

On the image of women... and

The difficulty in finding one's identity

I am a creator of women's lingerie and my approach – both ethical and unconventional - takes an unusual and innovative direction in terms of marketing, since it is clearly an uphill battle to sow the seeds of femininity in a sexist world mired in conventions and conditioning.

I started out creating lingerie at a time when I was myself heading down a path into the unfathomable depths of my identity as a woman - its inner geography and alchemy made up of tides and cycles of transformation.

At the outset, I was making underwear and washable pads, wanting to bring tenderness and kindness to our intimacy.

My focus was on the pelvis, the 'Jade Palace', that alchemical zone that cooks up and controls our cycles.

Then I started working on a collection of 'celebratory briefs' with a matching range of pantyliners for Moontimes: refined, stylish, in tones of precious ruby reds, a red backdrop as an invitation for a red flow. Currently, a collection called *First Blood Finery* is in the works, designed to celebrate the young girl at the start of her menstrual cycle with charm and style.

One thing led to another and I started making short nighties, then a whole range of lingerie intended to connect us to our power, that power lodged at the core of a woman that we need to awaken to liberate the vital force of 'La que sabe'*1. Since then, I have discovered my taste for the ostentatious, working towards an authentic, radiant femininity, that reveals the body and celebrates it, honouring the singular charm of every woman.

The collections are ethical*2, joyfully refined and filled with glamorous colour.

This is my way of attracting women's curiosity towards a new vision of their femininity, because seeing feminine hygiene in a new light is now a way of awakening to the mysteries of our bodies and the sacred dimension of our womanhood.

The 'Dessous' (literally undersides *and* underwear) typically means what is hidden, secret and intimate. They hide our feminine attributes, our treasures, our mounds and marvels - while at the same time protecting them. With this in mind, choosing lingerie that is comfortable and health-conscious to care for our intimate hygiene is essential, yet we can still remain elegant and sensual to exalt our femininity!

I have noticed that often in alternative circles, women place an emphasis on body ecology while forgetting about the body's charms, whereas in urban circles, women place more importance on their appearance whilst omitting the connection to their matrix - the womb, the core of our femininity.

How to respect and best serve our feminine nature in modern society

THE MEDIA MIRAGE

I recently attended the International Lingerie Salon - which has become an enormous global business! The trend for all things 'sexy' is upfront and stronger than ever! The stands, entirely closed off, call to mind miniature brothels in front of which young scantily-clad women pose as hostesses, parading up and down the aisles among the visitors, touting for their particular houses.

In the brochures and catalogues, the young women are displayed in suggestive poses, lips open and thighs spread. Intimacy here, on show and draped in artifice, is shocking and quite banal. In order to seduce the consumer, the media works almost exclusively with the archetype of the steamy, femme fatale, and even transmutes her into a caricature.

Whilst the 1950's saw women depicted as good wives and docile housekeepers, elegantly dressed and entirely devoted, women's bodies today are hypersexualized and reduced to a simple marketing strategy.

The media would have us believe that being 'sexy' is our real strength!!

In a world where what you appear to be is way more important than what you are, the digitally remodeled ideals of beauty skew the subtle playing fields of the feminine landscape.

We are thus conditioned from a very young age to adopt a sexist representation of womanhood which insidiously becomes the norm - creating a constant sense of dissatisfaction in women about their appearance. Insidiously they leave their souls behind, devoting themselves to the worship of slimmness and the seductive charms of eternal youth.

Young girls experience sexual awakening much earlier then grow up with an irrational fear of aging, creating female rivalries that will have them sacrifice sisterhood!

Two characteristic types of behaviour stand out during adolescence, when the young girls' bodies are preparing to awaken: either rejection (the tomboy effect) or admiration (identification with the dominant model).

Girls start acting 'sexy', (meaning sexually attractive) at a younger and younger age - aspiring to resemble their idols at all costs - with mature women, less photogenic, notably absent from advertising. 'Femininity' nowadays is synonymous with youth and futility, whereas 'pleasing' and 'seducing' have clearly become ends in themselves, with the goal being the battle to continue to please and seduce.

In 2013, New York City launched a publicity campaign entitled 'I'm beautiful as I am' to help restore confidence to young girls and curb the massive epidemic of eating disorders thriving in the US : anorexia, depression, obesity and alcohol abuse.

We are living in a time of transition, where to illustrate just how far common decency has strayed from the path,

...
the current trend is to find thongs and maximizer bras for 7 year olds in clothing stores,
where make-up kits, diets and anti-aging or anti-cellulite creams are making big bucks,
where women will undergo labiaplasty surgery to reduce the size of their labia
and to give themselves genitalia that meets pornographic norms,
not to mention other so-called cosmetic surgery such as buttock prosthetics,
where depression, bulimia, anorexia, overeating and other disorders linked to a non-standard appearance
have become ordinary pathologies that affect women for the most part

...
or where women go as far as to privatize their bodies in the eyes of the law like a piece of property
so that they will be able to do what they wish with it
(in reaction to an anti-abortion law in Spain)

...
In the midst of this jungle, positive female images (that simply respect the nature of women) with whom we can identify are thin on the ground!

The paradox is that women like feeling desirable, while still being respected, recognized and appreciated for what makes them unique.

Women buy in wholeheartedly to these courtship displays, but in the same way that they will buy alluring lingerie to please a man ('pleasing him' to the detriment of 'pleasing herself'), all too often they ignore the rich depths of their own sexual pleasure, having never explored these avenues for themselves. We are carnal beings, just as subject to shivers of desire as men can be. The problem lies in our ignorance of the paths of our orgasmic pleasure. To know that joy, we have to let go of 'pleasing him' or 'doing it right', we have to cease hiding behind pretexts and diktats in order to dare to reveal ourselves *to ourselves*.

Imagine a woman buying lingerie for herself, simply to feel the velvet caress of silk on her skin, to create special time for herself, to feel sensual, to see herself as BEAUTIFUL.

Similarly, a mother will buy organic washable nappies for her child without affording herself the same care, continuing to use tampons and disposables that pose a risk to her health. Reclaiming the idea that we are strong, brilliant, primordial beings – and not 'the weaker sex' – begins with recognizing our feminine nature and recapturing the fullness of our power.

Unlike men, women's strength is found on the inside; just as our sex is hidden, so our strength lies within. As such, it is harder to discern.

In Taoist philosophy, the uterus is directly linked to the very spirit of the feminine essence and was called 'the celestial palace' in ancient times; it is the seat of our femininity, the matrix.

Emergence of the Feminine

The body as it is idealized nowadays is a long way from the callipygian Venus,
those representations of feminine fecundity.

Difficult shaking free of the norms to connect with *Self-love* amid these coercive clichés.

Women most certainly need to feel beautiful and desirable, but the standards have been placed so high in our collective imagery that they have a hard time picking out their own beauty in the midst of this degrading morass.

These days, embodying our femininity means we must first free ourselves from the prejudices that condition our thought patterns.

This could be like going down into a cave, lighting an inner flame to explore its walls,
breathing in its smells and connecting to its depths.

Accepting our vulnerability, listening to our inner silence, observing our emotions,
finding this archaic, ancestral wisdom and this indescribable strength that have lain dormant within us
since the dawn of Time
and bringing them into the light.

It is like a massive spring cleaning of our conditioning, followed by a rebirth, an awakening of the self.

Daring to be Oneself.

Embodying one's femininity these days is an act of courage
Profoundly humanist
And we must be the ones to take the first steps.

It is music that is playing for ourselves alone
music that has no need of artifice...

Women, might I dare to inspire you, encourage you to take your femininity to heart...
Incarnar sa féminité aujourd'hui est un acte courageux

Karen Cayuela

*Karen Cayuela, creator of the Dessous de Karen.
A fashion design graduate in Paris, who moved into costume design then learnt the art of corsetry,
before training in organic agriculture and other alternatives.
"My world has been built quite naturally on an ethical foundation
coloured with feminine refinery."*

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(*1. *La que sabe: she who knows*)

(*2. Quality materials, either organic or upcycled, locally sourced from small manufacturers)