of screens to another, from one masculine world to another. All very different: a mosque, a soccer pitch, a sidewalk out of town.

There are links between all these communities: the way they position their bodies, a violence about them that interests me. These men form tight-knit groups, although you can feel this powerful tension, between them and with their entourage. This tension can be viewed as sexual.

You choose the people you film in accordance with your interest in the relations between bodies.

Yes, the tension in the relations of seduction, violence, and domination, as in *Kurdish Lover*, where I show tensions in a family where everyone is living on top of



Clarisse Hahn: People on the Line

Cinema of exhibition? Autobiographical cinema? Never mind the definitions, a new kind of cinema is being invented by Clarisse Hahn, a bold and determined young woman who mixes genres. Her camera is like an extension of her body in the way she negotiates the world. But, whether she is exploring her own family or evoking a protesting tribe across the ocean, it's all a matter of finding the right distance. This fall, Hahn has her first theatrical release in France, *Kurdish Lover*: a must-see. At the same time she will be presenting her work *Gerilla* at Jousse Entreprise gallery, and another film, *Los Desnudos*, is showing at Mac/Val to September 23.



- Tu es réchauffée?
- Oui, j'ai chaud maintenant.

everyone else, and because of the surroundings: a very poor region, at war. I film the moments when this tension bursts out, when they sacrifice animals for example, because inflicting violence on the innocent pacifies things, or during discussions, when veiled women turn lewd, saying things like "The donkey's cock in your mother-in-law's ass." This verbal violence and rawness come as a surprise and correct our ideas about the modesty of these veiled women. They show the truth of their lives as women in the countryside.

DANCING BODIES

It is clear from your films and from the photos that sometimes go with them, like the one about the Protestants, that physical movements are very important to you. There are often close-ups of arms, of hands.

In those nineteenth-century portraits of bourgeois, which are portraits of my Protestant family, the figures have a stiffness designed to mask their interiority. They have to appear peaceful and neutral. That's why I decided to focus on the busts. The jackets they wear, their hard collars are like breastplates. Their postures express a closed attitude. Their arms are folded. You notice that one of them, a former soldier, has lost a hand.

You began by being interested in men and it took you a while to turn your attention to young women your own age—people it might be easier to identify with.

Identification was already working with the old people in *L'Hôpital*, but of course it's more obvious with Karima and Ovidie. It's different for *Boyzone*, where it's a desiring gaze directed at men's bodies. There is an obsessive component, which is why *Boyzone* is part of a series. Certain types of men and situations interest me, whereas I feel rejected by some of these situations that I'd like to be a part of.

*I get the impression that you have gradually become closer to your models. In the early days you observed the boys at a distance, and there is still a sequence like that at the beginning of *Kurdish Lover*: bare-chested men are dancing in the summer sun, then the same men are seen in a snowstorm. The camera is distant, as in *Boyzone*. Later on in the film though, you are there with your camera amidst all the people. We don't see you in the image, but we hear your voice. You are there in the scene.*

I filmed those men who were dancing because I was attracted by the way they formed a whole, while exhibiting their bodies. I took an interest in these groups of men who are in Turkish cafés and I approached them, and when you get close like

that, then you're no longer in a relation of fascination. Then I got really close to one of them. I found out that he was a Kurd and I wanted to show him images I'd shot to see what he thought, and that's how we met, Oktay and I. He helped me get in touch with Kurdish associations and political parties, and I started filming. I have at least a hundred and fifty hours of rushes that I've never used. I only used what I shot in Kurdistan with him, apart from the images of dancing bodies right at the beginning.

There's real interaction between film and life. That's what I like. When you make a documentary film, it's also to change the way you look at the world. I don't work with a plan, or by staking things out, or with a preconceived idea. I like to drift as I bring my culture and my limits into relation with those of other cultures that I don't know. I therefore found myself in the middle of winter, at under 20°C, in this family where everybody sleeps in the same room to keep in the heat, and I found this closeness hard to take. I am always involved in what I film, while keeping a certain distance. I have no desire to film myself. Sometimes you hear me, but that's all.

FAMILY FILMS

*In your films there are people who go to the limit of what their body can endure. In the *Notre Corps est une arme (Our Body Is a Weapon)* series, you show people who put their body in danger. In *Gerilla*, for example, there's a group of partisans.*

They are PKK fighters. They're not my images, they were shot by guerrilleros and come from several sources. I'm not a war reporter, I myself have never filmed guerrilla warfare. What's more, I noticed that the people who filmed these fighters come back with images that are very similar to the ones the PKK shoots of itself. The PKK is a political group, it controls its image. In the film by Stefano Savona titled "Notebook of a Kurdish Combatant," we see guerrilleros around a fire cooking bread, and walking in the mountains. The PKK didn't give him access to any other images than the ones that already exist. I just took Kurdish archive images and remixed them. At the beginning we see partisans training in Iraq, playing ball, then walking in the mountains, attacking a barracks. It's not very spectacular, with a lot of movement—nothing like the image of war in films and their heroic poses. One could speak of organic camera: you hear the breathing of the person with the camera, we know that he is afraid, a comrade tells him to duck, all we see is the ground at his feet. He's not trying to act the hero like he does for reporters. At the end the barracks

are on fire and the guerrilleros are joking in the middle of a battlefield.

Is that the first time you've used images you didn't make yourself?

No, I also did that in *Prisons*, the film about Turkish prisons. I made this kind of collage and I built up a fiction with images from different sources. In *Gerilla* there can be as much as ten years' between different shots. These images were shot for propaganda purposes and play on romantic associations as they evoke older images, like ones of the Spanish Civil War. The wounded and dead are not shown after the battle. All we see are pretty girls. Most of the guerrillas emphasize this promise of companionship with women.

*Can it be seen as part of diptych with *Les Protestants*? That is to say, initially, the family you come from, and, after that, the family that you join, your family-in-law, as they say: the family in *Kurdish Lover*.*

That's how you see it? They are in effect family films, but above all they are films about being together. The family is a space that is in permanent crisis, a reality that is necessary but impossible to live with, like all the communities that I film, the hospital or the group of porn actors in *Ovidie*. How do you maintain an equilibrium at the heart of a group that is always potentially in crisis? How should one behave in order to stay together? For me there is a relation between *Ovidie* and *L'Hôpital*, because in both cases you have tense, extreme professional environments. And the family is the same thing for me. Necessary and unbearable. In *Protestants*, I wanted to avoid anything to do with the conventional family film. I'm not looking for my roots.

*The family in *Kurdish Lover* is the family of the man you live with, a family that you entered, which implies your presence in the film, but this presence is that of a foreign person. I was wondering if that didn't sum up the position you take in all your films: inside, and always foreign.*

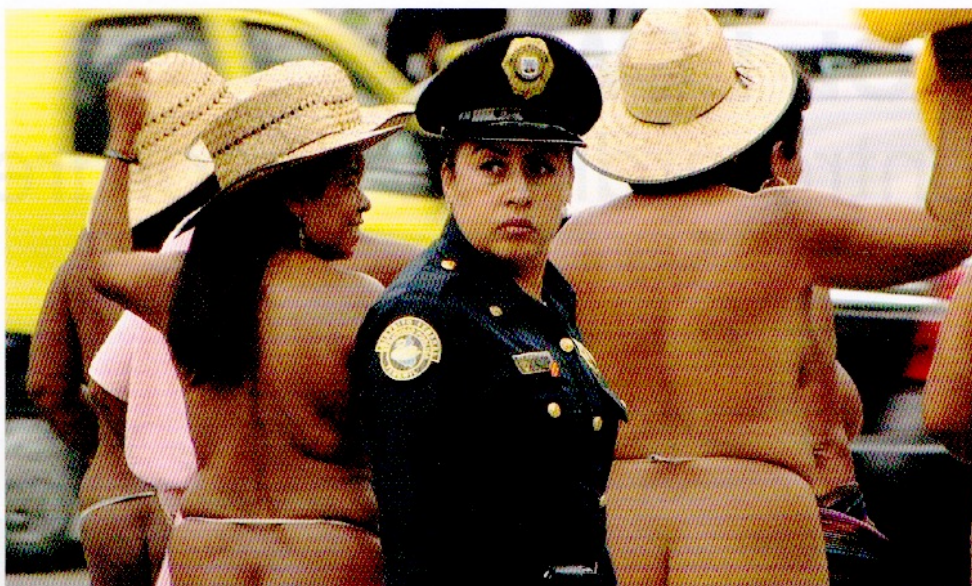
My place, indeed, is to be always "between." In the film I have a long dialogue with a boy who wants to marry. He lives in France and goes back to his village to find a girl, but it doesn't work out. We are walking along a road, he tries to explain to me why he wants to find a local girl. In fact, it's the camera that makes it possible to have this listening position. In this family, you are constantly being asked to take up a position, causing frequent disputes. Since I don't speak the language I can stay outside the quarrels, and the camera heightens the distance. It has another effect: when I film, I am more tolerant.

The way you film creates a sense of empathy with the persons filmed. Nevertheless, you don't judge.

My personal problems, my neuroses, my relational difficulties—I don't get rid of these things when I'm filming, but I do keep them at a distance. It's not really neutrality, because the situations I find myself in are, for me, a testing of the other, their inner self, in their moments of crisis, and this changes my way of seeing the world and myself. I like to be grabbed by the real, particularly by the moments of crisis within this same real. It is not only my vision that is constructed in this way, it is also my relation to others. That may be why I make films. To find my place in relation to others. According to a certain ethos of documentary making, the good person is the director who ennobles the people he films. The people I film are not angels; in Kurdistan, in that Alevi religion where paganism mixes with Islam. Everything is magic, but the people also have a very trivial side, and we are constantly moving between the sublime and the infamous. I am no angel, either.

Regarding the series with the PKK militants, the hunger strikers in Turkey, and the Desnudos, the Mexican peasants demonstrating naked against being despoiled of their land, can it be said that you support their cause?

I am with them, but I don't militate the way a number of engaged artists do. What interests me about them is that they're putting their bodies on the line in a political and social struggle. Kurdish culture is denied, so they fight for it; Indians thrown off their land in Mexico fight so as not to become uprooted, mere beggars in the big cities. They've been fighting for twenty years. Some of them squatted a parking lot in Mexico City with their wives and children and had this amazing idea of parading totally naked through the smart neighborhoods twice a day. I don't make activist movies, I simply film their engagements. As for the hunger strikers in Turkey, I don't know what to think of their method of protest. Those women who went on hunger strike, most of them intellectuals, are now handicapped for life. For them this process was self-destructive. But then, in a country like Turkey they could never have demonstrated naked the way they did in Mexico, where the Indians are festive, where they walk and dance and where the women are curvy. In fact, the Desnudos also went on hunger strike but they decided to stop when they realized that those



in power, and a large part of the population, couldn't care less if the Indians were dying of hunger.

THE BODY IN PERIL

Do you store up a lot of images?

It was three years for *Kurdish Lover*. I filmed bit by bit for two years, then I needed a year to digest all the images I'd shot. It was three years for *Protestants*, too. For those films I had about two hundred and fifty hours of rushes. I worked on my own for the filming, but not for the editing.

In conclusion, could you tell me about your plans for a fiction film?

It's a film I wrote about the Kurdish guerrillas. In *Kurdish Lover* I didn't film the war, only the tension that it generates between people. You only see the signs of war: Turkish soldiers taking up position in the village, a helicopter flying by. Paradoxically, the war was more present when I met Kurdish political militants in Paris, or former

guerrilleros in exile in France. At the same age as I was doing my studies, these people joined the guerrilla. My generation here didn't experience the same engagements as the preceding one. It was the age of the end of ideologies. But these young people saw things differently. They chose to go and fight and live in hiding. Some of them came back handicapped, wounded. They told me some incredible stories. I don't want to make a film of interviews. I want to make a fiction film based on facts, avoiding the codes of the war film. What interests me is to get people from the Kurdish associations here acting, people who know each other. As a result their actions are very natural, there are very few dialogues, and what there is comes spontaneously. My task is to try to reveal what is going on in the mind of a young man when he decides to go out there and when he comes back. But I won't tell you how the film ends. ■

Translation, C. Penwarden



Ci-dessus et ci-contre/above and opposite:

« Notre corps est une arme - Los Desnudos (Mexique) ». 2011. Installation vidéo, 2 écrans. Écran gauche : 12 mn ; écran droite : 6 mn 30. "Our Body Is a Weapon"