

Identity is always a problem

Label in & out

Bastero Kulturgunea, Andoain
12 January - 17 February 2007

Identity is always a problem. You go somewhere and straightaway the awful question pops up: where are you from? And the answer always contains the prefabricated cliché. The old Basque saying *euskalduna, fededuna*—Basque-speaking, faith-holding; Basque-speaking, beret-wearing; Basque-speaking, weapon-wielding. So you aren't yourself at all, you're what the other person wants, you have an identity which is a way of fitting a cliché. But that's not the worst of it. It's understandable that people from other places have a certain point of view on your country. The clichés are created inside and have already spread, that's what's horrible about it. And this still happens. In many places people dress up in farmhouse costumes for the fiestas.

In opposition to these clichés, and as a sample of modern identity, the Commissary Ainara Martin has chosen four artists to exhibit their work at the Bastero Kulturgunea in Andoain. Since the four are

very different, they all talked about identity, or about the problem of identity. Borja Uriona (Gernika, 1976) is no newcomer to the design world, and lives in Barcelona. The load we bear on our shoulders also moulds and explains our identity. This is why, along with his designs, he displays four traditional Basque costumes, adapted for the exhibition. This conveys an odd sensation to the spectator: the costumes have an innovated look about them, they want to break with tradition, but still want to be traditional costumes. Who knows if somebody will be wearing them at the next round of Basque fiestas.

Tytti Thusberg (Mikkeli, Finland, 1969) has also been active in design, and the pieces she has brought to the exhibition are half design, half sculpture. These are designs which nobody would wear - designs nobody *can* wear, in fact. Her pieces are made from the common-or-garden materials we generally throw out—little infusion sachets, for example—and in this way

she expresses beautifully and elegantly the false identity which advertising in the modern age imposes on women (and men).

Aitor Larrañaga *Peli* (Zarautz, 1975) has produced a daring colourful installation. To date most of his work has been painting, and this is the case here too, but he has added several other objects, glasses painted blue and red, and a cylinder of butane gas, for example. We observe landscapes on his paintings, but they do not fill the entire canvas—they are cut off, and these interferences mean the observer cannot completely identify with the scenes, as if the intention is to state we cannot fully identify with our surroundings.

It is Saioa Olmo (Bilbao, 1976) who has most directly pinpointed the subject matter of the exhibition, and her material here is the town of Andoain. She has used the Andoain coat-of-arms in particular, the town's official symbol. On the one hand, she has talked to the local people, asking for their opinions on the coat-of-arms and on the town. On the other, she has changed the coat-of-arms—she has turned it into a mirror, and taken photographs of what the mirror showed; on another, she has removed the inner image and set another three images into it: the image of Andoain on Google Earth, the hierarchy of social organisations, and the locations appearing in the interviews with local people.

Basque art would have an official label on it, if there were such a thing. Xabier Garzarain



Saioa Olmo 2007