



María María Acha-Kutscher / Núria Güell / Margaret Harrison
She, the eye, the finger, the hand

17.09.2020 – 14.11.2020

ADN Galeria will start off the 2020-2021 season with the group show *She, the eye, the finger, the hand*, with works by artists María María Acha-Kutscher, Núria Güell and Margaret Harrison. The project, curated by Alexandra Laudo, establishes a dialogue between militant feminist works that critically review visual stereotypes. This exhibition is part of the Barcelona Gallery Weekend 2020 program.

She, the eye, the finger, the hand establishes a dialogue among a selection of works by three artists of different nationalities and generations: Margaret Harrison (1940, Wakefield, United Kingdom), María María Acha-Kutscher (1968, Lima, Peru) and Núria Güell (1981, Vidreres, Spain). In spite of their generational and contextual differences, and of the specificity and singularity of their works, it is easy to identify similar approaches, themes and discursive lines in the artistic practices of these three creators. The first term of the title, *She*, does not refer only to the obvious circumstance of them being women, but alludes to the fact that they work from a declared and manifested feminist standpoint through which they analyze different forms of violence and oppression exercised against women as political subjects. They are aware that violence and gender discrimination are inherent to other forms of oppression, such as racial or class subjugation, thus they advocate an inclusive and transversal feminism that denounces the violation of rights of any subordinate subject, and claim an egalitarian world where all people can define the conditions of their existence. For its part, *the eye* emphasizes on the function of observation and documentation of reality that the three of them exercise as artists, also highlighting the assumption of responsibility that derives from witnessing, and sometimes even being accomplices, of different forms of social injustice. The eye also refers to an interest in analyzing and critically reviewing visual canons, the stereotyped representation of the female figure in art history, and

the conventions that have shaped the forms of reception and interpretation of artistic images over the years. In their works, and unlike other political artists who limit their activism to documentarism, Harrison, Güell and Acha-Kutscher not only record and bear witness to the different forms of social injustice, but also confront them. *The finger* refers to their determination to point out the abuses made by systems of oppression and hegemonic power, but it also refers to their ability to recognize the privileges granted to them for being well-known artists and European residents; privileges that they use in favor of the cause they defend. That is why the last term is *the hand*, a bodily element that represents an active and direct form of relationship with the world, one that symbolizes their shared conviction of understanding art as a tool for social transformation and as a space for the exercise of activism.

The exhibition begins with Núria Güell's project *The value of purity* (2019), in which the artist gathers a set of objects, documents and audiovisual materials related to the "Pura Sangre Español", an equine breed created by demand of Felipe II, whose semen is currently marketed by the Spanish Ministry of Defense in order to promote its reproduction and prevent the extinction of what is considered a "breed pattern of national origin." Güell subtly reveals an intricate imagery in which the animal appears related to the armed forces and to the notions of purity, race and national identity. In dialogue with this work, we find two groups of images from María María Acha-Kutscher's *Womankind* project (in progress since 2010), in which the artist re-elaborates archival images through the use of digital collage. In a kind of oxymoron, the artist generates what could be called "documents of fictional histories" through which she reviews the traditional photographic representation of women from a feminist point of view. In these two groups of images the relations of domination and power are referenced and linked to animal imagery, the female figure, and to the ideological content present in certain elements of material culture, such as monuments, propaganda and uniforms.

In a second space, another group of works also alludes to the dynamics of domination and power that are established through objects and clothing, as well as the incidence of imagery in the conformation of gender roles and sexual relationships. Here, Núria Güell presents the collection of accessories and sex toys of one of the prostitutes with whom she worked in her video essay *De putas. An essay on masculinity* (2018). The sex worker to whom these objects belong, explains that many of



Núria Güell, *De putas. Juguines*, 2019

her clients, supposedly heterosexual, wish to wear women's dresses and accessories, and request to use vibrators and other sex toys, originally designed for gay men and for women. On display, the set of objects is an allusion to the repressive force that the typification of desire exerts on all of us. This line of reflection is also found in the work of Margaret Harrison, a pioneer artist in the construction of queer iconography that expresses a fluid and changing conception of gender and sexuality. Through the use

of humor and the critical revision of sexual stereotypes in US pop art iconography, Harrison feminizes and hypersexualizes the image of superheroes and male icons of popular culture. The works *If these lips could only speak (II)* (1971) and *Ejaculator* (2007) are representative of an extensive body of work that the artist began in the 1970s and continues today. In them she denounces how visual stereotypes limit and impoverish the construction of sexual and gender identity, and how this constitutes a form of violence and restriction of the freedom of women and men.

Next, in the large room, we find two works by María María Acha-Kutscher that also refer to the deconstruction of binary gender. Focused on artists and creators of the XX century, *Herstorymuseum* (in progress since 2017) is an imaginary museum created by Acha-Kutscher where she presents sets of



Margaret Harrison, *Scents of identity* 1993

images as small exhibitions that offer an alternative art history. On this occasion, Acha-Kutscher shows a new series entitled *Permission de Travestissement* (2020) composed of 36 images that reference the ordinance under which 19th century Parisian women were allowed to dress as men in specific cases and circumstances. The installation gathers portraits, quotes and works by artists who have appropriated

symbols of power traditionally associated with masculinity as an emancipatory gesture to reclaim the right to their own image, or to mitigate the inequalities they suffer in relation to their fellow men. Also in the framework of *Herstorymuseum*, Acha-Kutscher presents the piece *Writers with pseudonyms* (2020), which brings together portraits of different writers who used male names to sign their literary works.

Scents of Identity (1993), by Margaret Harrison, takes as reference Edouard Manet's work *Un bar aux Folies Bergère* (1881-82), where a waitress and prostitute remain solicitous behind a bar while looking sad and lost. In this series, Harrison portrays different female figures as department store sales clerks to point out how the capitalist machinery frequently places women in the position of mediators between products and

customers, and how the "obliging femininity" expected of her, also turns her into an object of desire. The careful presentation of the paintings in the exhibition space, arranged on a colored background and illuminated with elegant lamps, also invites us to think about the gaze as a form of consumption, and the artistic work as merchandise. The series dialogues with a group of *Womankind* images by María María Acha-Kutscher, in which the artist uses digital collage on archival photographs to reformulate the relationships established between the female figure, the mannequins, the models and the articles that are presented to be purchased.

Next we find a set of videos by Núria Güell related to the project *A Godly Tale* (2018-2019), in which she worked with a group of minors survivors of sexual exploitation and with a family of former pimps in

Mexico. During the process, Güell and the girls developed an audio guide that accompanied an exhibition of religious works. In the videos presented, the girls and the former pimps interpret and comment on the scenes in the paintings based on their experiences of abuse and mistreatment. In this work, Güell is interested in confronting Christian education and morality against the traumatic experience of sexual abuse, while challenging the concept of family propagated by Catholic instruction. We also find a critique against the role traditionally assumed by art history and institutions in the construction of hegemonic stories based on a patriarchal ideology of discrimination and stereotypical visions of women. However, the work also demonstrates confidence in the possibility of reformulating these great narratives from artistic practices, and from the museum itself, by incorporating dissident voices and non-hegemonic stories.

Parting from the desire to alter the traditional canons of representation of women in art history, María María Acha-Kutscher presents a new group of photographs that show women interacting with works of art and other images of female figures, generating from visual speculation, a new feminist imagery. Her work *Colossus 1* (2015), also from the *Womankind* series, and Margaret Harrison's works *We will create new methods to stop your aggression* (2018) and *Anger and fear* (2019) rework monumental and popular iconography from a feminist angle, and in the case of Harrison, also put in relation to repressive military and police violence. The forms of resistance and subversion taken by women in face of the repressive order of police forces and the questioning of their legitimacy is the theme that Núria Güell explores in her work *Contribution of Law Enforcement Officers* (2009), a work developed in Havana that documents the inappropriate flattering and flirting behavior that some police officers had towards the artist, and the strategy of subversive deception with which she responded to them.



María María Acha-Kutscher, *Womankind. Saudade*, 2020

The walkthrough finalizes with a large-format painting by Margaret Harrison and a new polyptych by María María Acha-Kutscher focused around the relationship between the female figure and the landscape. *Saudade* (2020), a new group of images by Acha-Kutscher, deals with melancholy and the communion between the emotional state with the environment, the internal and external landscape, presenting different female figures -some racialized- in a contemplative state that could be a revision of the romantic tradition. In *Ellen's Dress* (1998), Harrison establishes an association between clothing and landscape to suggest that both are constructions, not having a natural foundation but rather based on culturally established conventions. The figure represented is the artist's daughter, wearing a dress that Harrison bought in Cumbria, but which was manufactured and marketed in different locations indicated in the painting. To the spectacular nature of a sky that refers to the work of Turner and the tradition of English landscaping, Harrison contrasts the data that reveals the relationship of economic exploitation between Europe and developing countries in relation to the production and circulation of merchandise, thus contrasting the beauty of the landscape with the geopolitical harshness.

Alexandra Laudo [Heroínas de la Cultura]

Program

- Thursday, September 17th, 2020, 5pm. Opening with the presence of the artists Núria Güell and María María Acha-Kutscher and the curator Alexandra Laudo.
- Friday, September 18th, 2020, 6pm / 7pm. Guided visits with Alexandra Laudo, curator of the exhibition, and the presence of the artists Núria Güell and María María Acha-Kutscher.
- Saturday, October 24th, 2020, 12pm. Rambla de Poble Nou amb Pere Quart. Núria Güell, Public Event. Co-production by ADN Galeria, Can Felipa and Scene Poble Nou.
- Thursday, November 12th, 2020, 6pm. Guided visit by the curator of the exhibition Alexandra Laudo.

More information and reservations:

<https://www.adngaleria.com/es/communication@adngaleria.com>



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