

IN MY COUNTRY MEN HAVE BREAST

My Country Men Have Breasts (2012, filmed in 2007)

IRAN

5 minutes

Directed by:
Producer:

MANIA AKBARI
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In 2007 Mania Akbari was diagnosed with cancer and lost her breasts in the battle. Her struggle with the illness was documented in her feature 10+4. Her experience and the marks it left on her body became one of the central subjects of her work. The same year, Akbari photographed her own naked body for a photography exhibition entitled Devastation. It was soon banned in Iran, but that didn't deter Akbari from continuing to depict her body in a secretly filmed video. However, it wasn't until 2012, after Akbari had exiled to London to escape the Iranian government's arrests of filmmakers, that she was able to use this footage for another project, entitled In My Country Men Have Breasts. The trigger for this film occurred when Akbari was already in London. 'I had this experience of seeing this Arab-looking lady walking against the wind with her black gown covering her body all the way down. As I subconsciously started following her (for almost 40 minutes), I began to imagine the film, and the idea started taking shape, strengthened by seeing the movement of her chador in the wind. I was very curious to see what was underneath. I don't agree with the concept of the chador – a kind of magic triggered by this chance encounter.'

In In My Country Men Have Breasts, the images of Akbari's scarred body appear and disappear behind the sensual swaying of a black chador moving in the wind. As she stands by the sea, her body is initially filmed in such extreme close-ups that it makes her smooth skin look like the dunes of a desert, enhanced by the sound of a strong blowing wind. These images are juxtaposed with new footage of her body and a song by Ahangaran, also used in her video installation I Slept with My Mother, My Father, My Brother and My Sister In a Country Called... Iran. His piercing, chanting voice is deeply entrenched in the country's collective memory, symbolizing the massacre of soldiers that took place during the Iran-Iraq War.

More importantly, Akbari takes this idea and places it in the present, as a protest against the current political situation – the stand-off between Iran and the US and Israel, the conflictual situation in the Middle East, and the corruption in Iran itself. In My Country Men Have Breasts binds the devastating memory of war to the memory of a woman who lost part of her body owing to the ravages of cancer. By symbolically deploying the destruction of war as a cancer, Akbari establishes a metaphorical connection between the individual and the society, personal and collective memory, expressed through combat, struggle and above all, rebirth.

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IN MY COUNTRY MEN HAVE BREASTS...

Story

Akbari was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007 and she lost her breasts due to the cancer. After she directed, wrote and acted 10+4 which showed her struggle with the cancer, the depiction of the artist's body became central in her works. In the same year, Akbari photographed her own naked body for the photo project titled Devastation. Although it was pretty risky, put herself in danger and prohibited to exhibit Devastation in Iran due to the naked images of her own body, Akbari continued to depict her own body as a new medium and new material so that she provided a video secretly as well.

In 2012, after Akbari left Iran due to the barred situation of filmmaking and arresting film makers, she uses the video that shoot secretly from her own body in 2007 and juxtaposed with new images and the song of Ahangaran, who was a singer for the war time between Iran and Iraq. As a result of her action and performance, the video project titled In my country, Men Do Have Breasts happened. For Akbari, the aim of this video project is a protest in relation to the current political situation between Iran, United State, and Israel, the war in Middle East, and also the corrupted atmosphere inside of Iran.

In my country, Men Have Breast evokes the relationship between the devastating memory of war and the memory of the woman who lost part of her body due to ravages of cancer. The video highlights the symbolic connection between war, as a cancer, and the scars it bears on society. The metaphor also extends as a comparison between individual and society; the interaction of collective and personal memory of the war and death. The song over the video is by Ahangran, a singer whose voice has a heavy tone that symbolizes the massacre and death of the soldiers in the war of Iran and Iraq. This song is part of a difficult collective memory of the Iranian people during ten years of war.



IN MY COUNTRY MEN HAVE BREASTS

a video art by

MANIA AKBARI

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