

HerSelves

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“HerSelves” is the first group show in the Sala Project curated by the foundation team of the Blueproject Foundation comprising Renato Della Poeta, Aurélien Le Genissel, Cristina López Morcuende, Laura Olea and Pedro Torres. This proposal arose from a desire to investigate the figure of the woman in today’s society through a collective, internal reflection, whose contradictions, richness, paradoxes or complementarities reflect the plurality and complexity of a fundamental situation in our society. Through a diverse and multiple cast of voices and feminine viewpoints, the exhibition reflects upon what it means to consider the position of women beyond a simple otherness, a condition it has been confined to in the traditional, hegemonic discourse. Using their own personal experiences, the artists that come together here question the cultural, social, private or symbolic dimensions of the female figure and its issues regarding representation, identity, liberation, intimacy, desire or perception.

“HerSelves” is woven together as a multiple symphony in which female artists speak about women, regaining a voice which is so often absent, and allows them to denounce, criticize and construct their own message about themselves. Language, image, intimacy or provocation are media for transforming the personal into the political, the individual into the collective, the casual into the meaningful. Complementary or parallel discourses feed, criticize or deconstruct that evasive and slippery social construct of the collective imagination that we call feminine identity.

The title of the exhibition echoes an interview given in 1975 by Julia Kristeva, titled “Unes Femmes” (published in *Les Cahiers du GRIF*), in which the renowned philosopher highlighted that “the fact alone that a generality of the female condition exists should be a way of allowing each woman to express her singularity”. The exhibition is an attempt to approach this singularity, within an undeniable historical-social legacy, bringing together women that affirm their aspirations and personal creations.

The exhibition can be seen as a semantic and lexical interplay, whose fruitful tension is organized, firstly, around the feminine discourse as an alterity to male domination and, secondly, around the disappearance of

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borders to offer an egalitarian and universal vision; a kind of recognition that avoids denaturalized assimilation or the creation of an enshrined façade. These two centres of gravity structure an exhibition whose pieces orbit freely and independently, establishing dialogues, discussions or debates with one another about the body, representation, language and desire. These are the pillars supporting the prolific multiplicity of visions and aspirations that exist in the feminine discourse and which allow a transversal and equivocal reading of works that are thus transformed into polyphonic resonances of a shared aspiration.

Hence, Sarah Maple's painting *If I loved you it was because of your hair. Now you no longer have your hair, I don't love you anymore*, with its reference to Frida Kahlo's *Self-portrait with Cropped Hair*, is presented as a reflection on the female body and, more specifically, its dimension as a taboo, both sexually and morally. Through hair, as an element of subversion, humiliation or eroticization, the British artist brings to light and plays with the historical importance of the body in the feminist fight. The body has always been one of the main battlegrounds where women have fought to regain their freedom. The religious veil, women raped after the Second World War in France, witches in the Middle Ages or the famous "Death Squadron" of Russian women are just a few figures from the debate. With her fragmented figure titled *Nosotras devorándonos*, Alba Feito addresses the subject, delving deeper into the complicated relationship a woman has with a body that feels alien, strange perhaps, if it does not coincide with the *diktat* of the image imposed by the prevailing canons.

In the face of this symbolic violence, Camille Moravia seems, in contrast, to be leading a crude and carefree rebellion. Her photographs serve as a medium for playing, provoking and embracing her body in a combination of materiality and the (false) lightness of deeply condemning phrases, offering us a glimpse of her humoristic veneer. This is a mix of fragility and defiance, as confirmed in the title *Prends soin de moi*, a reference to the formal but intimate art of Sophie Calle. Numerous artists address the subject of the body and how it is represented in "HerSelves". Whether through a head-on condemnation, as is the case of Flor Aliberti, whose videos (*(Auto)exposiciones: Am I?, Watch Me Shrink, Cosplay* and *Daily Routine*) are presented as a series of montages created using tutorials taken from YouTube which show viewers how to lose weight, put on makeup or how to create the best cleavage. Or through ironic and kitsch parody, as is the case of Arvida Byström and Maja Malou Lyse, whose video (*Selfie Stick Aerobics*) is presented as a histrionic pastiche of aerobic tutorials that circulate around the Internet, to which the artists have added a selfie stick.

The woman's body as a malleable and submissive object, and, more specifically, or more simply, the woman's body as an *object*. Centuries



of being objectivized by the dominant male viewpoint has sustained this relationship women have between their bodies and how they are represented. In the *Autorretratos* of Sandra March, for example, we see how the Catalan artist turns the traditional visual structure on its head. While classical painting has always been a man painting the body of a woman as if it were an object, Sandra March turns the situation around: in her pictures it is a woman who is drawing the body of a woman. A body that it is hard to see as an object as it is her own body. In this case, the woman becomes painter and model, subject and object of the artistic structure, showing a real body far from the idealized fantasies we find throughout art history. Something similar can be seen in the photographs that Dina Litovsky has taken in New York's *Meatpacking* neighbourhood, in her series of the same name. Clearly less aware of their actions, the teenagers that Litovsky photographs offer their bodies as objects that they themselves have "drawn" or "painted" whether through their clothes, makeup or hairstyles. Again, the body and how it is represented, socially, as we have seen, but also intimately, as can be glimpsed in one of the photographs in which two teenagers are removing their sandals to put on their high heels. The intimate self versus the social self.

Intimacy and privacy can again be found in Alyson Provox's *Time wasting experiment*. Her cards, on which one can read thoughts that the artist has had during her *wasted* moments, in her free time, are a reflection of an intimacy that plays with the concept of universality. Where do these thoughts come from? Are we the sum of our thoughts? Do we feel identified with them? Are they specifically the thoughts of a woman or could they belong to anyone? The elusive nature of the female identity with its crumbling and uncertain borders can also be found in Kelli Connell's series of photographs (*This morning / Sweetwater / Reflection / Kitchen Tension*). Through these, the Oklahoma-born artist reflects upon the idea of the couple and familiarity through the classic figure of the double, allowing us to insinuate that maybe what we look for in the other (of whatever gender and sex) is nothing more than an image of ourselves. Verónica Navas Ramírez delves into similar psychological depths and subtleties with her performance, titled *Hasta Agotar Existencias (Ensayando*



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para que la muerte de mi madre no me pille desprevenida), which investigates into the fears, doubts, hopes and aspirations we all have hidden within us. The universal or specifically feminine relationship with the mother, or our own image that we construct through the stories we identify ourselves with are some of the issues the artist uses to try to define this shadowy form we call the “self”.

And this “self” is fruit of the image that we transmit and/or which is imposed upon us, as is shown by Joana Kohen with her triptic *As You Wanted Me To Be* and her work *Souled Out / Fit In*. With this piece, the Turkish artist plays humoristically and conceptually with the fragmentation of the female image on social networks and in the contemporary world. “What do you want me to be like? You decide!”, she seems to scream at the viewer in an allusion to the image of women that men have imposed upon them by force for centuries.

This act of enforcing an image finds particularly fertile soil in language, as we can see in the works *Studio visit* by Cara Benedetto and *I am a Writer* by Itziar Barrio. Reusing a phrase from the film *Basic Instinct*, the latter plays with the inequality and double standards that exist in the use of language. It is not the same for a man to say it as it is for a woman. The consequences, interpretations and judgements are very different. And even more so if they are about a woman’s sexuality, as we see in the phrase *I am a Writer*. It is hard to rid ourselves of our prejudices.

And all too often have these rubber stamps been instilled and imposed by men, as we discover in Núria Gómez Gabriel’s installation *Las fotografías de la Iconografía frecuentan sus páginas*. The Catalan artist presents a series of photographic images from the end of the 19th century taken in the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital, where Doctor Jean-Martin Charcot carried out the first experiments that would lead to the definition of hysteria; a word and a concept that, as demonstrated in the early years of psychoanalysis, has always been associated with women. More specifically, the concept of hysteria supported stereotypes of women as irrational, choleric, sentimental

and unpredictable beings. A *hysterical* bunch, as they say... the men that is. It is a label created without anyone asking women themselves; a situation mirrored in the absence of their bodies in the images of Núria Gómez Gabriel, as if they were not required for the experiments.

This abuse of language is clearly the reflection of the injustices denounced, for example, by Sophia Wallace, with her eye-catching, neon piece *Until she is free*, or Eliza Bennett in her video *A woman's work is never done*. In this work, the viewer is shown a woman sewing her own hand, thus allowing the British artist to denounce all the unacknowledged, unpaid and unseen work that women have done throughout the centuries. Work that, in a way, has never been considered work, unlike the act of weaving, historically one of the only recognized jobs associated with women.

The exhibition concludes with *Spit/Swallow* by the South African artist Frances Goodman. A neon mobile whose female outline, similar to Rodchenko's Lilya Brik, successively spits and swallows. A symbol perhaps of that ambiguous, unstable and complex position in which women have always found themselves; divided between their desire to externalize their anger, their rage, their contempt or their humiliation, and their need to swallow and put up with these same things, these injustices or moral impositions. *Spit/Swallow* is presented, therefore, as a paradigmatic piece and one highly representative of those opposing and/or complementary poles that feed and enrich women's reflections on their own condition, and which can be found throughout "HerSelves".

Far from attempting to encompass the infinite standpoints that exist among today's feminine voices, "HerSelves" can be seen as both a struggle and a reflection, which is more valid and necessary than ever. It raises essential questions and issues, helping to lay the foundations for a way of thinking that can one day provide the right responses.

