

## Erika Harrsch

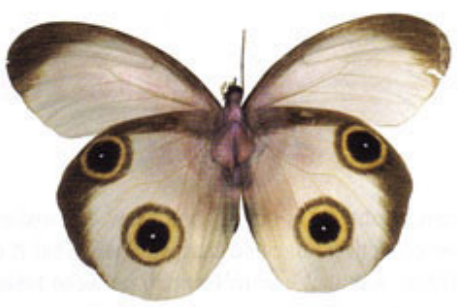
Eduarda de Souza

*"The fascination for an inaccessible erotic world causes an uncommon excitement in me."  
 —Erika Harrscha*

Looking at artist Erika Harrsch's figure, gestures and expressions is much like admiring one of her works of art. Harrsch is 36 years old, red haired and filled with sexual energy. Having received a traditional education in painting, this training is now something that the artist juxtaposes with a more multidisciplinary approach to art-making. Above all, however, the artist's work is deeply embedded in her Mexican roots—roots which, according to her, "she cannot escape from." Spring 2007 will mark the opening of Harrsch's solo exhibition at Galeria Leme, Sao Paulo, Brazil, an art gallery which has been in the market for only three years and which has gained much recognition for its team of national and international young artists. Additionally too, Harrsch will showcase a multimedia piece called *Body Maps* with the multidisciplinary group, VisionIntoArt, at the Whitney Museum as a part of the Live Whitney program.

Erika Harrsch's eyes spark when sharing her views on Nabokov and how he wrote fantastic and pleasurable letters to his sister describing his practice of spending hours, days and months observing butterfly's dissected genitalia under a microscope. "The visual realm of the genitalia seen through the microscope is amazing. I was able to observe and to photograph this during the months that I studied for my project with an entomologist," says Harrsch. Like the ideas presented by Georges Bataille, hers are complex and sexually directed. "I am strongly drawn in by the way Bataille establishes relationships between Eros and Thanatos, sex-life and death. This attraction reverberates in her piece *Imagoes* from her "Object of Desire" series, which will be presented at the Leme show. The series consists of striking photographs of butterflies digitally fused with female genitalia, which all match their country of origin both in terms butterfly species and female part. These images push the boundaries of cultures in which the most forbidden parts of a woman's body are perceived as inaccessible.

Erika was a star student at school, receiving honors and good grades. "A miracle," she says. "I was always makings drawings and designs during class time and, instead of doing homework, I was doing creative stuff at home." Her mature work reverberates with such activities. She cuts, glues, paints and draws, all in the same work. "When I was seven years old, I copied women from magazines and represented them with their clothes off." The artist sold drawings to her friends and, in the company of her brother, secretly devoured her father's porn magazine collection. The union of the aforementioned medias, differently scaled works, a strong literary background and an intelligent perspective of third world countries successfully unites the naïve and



the forbidden here, a major aspect of her artistic endeavor.

The beauty of her *dibujos-bocetos*, an impeccably cut butterfly from her "Object of Desire" series, is based in forbidden childhood acts. The artist could have prepared such works as this during class time long ago—she could have carried them around in her backpack for good luck. These works multiply and result in the multifaceted installation *EROS-THANATOS*, which was presented at the Fotofest Houston Festival, Texas, in 2006. Harrsch explains, "It is the recreation of the sanctuary of the Monarch butterflies in Michoacan, Mexico." The installation is to be presented at Leme and will be installed with the aid of scores of volunteers who will cut and fold the wings of a total of 10,000 butterflies. These will be placed on the ground, like a carpet, and spectators will be instructed to walk over them. Erika once again succeeds in giving a contradictory realism to such a surreal and uncomfortable experience.

Also part of *EROS-THANATOS* is a video (one of Harrsch's favourite media), which registers an increasing number of butterflies in the same spot, until they completely cover the sky. Harrsch recorded the sound of the wings separately from the video take, and then enhanced this with the sounds of individual butterflies. All of this sound work was completed in collaboration with sound artist Edmund Mooney. The result is a "multi-level visual sound experience," 12 minutes long, meticulously edited and worth every second. □

