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Antonia Gerke - "Idols Under Construction: Mom, Do Men Drive Cars Too?"

Dear ladies ,

I am Antonia Gerke, I am an actress, I am a painter, I am a mother of two girls, I am a coach, I am a friend, I am partner, I am a clown, I am queen, I am a loser, a winner, a bitch, a darling.

I am free to decide what I want to be/ who I want to be like everybody else... as long as the external and inner mirrors of who I am are breakable.

I didn't decide to be female, I enjoy being female, but it was a hard piece of work breaking inner and external mirrors, doubts and projections.

I often hear, how do you manage, single mum with two kids, two freelance jobs while doing sports, music and training young horses.

I recover from one work through the other. I manage because I want to.

In life like in art there are no rules and there is no right or wrong.

There is only something that works or does not work.

My challenges and goals are to stay flexible and authentic as an actress, artists, mother and human being.

So far I still don't need an expensive car, an aristocratic husband or a castle; only bravery, curiosity and a portion of ignorance.

So that was the positive introduction and you can see I am a fulfilled person.

But of course there are and were moments where I think of myself as a loser.

There are moments in which my intuition becomes silent, humiliated by woman, men, circumstances and situations.

In these moments I realize that in the last 10 years I have painted portraits of woman that only a minority of woman can understand.

These are mainly working women who are free spirited and autonomous.

There are doubting moments at the openings of my exhibitions where I often meet the either lustful or shy gaze of men looking at my paintings saying:

"if I buy this painting my wife will be jealous"

or I hear

"do you also paint cats? I can come by to your studio with my Tom cat"...

All of this has neither to do with my art nor with me.

Moments when I am told by a TV Director that I am too old as a woman at 37, to reach the top but for men it is possible.

Moments when people imply that it is egoistic of me to pursue my varied loved professions as well as being a mother.

"Be realistic!" One of my favorite sentences and one that I have never understood - who's reality is meant?

In these moments I wish I had the unshakeable self belief to react authentically, regardless of the consequences.

I have observed this unshakeable self belief more often among the male species of human being than among the female species.

Why is this happen? And why am I being confronted with my wrinkles anyhow?

It is in the bones of human history that the man is the leader, the hunter, the one who carries the guns.

I don't want to bore you with the topic of gender equality.

I know that this topic is like a long loong old grey beard but still this old grey beard, no matter how often you trim it, it grows back again in different guises.

How can it be that on a film set with over 50 people, I am the only woman who understands that a lactating (breast feeding) mother needs to express (get rid of her milk) milk during the lighting breaks?

I still hear the director's assistant saying:

"Coffee break! If somebody needs milk, ask Antonia."

I thought that was very funny then. But afterwards I realized how sad and bad this situation was.

So, this was the second (sub) introduction. I am still fulfilled.

Idols under constructions- Mom do men drive cars as well?

My daughter, four year old then, sat thoughtfully in the back of my car.

"Mom, do men drive cars as well?"

I answered: "Of course they do." I could not help adding:

"Not as good as women though."

At that point I realized that I was a role model. Until now I was only wondering that I had none. I had missed a role model sometimes.

A role model can be a guiding star, an idol, an inspiration, a pattern, an exemplary, an incitation.

It is someone in life who gives impulses, stimulus and incentives.

And now I am a role model myself? Tzz.. for hundreds of years a woman would not think of herself immediately that way. For a man it was the most normal thing that his son would follow in his footsteps.

I am not saying that women so far just thought too little of themselves.

I think the men's role as a role model was taken too seriously.

Especially by the men themselves.

They seem to have a genetical source of role models, for example:

Old Shatterhand, Winnetou, Napoleon, Franz Beckenbauer, Mozart, Bach, Picasso, George Bataille, James Dean, Clark Gable and Superman and of course their fathers.

A woman does not naturally define herself or another woman she adores as a guiding star or good example in this or that.

By the way, I do have a good feeling about a major change in that aspect when I hear about events like this one here. I might have no role models, but I have gotten to know some women who are going naturally their own way without the smell of being a victim in this or that.

That encourages me.

Looking back in history I had the feeling that a woman is a kind of background decoration for all male heroism. She is rarely the hero herself.

It sounds so old fashioned, but this patriarchy seems to remain inside us all like a fossil dinosaur. It is time to make an international museum out of this.

The museum of patriarchy. We should start collecting.

Back to the role models.

Especially when I was young, I was looking for a role model or justice in a way.

When I was eight Years old my mother found me in the bath, where I was cutting virtuously my already short hair even shorter.

My excuse was:

“I want to be a boy now. When boys do something great, climbing the highest tree, when they win in running or shoot a goal in football, they are the heroes! When I do exact the same thing great, they say: don't show off.”

Nowadays, I no longer care, I just show off if I think it's needed, but still there remains this little doubt if I have earned any applause at all.

I was looking for female role models in the history of film and culture.

Marlene Dietrich. She said over-modestly in her biography that the film director Sternberg has made her and her image of that strong woman everybody adored. She herself was a Prussian obeying soul, trying the best to please the image that was given to her. Here I found a role model for the modern woman in the last century in Germany. No wonder that these women did not want to define themselves as a role model. At least Marlene Dietrich legitimized wearing pants for woman.

Here we scratch the topic: The power of the medium film and the image of woman in our daily TV program.. I planned to hold a minute of silence at that point.

Anyway, the good thing is that a lot had happened since I wanted to be a boy in the bath of my parent's home. During the last 30 years television modernized. We have single mums working as police officers, successful lawyers and great female doctors who have a family, needs and wants.

The obvious normality of it is demonstrated awkwardly. Anyway, it is a good start.

By the way where is the quota for female TV authors and female directors?

Not that we would want one, but we need one.

Back to the role models in the film scene.

Romy Schneider died in my age. A person full of desire.

Marilyn Monroe died as well that age. She was full of fear and insecurities that she could not live up to her image.

She left us: "Diamonds are a girl's best friend."

It is a comforting and funny idea and at the same time a sad fact in quite a lot of biographies.

Hildegard Knef: „Für mich soll's rote Rosen regnen.“ Desire.

Edith Piaf: „Non, je ne regrette rien.“ A revolution 1960. A woman who does not regretted anything. Today it is normal to not feel guilty for your needs and wants. Isn't it? Häh?

Zarah Leander: "Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen."
Still up to date - this thought.

These typical role models for the actresses of the last century were pretty lonely and broke when they were old. Actually I have found some highlights among the new generation of actresses, wonderful woman like Charlotte Rampling, Cate Blanchet or Helen Mirren. Also in other professions, Margaretha Steiff, Hillary Clinton or Indira Gandhi. But will these women be defined as role models for the whole society like the great divas of the last century? I hope so.

I was looking for role models in mythology and religion.

Either they were bitches or witches or pure male fantasy projections or all of it at once or they were unbelievable holy.

Nothing I want to be look up to or to be seen as.

In art history I did not find a lot genius paintresses, only hundreds of muses.

The small numbers of outstanding female artists were expressing virtuously emotional distress and extremities of misery.

Very little: joy of life, happy love or humorous aspects of life.

No wonder none of them said: Look at me! I am a good example for talented girls!
Be like me!

Besides, no one gave paintresses in the last centuries financial support.

Who could have done? The churches, the aristocracy, the husband? No, that would have been far too dangerous for the whole society.

Today, I can hardly stop the flow of financial support..There is none.

2009 I received a price for an artistic production. I stood there on stage with this glass sculpture I got as a price, sponsored by one of the biggest electric power company

and thought: Why is this price not combined with another prize? At least something? Free electricity for my studio or money for new art material? But I was too polite and too grateful for the attention. I shut up and paid, late at night, a big sum to my babysitter.

As an excuse for my moaning, I have some numbers for you:

In Germany there are about 45,000 actors and actresses. There are less than 3,000 roles per year. Needless to say that the business is difficult and that there are far more male characters needed than female.

I read that only 4% of the painters can actually make a living from painting. No need to say that the number of paintresses of the 4% is tiny.

One last thing concerning role models:

I made a spontaneous survey among my female friends:

Who is your idol or role model:

Actress, 47: Idol, Madonna, but I have no role model.

Horse-trainer, 24: I am my own role model.

Makeup artist, 45: A role model? For me?

Paintress, 40: No.

Opera singer, 36: Still looking for one.

Film producer, 47: Angela Merkel and all women who stay female in a men's world.

Journalist for politics, 35: I have no role models or idols.

My grandmother, 99 ½: I had none.

A lot of my male friends, among them also fathers, fall also in a deep hole when they think about their role models.

Schoolteachers are discussing loudly how to restructure the education of boys, in order to compensate their disadvantage.

In the area I live in Berlin, I see in every corner advertisement for support groups for men or single fathers, saying -find your female side-.

A lot is going on. Things develop. But not enough. We need to keep on talking about this long long grey beard of gender equality. We need to keep on trimming it.

Especially when we look to other corners of the world like in Africa, India and so on.

Here we do not see any old old topic of gender equality, no long long grey beards anywhere. There is a lot of talking and doing to spread around the world.

Women need to define and promote each others as role models for other societies and cultures and the next generations.

And we need to do this with humor, as a matter of course and the greatest of ease.

I am Antonia Gerke, an actress, a paintress, a mother of two girls, a coach, a friend, a partner, a clown, queen, a loser, a winner, a bitch, a darling and I love it.

Thank You for listening.