

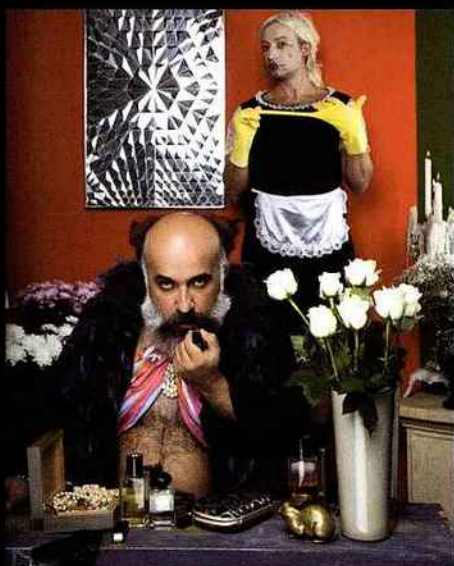
PHOTO ROMANCE



LES BONNES RAMIN & ROKNI HAERIZADEH ET HESAM RAHMANIAN

La pièce de Jean Genet, *Les Bonnes*, met en scène deux bonnes, Solange et Claire, qui entretiennent une relation floue avec leur maîtresse, Madame. Lors de véritables crises, elles ont pour rituel de revêtir les robes de Madame, brouillant ainsi les rôles entre les personnages. Jouant sur un malaise identitaire, cette œuvre prend une dimension d'autant plus satirique dans sa réinterprétation par les trois artistes iraniens exilés à Dubaï.

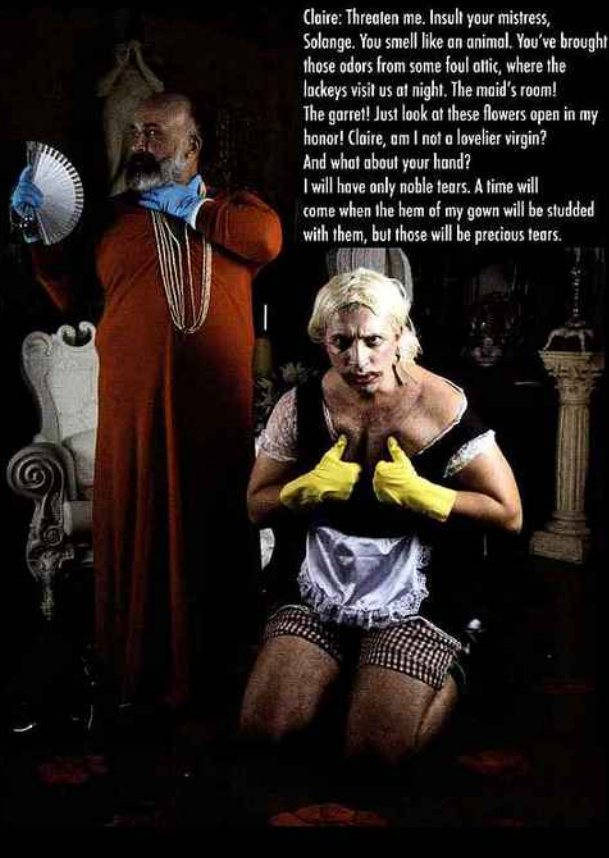
PAR WILLIAM MASSEY



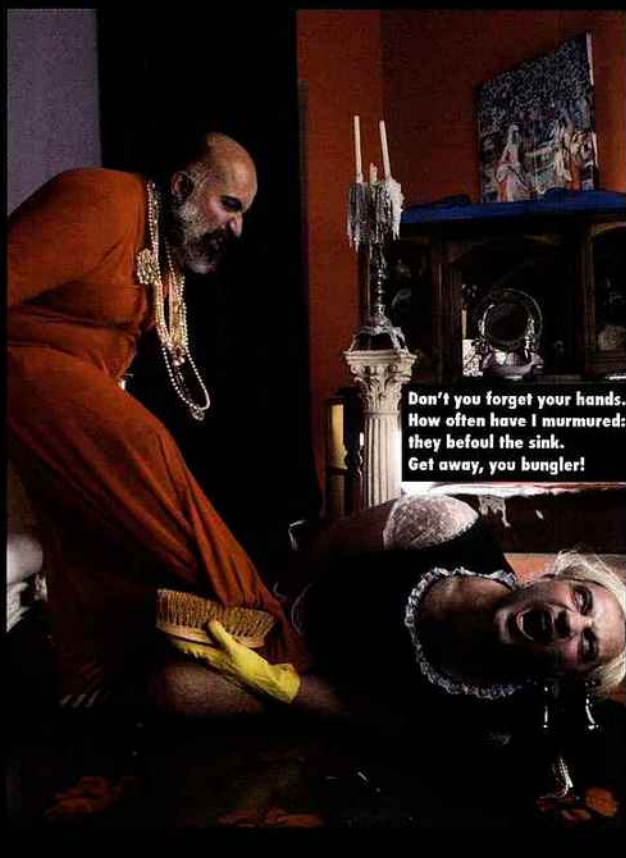
Claire: Those gloves! Those Eternal gloves! I've told you time and again to leave them in the kitchen. You probably hope to seduce the milkman with them. When will you understand that this room is not to be sullied. Everything that comes out of the kitchen is spit! So stop it! Without spit! Let it sleep in you, my

child, let it stagnate. May the lost wayfarer drown in it. Lean forward and look at yourself in my shoes. Do you think I find it pleasant to know that my foot is shrouded the mists of your swamps?

I shall be lovelier. Lovelier than you'll ever be.



Claire: Threaten me. Insult your mistress, Solange. You smell like an animal. You've brought those odors from some foul attic, where the lackeys visit us at night. The maid's room! The garret! Just look at these flowers open in my honor! Claire, am I not a lovelier virgin? And what about your hand? I will have only noble tears. A time will come when the hem of my gown will be studded with them, but those will be precious tears.



Don't you forget your hands. How often have I murmured: they befoul the sink. Get away, you bungler!

Solange: Limits, boundaries, Madam. Frontiers are not conventions but laws. Here, my lands; there, your shore-

Claire: what language, my dear. Do you mean that I've already crossed the seas? Are you offering me the dreary exile of your imagination? You're taking revenge, aren't you? You feel the time coming when no longer a maid- the time coming when, you become vengeance itself... don't forget, it was the maid who hatched schemes of vengeance, and I contain within me both vengeance and the maid and give them a chance for life, a chance for salvation.

Solange: I am ready. I'm tired of being an object of disgust. I hate you, too. I despise you. I hate your scented bosom. Your... ivory bosom! Your... golden thighs! Your... amber feet! I hate you!

You think you can always do just as you like. You think you can deprive me forever of the beauty of the sky, that you can choose your perfumes and powders, your nail-polish and silk and velvet and lace, and deprive me of them? Madame thought she was protected by her barricade of flowers, saved by some special destiny, by a sacrifice.

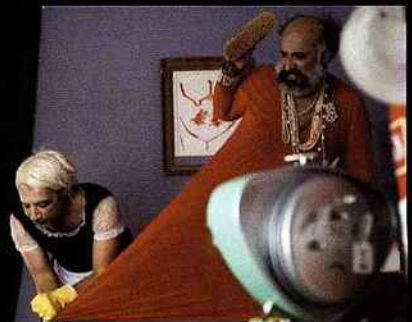
But she reckoned without a maid's rebellion. Behold her wrath, Madame.

And we no longer fear you. We are merged, enveloped in ore fumes, in our revels, in hatred of you.

I'm going back to my kitchen, back to my gloves and smell of my teeth. To my belching sink. You have your flowers, My sink. I'm the maid. You, at least, you can't defile me.



And if I have to stop spitting on someone who calls me Claire, I'll simply choke! My spurt of Saliva is my spray of diamonds!



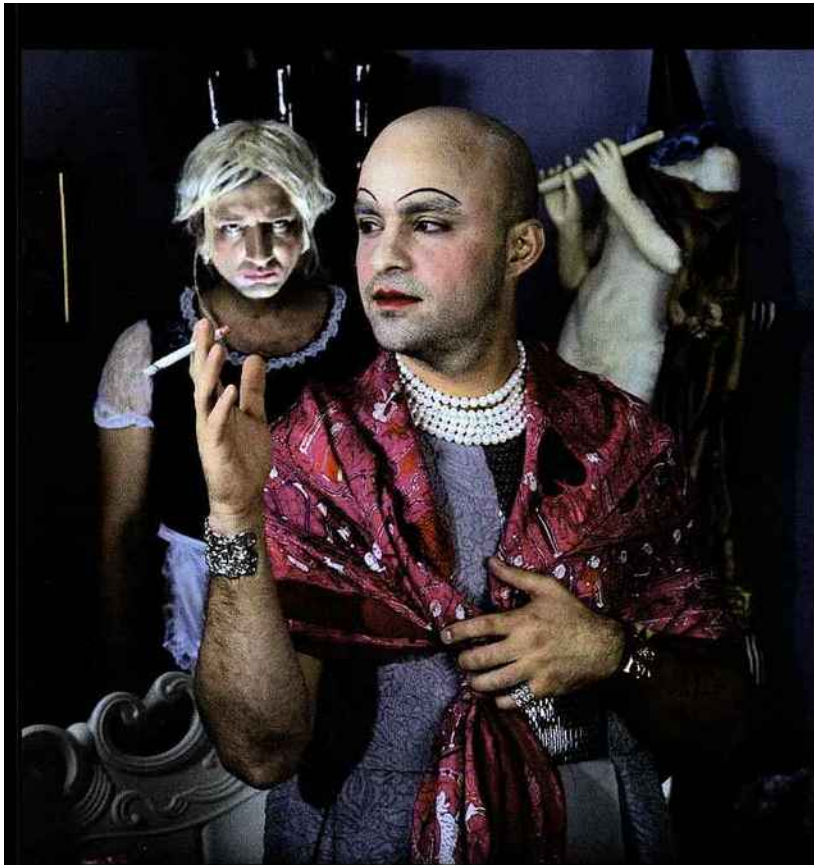
Solange: I liked the garret because it was plain and I didn't have to put on a show. No hangings to push aside, no rugs to shake, no furniture to caress-with my eyes or with a rag, no mirrors, no balcony. Nothing forced us to make pretty gestures. Don't worry, you'll be able to go on playing queen, laying at Marie Antoinette, strolling about the apartment at night.

Claire: If it weren't for me, if it hadn't been for my anonymous letter, you'd have missed a pretty sight: the lover handcuffed and Madame in tears. Madame is kind! Madame adores us.

Solange: She loves us the way she loves her armchair. Not even that much! Like her bidet, rather. Like her pink enamel lavatory seat. And we, we can't love one another. Filth... doesn't love filth.

Claire: Speak of madame's kindness.

Solange: It's easy to be kind, and smiling, and sweet. - when you're beautiful and rich. But what if you're only a maid? The best you can do is to give yourself airs while you're doing the cleaning or washing up. You twirl a leather duster like a fan. You make fancy gestures with the dishcloth.



Solange: Nothing comes after. I'm sick and tired of kneeling in pews. In church I'd have had the red velvet of abbesses or the stone of the penitents, but my bearing at least would have been noble. Look, just look at how she suffers. I wanted to make up for the poverty of my grief by the splendor of my crime. Afterwards, I'd have set fire to the lot.

Claire: I'm tired of it all. Tired of being the spider, the umbrella-case, the shabby, godless nun, without a family! I'm tired of having a stove for an altar. I'm that disagreeable, sullen, smelly girl. To you, too.

Solange: I know everything. I kept my eye and ear to the keyhole. No servant ever listened at doors as I did. I know everything incendiary! It's a splendid title. I know I disgust you. I'm repulsive to you. And I know it because you disgust me. When slaves love one another, it's not love.

Claire: And me, I'm sick of seeing my image thrown back at me by a mirror, like a bad smell.

Hand me the towel! Hand me the clothes-pegs! Peel the onions! Scrape the carrots! Scrub the tiles! It's over. Over. Ah! I almost forgot! Turned off the tap! It's over. I'll run the world!

We've read the story of Sister Holy Cross of the Blessed Valley who poisoned twenty-seven Arabs.

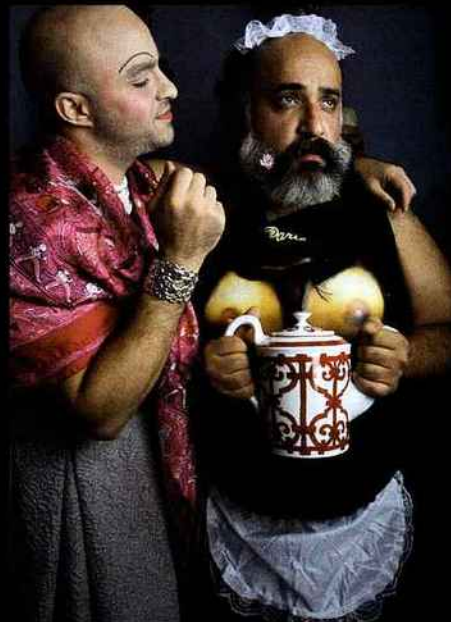
We shall be that eternal couple, Solange, the two of us, the eternal couple of the criminal and the saint.

The Phenobarbital! We must be joyous. Lets sing! Sing, the way you'll sing when you go begging in the courts and embassies! Otherwise, it'll be so tragic that we'll go flying out of the window. Murder is a thing that's... unspeakable!

Solange: we'll carry her off to the woods, and under the fir trees we'll cut her to bits by the light of the moon. And we'll sing. We'll bury her beneath the flowers, in our flower beds, and at night—we'll water her toes with a little hose!



Madame: Farewell to parties and dances and the theatre, you'll inherit all that. Happiness makes me giddy. Those girls do worship me, but they haven't dusted the dressing table. Their housekeeping is the most extraordinary combination of the luxury and filth.

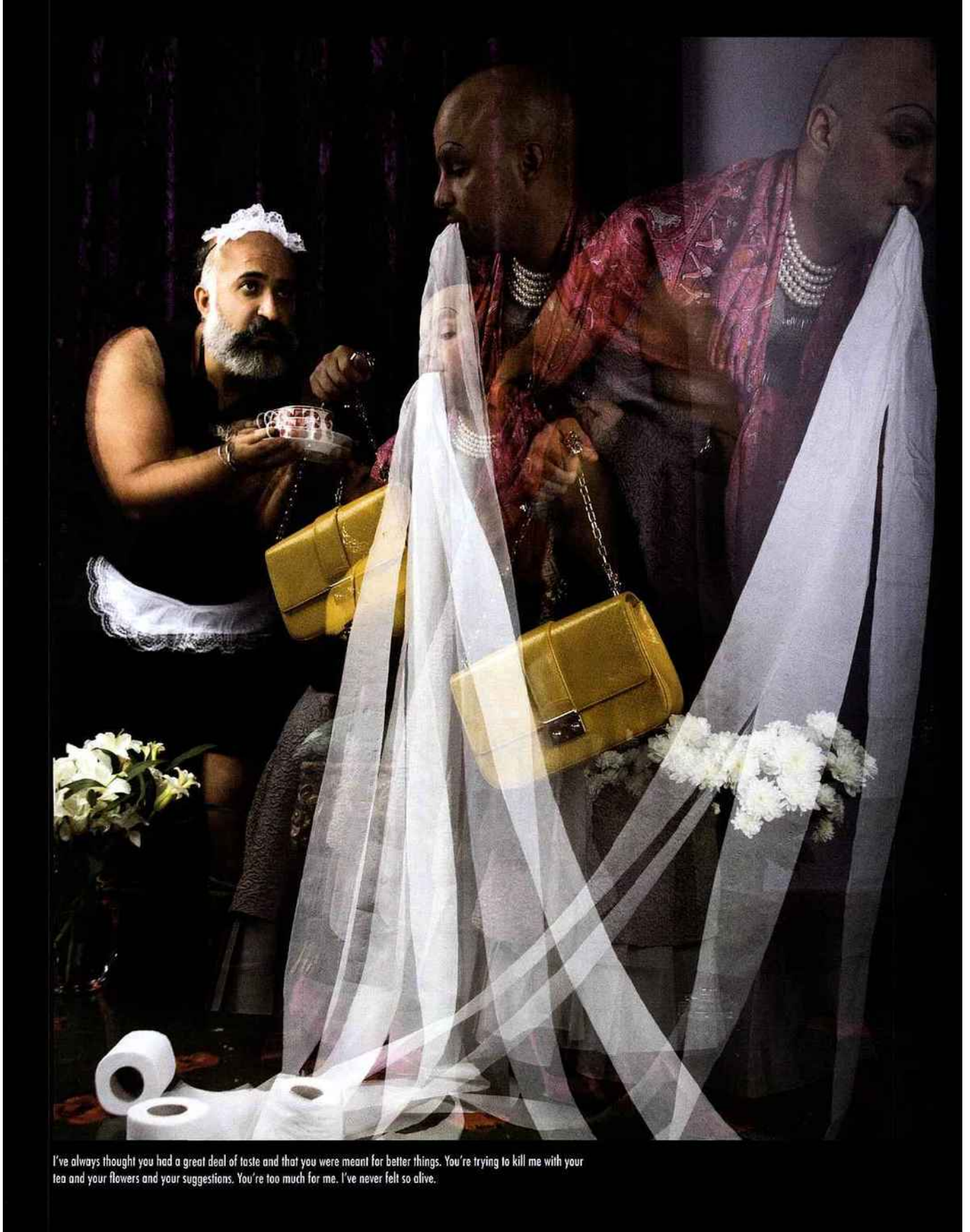


Madame: I'm not tired. You treat me like an invalid. You're always ready to coddle me and pamper me as if I were dying. Thank God, I've got my wits about me, I'm ready for the fight. Come, don't make such a face. There are times when you're so sweet that I simply can't stand it. It crushes me, stifles me! And those flowers which are there for the very opposite of a celebration!

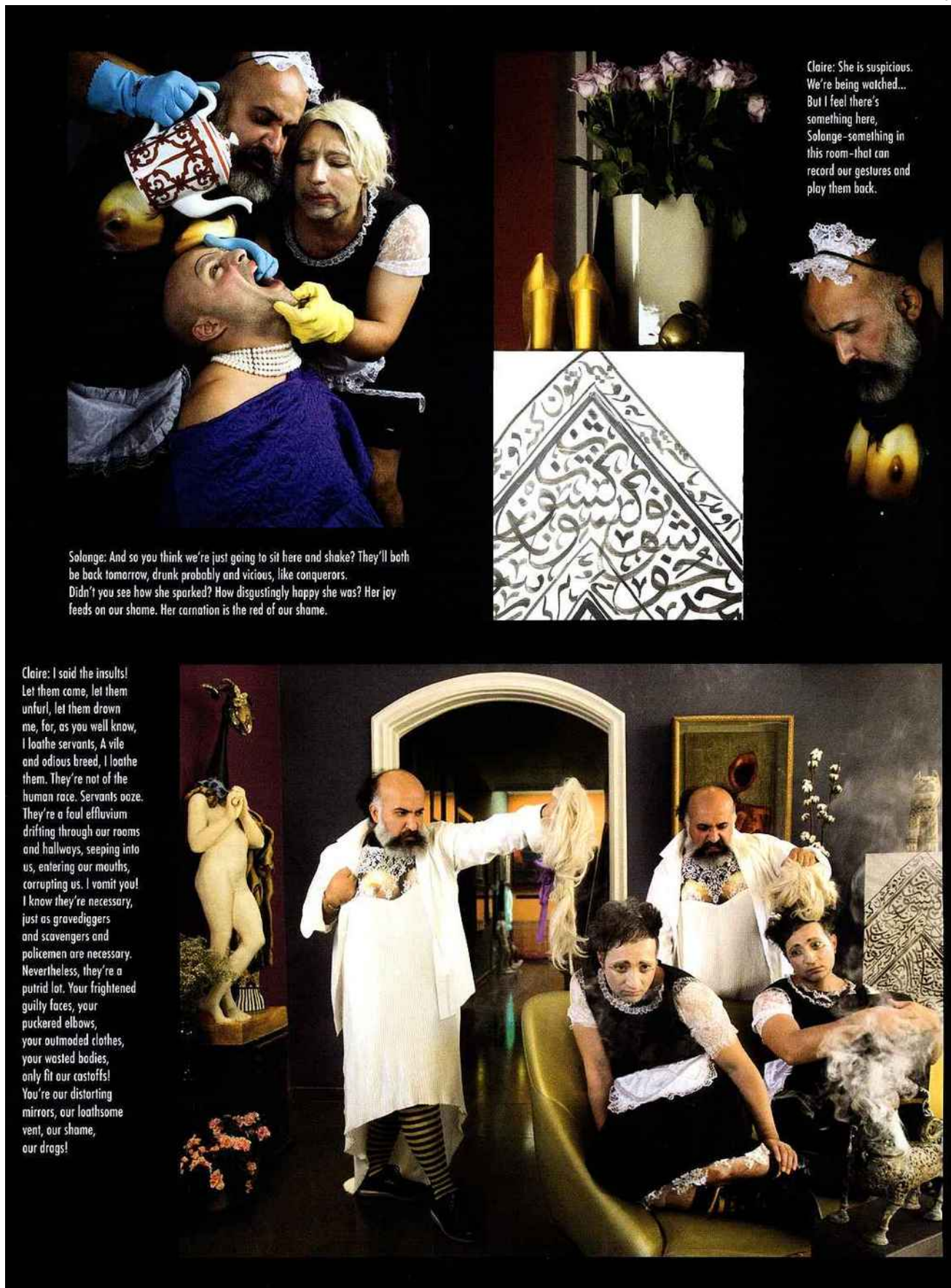
With my old gowns alone you both could have dressed like princesses.



You're quietly killing me with flowers and kindness. One fine day I'll be found dead beneath the roses.



I've always thought you had a great deal of taste and that you were meant for better things. You're trying to kill me with your tea and your flowers and your suggestions. You're too much for me. I've never felt so alive.



Claire: She is suspicious. We're being watched... But I feel there's something here, Solange—something in this room—that can record our gestures and play them back.

Solange: And so you think we're just going to sit here and shake? They'll both be back tomorrow, drunk probably and vicious, like conquerors. Didn't you see how she sparked? How disgustingly happy she was? Her joy feeds on our shame. Her carnation is the red of our shame.

Claire: I said the insults! Let them come, let them unfurl, let them drown me, for, as you well know, I loathe servants, a vile and odious breed, I loathe them. They're not of the human race. Servants ooze. They're a foul effluvia drifting through our rooms and hallways, seeping into us, entering our mouths, corrupting us. I vomit you! I know they're necessary, just as gravediggers and scavengers and policemen are necessary. Nevertheless, they're a putrid lot. Your frightened guilty faces, your puckered elbows, your outmoded clothes, your wasted bodies, only fit our castoffs! You're our distorting mirrors, our loathsome vent, our shame, our drags!



Solange: ...At least Madame is dead! ... strangled by the dish-gloves. Madame may call me mademoiselle Solange. Madame should have taken off that black dress. It's grotesque. So I'm reduced to wearing mourning for my maid. Oh! Madame needn't feel sorry for me.

... The dresses? Oh, Madame could have kept them. My sister and I had our own. Those we used to put on at night, in secret. Now, I have my own dress, and I'm your equal. I wear the red grab of criminals.

I've been a servant. Well and good. I've made the gestures a servant must make. I've smiled at Madame. I've bent down to make the bed, bent down to scrub the tiles, bent down to peel vegetables, to listen at doors, to glue my eye to keyholes! But now I stand upright. And firm. I'm the strangler.

Maids should have better taste than to make gestures reserved for Madame!



Claire: it would be too simple to conspire with the wind, to make the night one's accomplice. Solange you'll contain me within you. I'm going to help you. I've decided to take the lead. Nothing exists but the altar where one of the two maids is about to immolate herself—Be still. I drink it anyway let me have it. And you've poured it into the best, the finest tea set.

Mademoiselle Solange, the one who strangled her sister! Me be still? Madame is delicate, really. But I pity Madame. I pity Madame's whiteness, her satiny skin, and her little ears, and little wrists... eh?

Who am I? The monstrous soul of servanthood! It would be a fine thing if masters could pierce the shadows where servants live... that my child, is our darkness, ours.

The hangman follows close behind. He's whispering sweet nothings in her ear.

It's no use, Madame, I'm obeying the police. They're the only ones who understand me. They too belong to the world of outcasts, the world you touch only with tongues.

**À VOIR**

"Conversation de Ramin et Rokni Haerizadeh avec Vali Mahlouji", introduction de Suzanne Cotter, commissaire d'exposition, The Elaine Turner Cooper Education Fund, 15 janvier 2013,

18h30, Guggenheim Museum, New York, www.guggenheim.org

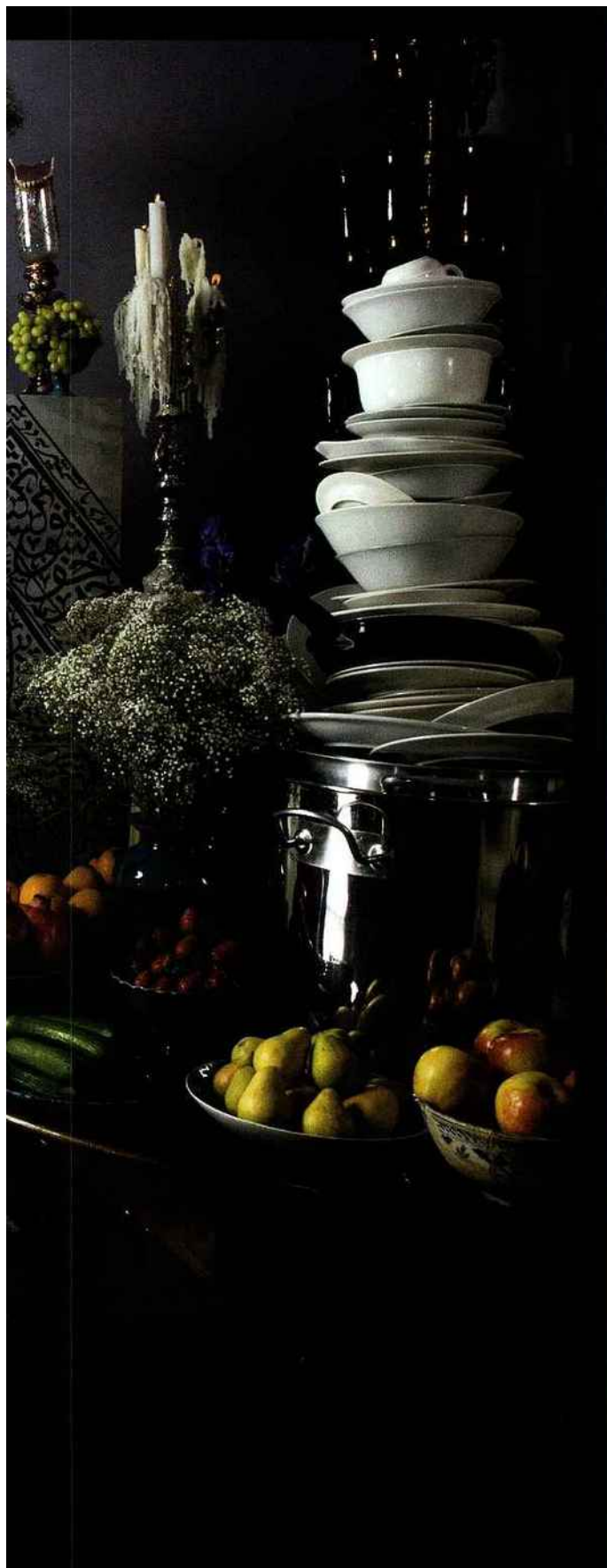
Installation pendant l'Armory Show, Galerie Isabelle van den Eynde, du 7 au 10 mars 2013, New York, à cette occasion, publication d'un

livre dédié à la série "Fictionville".

Ramin et Rokni Haerizadeh sont représentés par les galeries Nathalie Obadia (Paris, Bruxelles), Isabelle van den Eynde (Dubai). Hesam Rahmanian est représenté

par Isabelle van den Eynde (Dubai).

Hesam Rahmanian prépare une exposition personnelle, programmée en automne 2013 à la galerie Isabelle van den Eynde de Dubai.



Comment avez-vous découvert cette pièce de Genet ?

Nous avons grandi avec l'œuvre de Jean Genet et avons aussi lu ceux qui lui étaient proches, tels que Samuel Beckett et Eugène Ionesco. La pièce a été traduite par l'artiste iranien Bahman Mohassese en 1968, et plusieurs pièces de Genet ont été jouées à Téhéran par le Kargan Namashye, une troupe de théâtre, expérimentale et provocatrice qui s'est produite jusqu'à la Révolution de 1979.

Pourquoi avoir voulu utiliser ce texte comme source d'inspiration ?

Après notre dernière exposition commune, "I Put It There You Name It" à la galerie Isabelle van den Eynde à Dubai, nous voulions continuer à confondre nos personnalités en tant qu'artistes. *Les Bonnes* est une pièce qui parle un peu de nous, de la manière dont nous travaillons et fonctionnons depuis trois ans dans notre maison de Dubai. Chacun de nous peut être à tout moment bonne ou madame. De plus, *Les Bonnes* est un texte qui s'applique vraiment à notre époque, aussi bien dans les Emirats qu'en France. La pièce traite d'une mascarade du pouvoir. On peut interpréter le texte dans le sens de la relation binaire entre l'Orient et l'Occident. A la suite des événements récents dans le monde arabe, les opprimés se soulèvent pour conquérir le pouvoir à leur manière, imitant ou parodiant les structures du pouvoir telles qu'ils les voient en Occident, particulièrement dans la sphère de la culture.

L'autre grande mascarade tient à la présence des drag...

Si les protagonistes revêtent des vêtements et des accessoires de femme, alors nous pensons qu'ils doivent clairement jouer comme des hommes afin de créer une ambiguïté. Les cultures patriarcales placent les femmes dans une situation invivable. Notre objectif est donc

de rester des hommes en jouant ces femmes et de devenir le cauchemar du patriarcat. D'ailleurs, nous n'avons pas cette séparation des genres dans notre langue, le farsi.

Comment lier votre réinterprétation des Bonnes à la culture iranienne ?

Dans la Perse antique, les pièces de théâtre étaient jouées chez les gens du peuple car il n'existait pas de lieu dédié. La scène et le rideau sont des inventions occidentales qui ont été importées plus tard. Le théâtre traditionnel était donc complètement spontané, avec des acteurs nomades qui ne savaient ni lire, ni écrire. Ils se contentaient d'apprendre quelques textes et improvisaient des heures durant autour de cette base, ce qui est similaire à la démarche que nous avons adoptée ici.

Une mise en scène qui tient presque du rituel...

C'est une question que nous nous sommes posée dès le départ : comment passer du théâtre à la performance ? La frontière entre les deux est très ténue. Dans le cas des *Bonnes*, nous avons cherché à employer le vocabulaire gestuel de la performance plutôt que celui du théâtre. Nous sommes partis de répliques choisies et avons répété des mouvements en songeant à l'affection de Genet pour le théâtre kabuki japonais.

Comment avez-vous choisi les vêtements et les accessoires ?

Nous avons quelques tenues en tête, mentionnées dans la pièce. Lorsque l'on revêt des vêtements de marque, l'identité est en quelque sorte dissoute dans leur langage de pouvoir et de prestige. Cela nous paraît encore plus pertinent aujourd'hui qu'à l'époque de Genet.