

Performance is at the heart of Filipino-Danish artist Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen's practice. In a 2014 interview, she describes how 'I see myself as a living sculpture that talks'. Her performances are either observed by a live audience or documented in video. The body – her own, or that of family members and friends – is significant in terms of its relationship to space, and it becomes a means through which to interrogate personal identity, constructs of gender, ethnicity and culture.

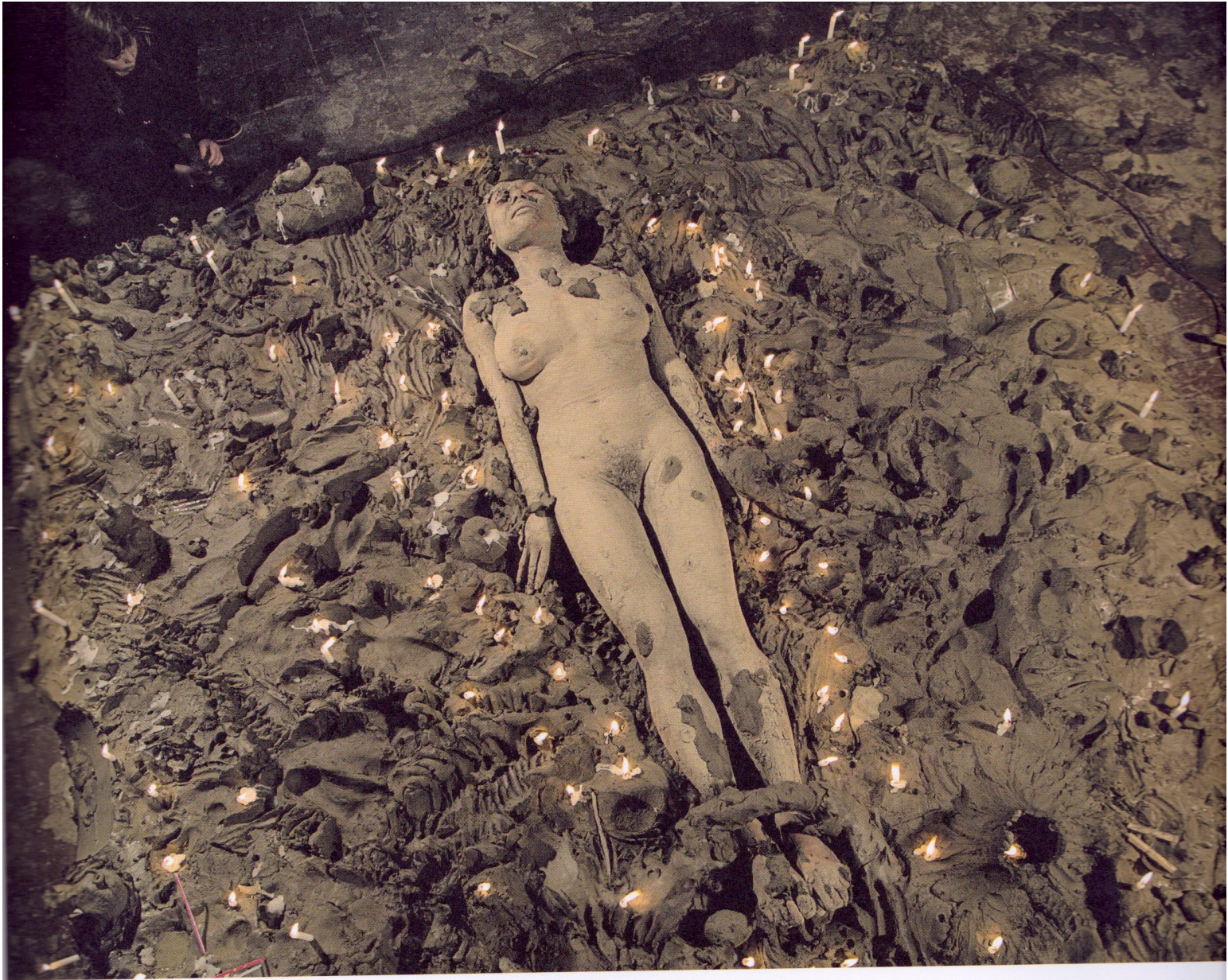
Cuenca Rasmussen first used clay in 2013 when performing at the festival 'Unten am Havn' (which connects the cities of Copenhagen and Hamburg). Impersonating Edvard Eriksen's famous sculpture *The Little Mermaid* (1913) – based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale and now a national symbol of Denmark – she reproduced its pose while covered in the local clay from Hamburg called 'Die Elbmarsch Ton'. In a recent interview, Cuenca described how the work's symbolism sought to question 'how a person's origin [might] influence her/his character. Where we come from: does it matter at all, or do we easily adapt to foreign ground?' Sociological discussions of nature versus nurture arise here, with the artist questioning what *really* makes us who we are.

In her 2014 exhibition 'Being Human Being 1' at Copenhagen's Kunsthal Nikolaj, over the space of seven days she invited family and colleagues to immerse themselves in a landscape of clay that had been transferred into the gallery. *Lucy* was produced on the first day (its title referring to Ethiopia's fossil of early *Homo erectus* – upright man), where the artist herself lay in ritualistic fashion surrounded by flickering candles, her skin caked in a layer of thick slurry, slowly drying and cracking. The public was invited to light the candles and mould small offerings using the clay. The surrounding bed was resultantly kneaded and sculpted, with traces of fingermarks still discernible, tiny stacks of clay or curved cups, and a thin arch curved over Cuenca Rasmussen's feet. Over subsequent days, her mother, siblings and daughter made body prints on canvas of their hands, feet and faces; red and brown clays coating flesh and then being pressed into the cloth. These reams of fabric were draped around the space, equating to a time-based portrait of the familial bodies that had engaged with this environment.

This all brings to mind the 1970s 'Silueta' series of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, who felt that 'art must have begun as nature itself', smothering her body with blooms of white flowers or leaving silhouette imprints in mud, clay and sand. For Mendieta, this was a symbolic process of spiritually merging with nature. For Cuenca Rasmussen, clay is an organic material with beautiful variations in colour and texture; a sumptuous and sensual means of exploring selfhood as body meets material. Clay coats the skin with its own oozing thickness and colour, and, to a degree, culture and ethnicity are indiscernible beneath muddy limbs or imperceptible in the body prints. Above all else, we are human and adapt to the earth beneath our feet. • Louisa Elderton

Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen Born 1970, Manila, Philippines. Lives and works in Copenhagen. **Selected Solo Exhibitions:** 2017 – 'Vestige', Drawing Room, Manila; 2016 – 'Being human being 2', Hans & Fritz Contemporary, Barcelona; 2014 – 'Being Human Being 1', Kunsthal Nikolaj, Copenhagen; 'Melodic Skies dropping down to Earth, making Trees fly', Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg, Sweden; 'Inbetweenness', Horsens Art Museum, Denmark; 2013 – 'Mobile Mirrors', Christian Larsen Gallery, Stockholm; 'Anger ist Power', MOCA Roskilde, Denmark; 2011 – 'Afghan Hound', Location One, New York; 2010 – Heidelberger Kunstverein, Germany; 2006 – 'EgoShow', X-Room, The National Gallery, SMK, Copenhagen. **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2016 – 'Body Compositions, 1-3: Unknown Landscapes', North Coast Art Triennial, Tegners Museum, and touring to Gribskov Kommune, Denmark; 2014 – 'Immanent Geographics', The Drawing Room, Manila and Singapore; 2013 – 'The Beginning Is Always Today. Contemporary Feminist Art in Scandinavia', SKMU, Sørlandets Kunst-museum, Kristiansand, Norway, and touring to Västerås konstmuseum, Sweden; 2011 – 'Speech Matters', The Danish Pavillion, 54th Venice Biennale; 2009 – 're.act.feminism', Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and touring to International Festival of Contemporary Arts, Ljubljana; Kunsthaus Erfurt, Germany.





— Being Human Being with
Jeannette Ehlers, 2014
5-hour performance in 'Being
Human Being 1' exhibition,
Kunsthall Nikolaj, Copenhagen

— Being Human Being, Faces
(Lilbeth), 2014
5-hour performance in 'Being
Human Being 1' exhibition,
Kunsthall Nikolaj, Copenhagen

— Lucy, 2014
5-hour performance in 'Being
Human Being 1' exhibition,
Kunsthall Nikolaj, Copenhagen

— Overleaf:
Installation view, 'Being Human
Being' exhibition, Kunsthall
Nikolaj, Copenhagen



Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen

