



As easy as Phi – Rachel Garrard at Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert

Portraits: Reflections By Emerging Iranian Artists

## The Exhibition That Mistook His Wife for a Hat

by ALEJANDRO PARDO on 09/30/2014 · LEAVE A COMMENT

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Skylight gallery mistook his wife for a hat, or rather her husband since the gallery is directed by Carla Goldberg, and the current exhibition which we're commenting has been curated by Vida Sabbaghi, who has brought together a diverse group of creators, from the independent artists gathered at **Call for Bushwick** to the young artists of the Yun-Mo Ahn's International Friends and others.

Delightful storyteller and neurologist Oliver Sacks describes in one of his books the apparent pathology of Dr. P, who suffered an estrange case of prosopagnosia. Dr. Sacks invited the patient to a standard physical and cognitive examination since he didn't seem impaired but rather ingenious and well cultivated. The examination left Dr. Sacks in sheer perplexity, and this is what followed:

"He also appeared to have decided that the examination was over and started to look around for his hat. He reached out his hand and took hold of his wife's head, tried to lift it off, to put it on. He had apparently mistaken his wife for a hat! His wife looked as if she was used to such things."



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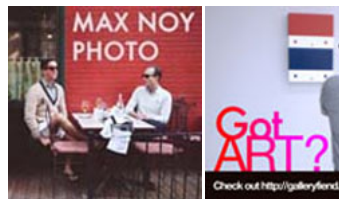
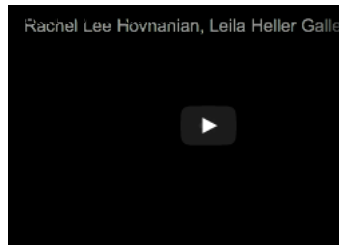
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RACHEL LEE HOVNANIAN, LEILA HELLER GALLERY, SEPTEMBER 2014



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Beyond the adorable comedy of the wife's resignation, the face blindness and hallucinatory condition suffered by Dr. P has been object of intense study. Dr. P was unable to see faces, but his active and highly creative visual cortex was substituting them with all sorts of objects.

Recognizing faces it's been a skill of the utmost importance for humans since we were no more than primitive mammals. Our brains have evolved a complex innate wiring within the fusiform gyrus, particularly the one located under the temporal lobe of the right hemisphere of our brains with the sole purpose of recognizing faces. We have specific circuitry and an elaborated software to identify and differentiate individuals by their faces. If you have your doubts about the radical specialization we have for face recognition, as we hope you do, here is an easy test you ought to try. Ask somebody to show you some photo-portraits upside down. You'll soon realize your inability to recognize even family and friends.



Artist Armando Marino



Without faces, you get immediately deprived of the notion of the different identities of the people surrounding you. They all seem the same in your eyes. You look at the other and you don't see the difference, the amount of millimetric nuances that make faces different and become so stratospherically important in the star system society. What make us superficially different isn't present any more so we become rightfully equal.

Vida Sabbaghi has curated a show that explores the relation between the self and the other. Defaced portraits are predominant within the gallery space, and they don't seem ominous or secretive but unbound from the captivity of the surface of their heads, and optimistic, and inclusive. The Bride of Armando Mariño sits at the bottom of the gallery in her white

dress and cerulean skin showing a gorgeous flower that blooms explosively in yellows and oranges right at the place that would have been occupied by her head. The Blue Evolution of Shari Weschler Rubeck uses a cell phone and a futuristic helmet instead to deface its characters while connecting them with a thread of flying blue birds. The diversity of this posopagnosic mechanism can include piles of scarves, masks, vegetables, or the larger than life keyhole of the Keyhole Man by Richard Driscoll, which is however a life size statue of a strong metallic presence. Jean Paul Sartre and Marleau-Ponty should have held their famous debate on "the other" among the artworks of this exhibition. Sartre would have argued that the root of all evil is in the overwhelming presence of the other, that forces us to recover our own being by making us an object out of the other. He would



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have point at these sculptures and paintings around him as his probe, since removing what is more other in the others softens the unavoidable anguish of the ego. The other becomes blissfully undifferentiated as well from yourself. **You approach what seems a circular mirror to discover that you are not there; its reflections don't cast your image back but vague shadows that Virginie Sommet makes you believe may be somebody else's. What a recipe to get over yourself and themselves.**



Sometimes, declares Dr. Oliver Sacks, the patient with severe neurological disruptions refuses the treatment. The pathos of his condition is superseded by a mysterious sense of joy, nostalgia, or empathy he wants to preserve by any means. This show gives you the opportunity to experience prosopagnosia and come back from perceiving another's experience to understanding the world in a different way.

### *shifting alterity: otherness in our social landscape*

September 8 – October 17

Skylight Gallery

A group exhibition organized by An Inclusive World  
curated by Vida Sabbaghi

**Article by Alejandro Pardo**

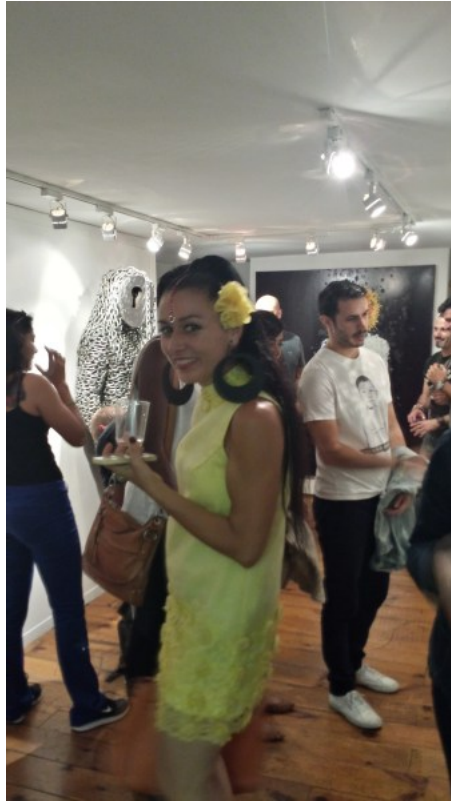






Virginie Sommet near her piece "Metal Patience"





Virginie Sommet





**Alejandro Pardo (6 Posts)**

Originally from Spain, Alejandro earned a BA in Philosophy and a MA in Pragmatic Linguistics from University Complutense of Madrid. After graduating, Alejandro worked in public and media relations, branding, and online marketing for European advertising and PR firms. He eventually came to New York and got an MA in Corporate Communication from Baruch College (CUNY) in Manhattan where the art world devoured him.



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