Webcam Venus, Honestly Beautiful

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Addie Wagenknecht and Pablo Garcia. "Webcam Venus," 2013

"Would you like to pose for me?" With this invitation the FATlab artists Addie Wagenknecht & Pablo Garcia have co-opted adult webcam performers to pose for them. Rather than extreme erotic performances, this time they were hired by chat (in some cases even paying them their normal rates) to represent positions and gestures from great classical works of art: from the "Mona Lisa", to "Venere di Urbino " by Titian, or "Nudo Sdraiato a Braccia Aperte" by Modigliani, to name just some of the chosen works. The effect is astonishing. Considering the contemporary canons, the players chosen by the artists for this operation are the opposite of the canonized beauty: they have nothing to do with bodies artificially altered for commercial advertising, which in the long run slowly destroys the image and self-confidence. In this unusual direction, the performers are beautiful. Paradoxically, the artists specifically asked them to not strip off their clothes, but their virtual identity. When they were asked to pose in a "classic" way, these particular interpreters suddenly become self-aware. We read in the artist's text: "IRL (in real life), art nudes are acceptable while naked bodies are inappropriate; NIRL (not in real life), graphic sex acts are acceptable yet de-sexualization on cam performers was difficult for some to maintain ". For a moment, in the frame of "Webcam Venus " we can see the identity that lives just outside the frame of the webcam, the one where the person has to improvise beyond the protocols issued by sex performances (or any other we are called to interpret daily), becoming someone else who, paradoxically, describes themselves better.