

The projects of Inmaculada Salinas (Guadalcanal, 1967) shun specialization, making no distinction between produced and reproduced works, between drawings, texts, forms and ideas. Above all, they are attempts to overcome the formal nostalgia that has taken over the contemporary art scene.

Inmaculada Salinas

VOICES IN THE FOREST



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[LA VIRREINA]
CENTRE
DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



INMACULADA SALINAS.
VOICES IN THE FOREST

Inmaculada Salinas is developing for La Virreina Centre de la Imatge a proposal consisting of thirteen previously unexhibited works whose common thread is the thirteen martyrdoms suffered by the girl martyr Saint Eulalia, the patron saint of Barcelona, who was later replaced by the city's co-patron, Our Lady of Mercy. It is said that in the 7th century, as a means to strengthen its power, the bishopric of Barcelona adopted the story of the martyrdoms suffered by this young Christian from Mérida, which had been circulating around the Iberian Peninsula for more than three centuries.

If to feminize a body is to place it on the passive side of life, that is, to deprive it of any attribute that could be seen as a threat, with this project Salinas aims to activate the female body, reversing the martyrdoms suffered by Saint Eulalia, presenting possibilities of disobedience and transgression and proposing practices of seduction and punishment, uses and enjoyments that can be explored by the female body. The series and individual works in this exhibition not only challenge the binary conventions that naturalize false differences such as hard/soft, smooth/rough, dry/wet, straight/curved and active/passive, but also question a conservative feminism that criminalizes desire and restricts gender. Through different collections of images that she has accumulated over the years, the artist traces a kind of political genealogy of the female body that serves as a vehicle for the forms of production of power and pleasure that women can exercise but that are censored, the possibilities of resistance and subversion that are collected in iconographies of the history of art (such as *Phyllis and Aristotle*, *Roman Charity* and the *Sheela na Gigs*), allowing them to speak or resignify themselves through her works.

In addition to these issues, Salinas considers others that are more dependent on her condition and vocation as a painter. Although for years she has been insistently affirming the poetic and political act that painting means for her, she is una-

ble to identify with the dependence on styles, languages and techniques that prevails in the Andalusian art scene, and specifically in painting, where what Mark Fisher¹ and music critic Simon Reynolds² have described as a situation of “formal nostalgia” is predominant. It is a kind of attachment to the forms, modes of presentation and circulation of the past that reinforces its isolation from other artistic expressions, paralysing the creation of new representations more closely in line with contemporary artistic experience and their circulation in spaces other than galleries and museums. Perhaps there is no shortage of reasons for nostalgia: in the early 1980s Seville, where the incidence of the modern art market was then practically nil, underwent a reconstruction of the artistic fabric that clearly marked the art scene in Spain. This reconstruction was led by the galleries La Máquina Española and Juana de Aizpuru and by the magazines *Figura* and *Arena*, and its main asset and source of expression was the participation of artists, especially painters. In fact, contrary to what is happening in other artistic fields, such as dance (especially flamenco dance), the changes that have taken place in the visual arts in Seville and Andalusia have almost exclusively been few in number, cryptic and only visible to specialists or initiates.

Salinas continually explores ways to avoid this situation. She is committed to breaking free from this dependence on the past, from this narcissism to which the art scene in which she operates seems to be doomed, and she is confident that it can be done. Some of the routes she proposes to escape from this “melancholy”³ and open the horizon regarding representation involve proposals that accumulate a large amount of work, avoid specialization and the standard disciplinary or academic clichés, and establish no differentiation between produced and reproduced materials, between “drawings, texts, forms or ideas”.⁴

This ethical and aesthetic approach that Salinas initiated years ago is materialized in the creation of long series that incorporate texts or meticulous drawings made from repeated patterns. The only modification is in the range of colours, which progresses drawing by drawing until the end of the series ac-

ording to the sole criterion of the chromatic order suggested by the box of crayons. These texts and drawings interact with photographs, engravings and paintings from some of the collections of images that the artist has been meticulously compiling.

Three of the thirteen works that make up the exhibition, *Jail*, *Street* and *Crystal* follow this system of confronting images and drawings. Four other works, *Whip*, *Milk*, *Fire* and *Cross*, are also displayed in long series of images from the archives compiled by Salinas. However, whereas in the first three the drawings interact with the images, in these works she uses quotes and texts taken from her readings during the process of reflection and production of the works (the anonymous 12th century work *Lai d’Aristote*, *Antigone’s Tomb* by María Zambrano, *Antigone* by Salvador Espriu and *La voz del cuerpo* by Mónica Valenciano) to pursue and provoke strangeness and inaccuracy, anomaly or discomfort.

Creature, *Lead* and *Oil* are the titles of another group of works that recognize the debt to the monumental *Mnemosyne Atlas* of the German art historian and critic Aby Warburg, a work that improved our understanding of how images work and the secret connections that can exist between them. For Georges Didi-Huberman, the work of compilation that is inherent to the *Atlas*, in which different times are united, produces a kind of shock. This work process because it reveals new meanings according to the order, arrangement and organization of the images, drawings and texts.

Finally, three works function autonomously: *Hook*, a textile and a printed text that hangs like a banner from a balcony overlooking one of the rooms of the exhibition space; *Stone*, which brings together a collection of pebbles from different places that have been pierced by water; and *Cal*, which is made up of twenty-four drawings assembled and exhibited as a whole that reproduce a fragment of the painting *Death and the Knight* by Pedro de Camprobín, which is preserved in the Hospital de la Caridad in Seville.

Each of the works described contains its own codes, instructions or systems, all of which provide us with keys to vis-

ualization—images and drawings that are fragmented, divided, separated and repeated. Although these keys have no communicative or informative function, when observed they produce something similar to a crisis, a disorder generated from the most obsessive of orders, a threat to reason.

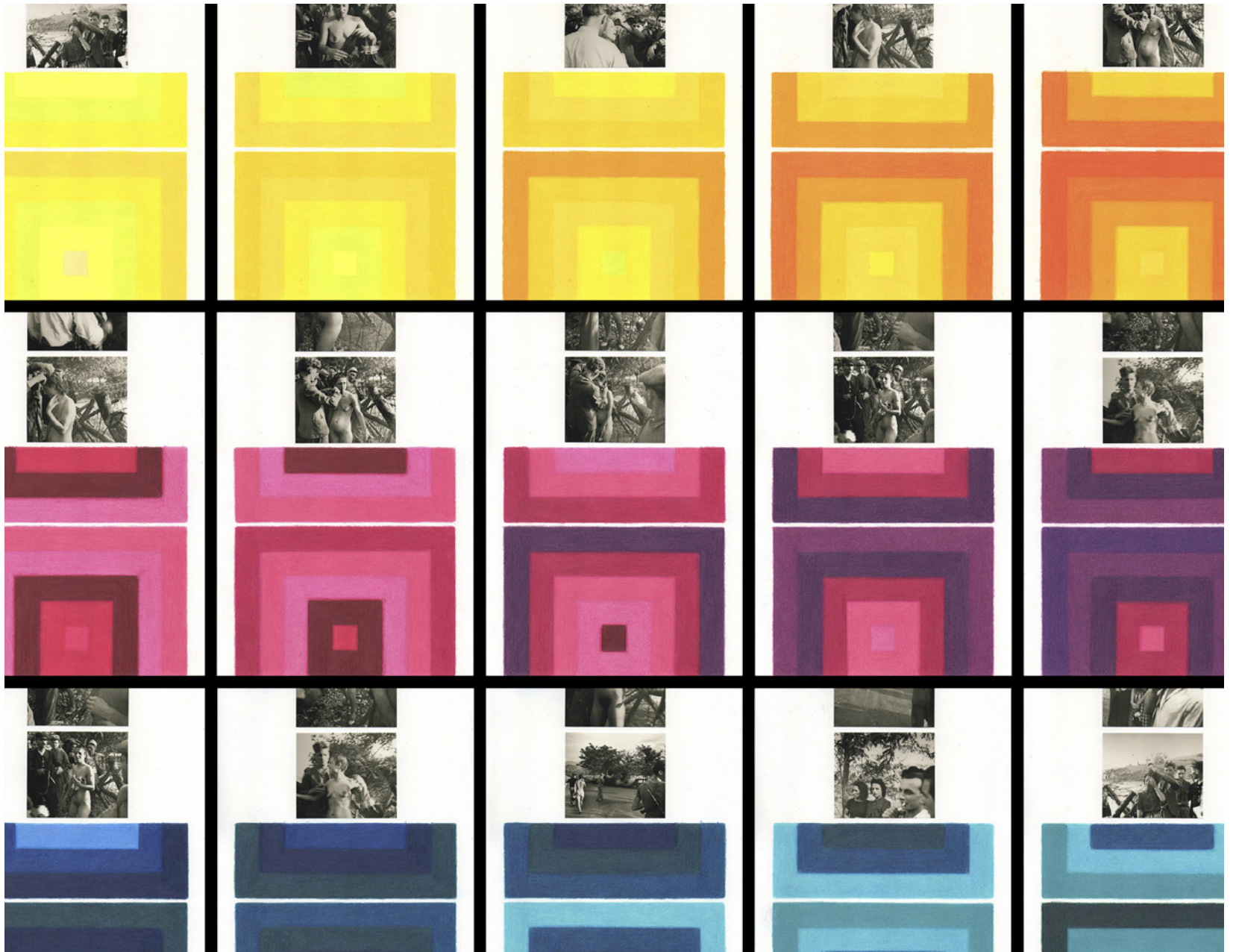
We have explained how this way of operating—producing endless works, investing countless hours, repeating the mechanics of assembly and craft—has allowed Salinas to overcome these melancholic times, to give a certain meaning to her work and to propose ways to redefine not only painting but also the work of art. Perhaps in order to understand why we believe that this work methodology can produce these effects, we need to make a few brief notes on the position that art has come to occupy in neoliberal society.

Since Fredric Jameson published *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in 1984, we know that by colonizing the kingdom of non-productivity, by commodifying the anti-use that is art, capitalism has made it one of the main pillars of its power. For her part, Hito Steyerl points out, “Among all other forms of art, fine art has been most closely linked to post-Fordist speculation”.⁵ And, indeed, post-Fordist capitalism destroys Marx’s idea of working time as the measure of magnitude of a thing’s value. “The modifications in the workers’ statute that affect the relationship between the space/time of work and non-work mean that work has ceased to have that central character that it had for capital as a source of valorization.”⁶

How have these transformations affected the work of art? Following Hito Steyerl, “Rather than painting, welding, and molding, artistic strike work consists of ripping, chatting, and posing.”⁷ Steyerl considers that what used to be work has become its opposite, what she calls an *occupation*. “An occupation keeps people busy instead of giving them paid labor. As such, it knows no traditional alienation, nor any corresponding idea of subjectivity. An occupation doesn’t necessarily assume remuneration either, since the process is thought to contain its own



Fuego (fragment), 2022



Calle (fragment), 2022



Plomo, 2022

gratification. It has no temporal framework except the passing of time itself. It is not centered on a producer/worker”.⁸ Salinas is well aware that the many actors currently involved in the production of contemporary art and culture show the highest levels of precariousness, self-exploitation, lack of solidarity, competition and isolation that characterize a new capitalist order in which “structural unemployment is as necessary as the degradation of social and working conditions”.⁹ Salinas maintains, as stated by Hanne Darboven, that art is time, a time that is of work and therefore of expression and production, but also of claiming and denouncing, of conflict and socialization with other professions in which, as in art, the exploitation of devotion or the confusion between work and life have been discovered as sources of additional surplus value.

Salinas’s very long series that repeat patterns with hardly any variations, her meticulous work of collecting, assembling and reassembling images, and the long working hours that she sometimes spends in the exhibition space are commitments that she establishes and imposes on herself. The aim is to visualize her condition as a worker, to give her work some kind of value in the face of the farce, indecency and wretched conditions of production, circulation and exhibition that dominate the contemporary art scene. Although they lack any didactic intent, these works point us to paths that must be taken if we want to reverse this situation: to show unnameable realities, to “...activate the strength of the weak, deploy new languages and new ways of thinking. To occupy space and take over time.”¹⁰

But there is something else in these *ways of doing*, in this work that we have been describing: there is a tactile way of thinking. “Manual work is also a way of thinking. That’s the amazing thing. Manual work, including manual thought, is a form of resistance to the logic of production of capital. Manual work takes time. Manual work democratizes—it’s not statistical or algorithmic. Manual work specifies. Manual work is even digital—and the play on words is significant.”¹¹ I use this quote from a conversation between Pedro G. Romero and Ángel Calvo Ulloa because it is similar to Salinas’s answer to a

question I asked her in one of the conversations we have been having since Valentín Roma proposed this work to us. “Why,” I asked, “as an artist who is so skilled, so gifted for drawing and painting, do you reduce your pictorial work to series built from a pattern that’s sometimes a mere repetition with very few variations?” Her answer was simple but convincing: “My work is a process that requires time. It uses time as one of its themes and allows me, while I do it, to think.” What I understood from this answer is that this serial work, these repetitive, mechanical drawings, interest her (in addition to all the reasons stated above) because they give her the opportunity to doubt “about the status, the nature and the ownership of what is painted”.¹²

The distance of fine arts, and specifically painting, from other artistic expressions is one of the symptoms of that formal nostalgia I mentioned at the beginning of this text, and of its stagnation. Destroying the old demarcations that circumscribe and isolate the arts disciplines is another of the interests that are at play in this exhibition and are present in the work of Salinas, perhaps because her work has a strong performative nature, which can be appreciated both during the production and during the exhibition. Salinas is not naive, nor does she pretend that performative art, dance, criticism and the visual arts should come together, but, paraphrasing Marcel Broodthaers, she wishes to place her work on the very border that separates them.

In order to explore proximity and distance, the common and the divergent, the relationships and conflicts that can occur between linguistic, discursive, poetic and aesthetic experimentation, Salinas invites everyone to participate in this exhibition. Mónica Valenciano and Laura Vallés Vílchez.

“(…)+ That collection of stumbling blocks and also some pushes that gradually took away some stability from me”, that dance “like a doodle with almost no physical support...”¹³ by Mónica Valenciano gave rise to the proposal for her to produce a work within the framework of the exhibition, not because we wished to present something resembling a joint work between the two artists, but because it was important to both of them to

get as close as possible to that border mentioned above between the making of the visual arts and that of dance.

The relationship with Laura Vallés Vílchez goes back a long time. An editor, teacher, art critic and exhibition curator, for years she has been establishing a relationship of complicity with Salinas’s work. She has written texts for her, invited her to exhibitions and published her works. Salinas has also been following Vallés Vílchez closely and feels affected by the proposals, decisions and theses that she has defended in a variety of forums, and especially through the journal *Concreta*. It therefore seemed inevitable to invite her to this exhibition so that she could carry out, in the words of Vallés Vílchez, “through word and image, a ‘laborious record’ in three acts of the process adopted in the exhibition: the mounting or prequel, the first encounter with people who sneaked in, and the result of these reciprocal gazes. A proposal that is committed to a slow and deliberate policy of attention, just as ‘photography’ frames an event and aspires to generate a contact or print.”

Inmaculada Salinas. Voices in the Forest is the title of this exhibition, which arose at a very early stage from the first conversations we had with Mónica Valenciano, who told us of the considerable influence that the work *Claros del bosque* (Clearings in the Woods) by María Zambrano had had, and continued to have, on her work. We talked about the importance of voice in the choreographies and actions of Mónica Valenciano and the fact that for Salinas too it was important for her painting to speak not from the outside but from within, like those words from the woods of María Zambrano, “before such a use of the word appeared, before the word itself was colonized, there would only be words without proper language.”¹⁴ Salinas wanted her works to speak, but she does not demand useful or pragmatic resonances from them. She does not intend to duplicate reality by saying what is, but to put forward operations that add resistances, escape routes from that authoritarian, absorbing, invasive and inescapable symbolic universe that the art system has become.

Notes

- ¹ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Zero Books, 2014
- ² Simon Reynolds, *Retromania. Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past*, Faber and Faber, 2012
- ³ Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy", *Boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19-27.
- ⁴ Pedro G. Romero, Conversation between Pedro G. Romero and Ángel Calvo Ulloa within the framework of the project *Adios/Volverán*. [Our translation]
- ⁵ Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 93.
- ⁶ Francisco Quintana, "Trabajo, no trabajo y neo/posfordismo", *Cadernos de Psicologia Social do Trabalho*, 2005. [Our translation]
- ⁷ Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 95.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ⁹ Francisco Quintana, "Trabajo, no trabajo y neo/posfordismo", *Cadernos de Psicologia Social do Trabalho*, 2005. [Our translation]
- ¹⁰ Diego Sztulwark, *Guerra y Lenguaje en Amador Fernández-Savater*, Filosofía Pirata, 2021. [Our translation]
- ¹¹ Peter G. Romero, Conversation between Pedro G. Romero and Ángel Calvo Ulloa within the framework of the project *Adios/Volverán*. [Our translation]
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Jose Antonio Sánchez (ed.), *Desviaciones*, Madrid-Cuenca, 1999. [Our translation]
- ¹⁴ María Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, Alianza Editorial, 1977, p. 28. [Our translation]



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Curator: Joaquín Vázquez

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**La Virreina Centre de la Imatge
Palau de la Virreina
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona**

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Free entry**



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@lavrreinaci

barcelona.cat/lavirreina