

In *A Spiralling Ascent. Looking Back from the End*, Raisa Maudit (La Palma, 1986) symbolically reviews secret languages and possibilities of change, taking as her starting point the Beguines and their para-religious movement founded in the twelfth century. Feminism and apocalypticism join forces in this project with multiple timeframes.

## Raisa Maudit

# A SPIRALLING ASCENT. LOOKING BACK FROM THE END

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Ajuntament de  
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[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
DE LA IMATGE



## A SPIRALLING ASCENT. LOOKING BACK FROM THE END

A hidden revolution took place in the twelfth century. In the context of feudal Europe—with its many systems of hereditary power vying with totalitarian-like symbolic power under the sway of the Catholic Church—an international women's collective began to work clandestinely to propose another reality. These were the Beguines. Organised into beguinages, this group of active women created their own decision-making structures to determine who would represent them; they chose not to marry; and they set up their own economy for their own survival. In addition, they generated cultural content: they painted, they worked to improve literacy rates, they wrote books and they published the first autobiographies. The Beguines succeeded in defining and distributing content almost as a generous offering for a way of life. A way of life within the system yet outside it: they rejected the Church, yet they surrendered themselves to God. These women were from various social strata and had connections with the middle and upper classes, yet they lived in chastity. The Beguines created their own codes of identification and were successful in building a network of beguinages that began in Germany and Flanders and extended—over the centuries—throughout various countries and places, among them Catalonia.

The forerunners of the mystic poets of the sixteenth century, the Beguines explored the symbolic based on what is now regarded as their proto-feminism. And herein lies the revolution: women in the twelfth century patiently targeting the future and offering conceptual and physical shelter by creating a vocabulary of their own that facilitated a different way of looking. The Beguines constructed their reality as an alternative, they invented a world of their own that withstood the blandishments of both the Catholic Church and the nobility, and they prevented their possible disappearance by using collective defensive tools such as the leap into mysticism and the invisibility of secrecy. It was not until several centuries later,

in the twenty-first century, that the Beguines were viewed as 'extinct', yet their work and way of being remains active through women thinkers, fighters, poets, clerics and social organisers.

In a period of collapse like today, with the current fall of democratic systems in the face of purely economic models and their populist strategies, in an era in which the return to out-and-out feudalism is beginning to look feasible, Raisa Maudit (La Palma, 1986) travels in her exhibition through time in a bid to reclaim and share another history—that entails another future or another present—and to understand it as something more than a need. Perhaps through a gesture of faith, perhaps in a mystical tenor, perhaps as a final option. Faith and mysticism among the Beguines enabled them to develop critical minds, free thinking that distanced itself from the systems of power in order to attempt to visualise other realities. And in that process of visualisation, the presence of the symbolic facilitated an emotional connection that transcended that particular moment. Secret languages tend to survive to the extent that they are less language and more poetic possibility.

The exhibition *A Spiralling Ascent. Looking back from the End* provides no answers. It does not tell the story of the Beguines. It does not offer a better world. Rather, with this exhibition Maudit explores a way of doing and pays emotional tribute to a series of invisible forerunners. Intelligent fighters, women who, in near anonymity, managed to offer the possibility of opening up a world in the face of decline. Gestures and bodies, ideas and sensations, time jumps and a shared desire. The exhibition gives no answers since it is difficult in the darkness—and we are going through one of the darkest periods of history—to glimpse even the questions. And in the face of doubts, a possibility of vision. A vision like that instant before linguistic construction, like that still unstable premotion that is forming first. A complex vision which, in the twenty-first century, transforms the codex into code which—in its fragility—seeks a new idea of the lifeline that needs to remain in the realm of the complex, evading the messianic singularity in order to participate in a shared gesture. And shared gestures call for generosity, something

that is difficult at a time of doubts and control. The invisibility of the Beguines is undoubtedly entirely connected with the idea of the group as opposed to that messianic singularity: the complexity of crossover narratives, the multiplicity of voices and their proximity to democracy, anarchism and the multiplication of subjectivity safeguard against and—at the same time—entail loss. Proto-feminism involved being mindful of the group and thinking of the collective, defending a future without markedly individual acts of heroism.

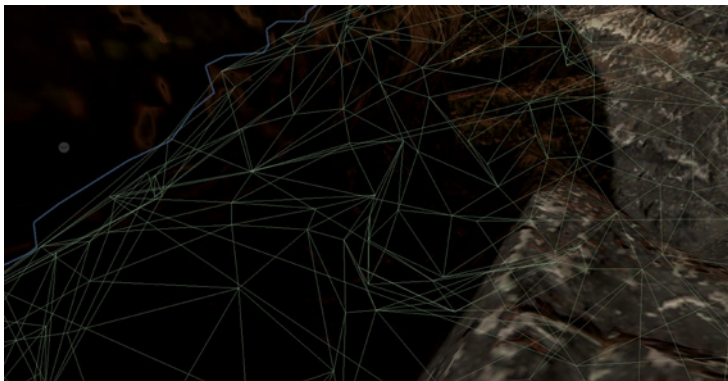
Maudit has embraced the Beguines' way of doing and as a consequence she works in her exhibition by establishing a series of axes that constantly cross each other. Temporal axes, linguistic axes, emotional axes and abstract axes. The time in the exhibition could be baroque, with its shadows and its sensuality, its fear and its latent death. The exhibition time could also be part of that story, the history, written in science fiction—in the work of Frank Herbert and Ursula K. Le Guin, for example—that becomes a blend of situations out of synchrony. The time of the exhibition sets its rhythm, a complex rhythm with different tempos and gestures, with repetitions and insistence.

If time is a context, the exhibition space of *A Spiralling Ascent. Looking back from the End* is the place for arriving at a definition in an emotional process based on a complexity that includes fear, error, belief, anger and the necessary measures of violence and love. And several centuries with which we have to negotiate, various overlapping times, various enclaves, various references. In order to understand the present situation— or a possible present situation—let us go first to the twelfth century. To understand reality, let us accept the apocalypse. To understand reality from a related point of view, let us try to see what trace is left of that proto-feminism of the Beguines, what is left of their well-organised anarchy, their love of knowledge, their codes of mutual recognition, their collective. It is said that the last Beguine died in 2013. This story has not ended and the exhibition is transformed into an echo chamber to counter the possibility of it being forgotten.

In their non-frontal attack, in their rejection of rules and structures of power, the Beguines became a destabilising factor. They spoke of sexuality and religion, they used romance, they broke the rules simply by making decisions for themselves. What of all that remains? What have we erased? What code was left hidden but became a defining element for culture today? Maudit travels between times in order to go now too to a present future with machines and codes intermixing with the human. A world in which thinking has stopped being an attribute of humans, in fact. Let us carefully analyse gestures and their repetition in order to begin to see the hands that write, the hands that direct, that define. In the twelfth century, mysticism saw in God those hands that direct, but in a machine future the code in progress will become that entity to be adored, that possibility of a higher lack of control. The idea of God—and his omnipotence—has been taken over by fast-moving technology, by an artificiality capable of generating itself and presented under the banner of intelligence. The hand and its random gestures respond now to algorithmic code and their failure and end have become mechanical, so rather than death, there is dismantling; another God that cannot die. Mysticism and the need for a future have found a new ungraspable and grandiloquent being.

In the time of industrialisation, the gesture—formerly a human attribute—became shared with machines. With technology language became a code, and with codification under-way hands and gestures no longer write but are the process of writing. And with the process, translation starts to be complicated due to the very instability of the process; gestures and code today use speed and time in progress, thereby making translation difficult. In its place, possibility will be transition or adoration. The possibility of change is turned into something that is verbal, into a time in progress that is difficult to define. Not being able to visualise the change, not being able to keep a distance, the spiralling ascent speeds up and faith finds its logic.

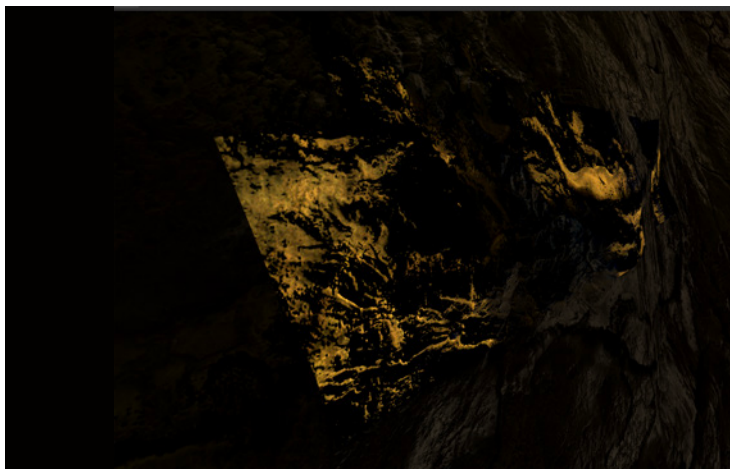
Whereas in the twelfth century a possibility of change due to the action of a non-dominant sector presented itself, what will happen now in this fast complexity? What will happen with



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the destruction? Can we see the destruction? Who ignores the advanced version of a capitalism that espouses evolution and learning only in profit? And what is code now? For whom? Can we generate a human code to stop understanding each other? Might this code be something that separates us from machines? Can we have other languages in which the emotive and the abstract enable those silences in the story to become the main subjects and verbs? The volume of questions is immersed in a compact and burning mass, in something like a pre-thought for a post- moment. The volcano erupted and the lava has still not yet solidified, as a result of which we are unlikely to find ourselves in a stable landscape. Stability, in fact, gave way to a continuous crisis with various triggers, with various explosions in a continuum of disquiet. The ash—the end—comes before the form.

And to counter the disquiet, let us consider the whisper. Consider the bodies that whisper and share through proximity. The secret becomes something that is physical, a litany to be shared individually. In the exhibition, Maudit offers bodies—and relics—with which to establish a relationship. Whereas mysticism entails abandoning bodies in a sensualised explosion, Maudit provides a context for another type of physicality: bodies are sculptures that are symbols that are matter. Bodies are voices that are technology that is something like a language in progress. The bodies are tribute and they are fear and they are reality. The layers of meaning intersect and complement each other in this ascending spiral marked by a historical and also written edifice. The place of the bodies in the exhibition, the place of two bodies that are sculptures that are Beguines that are women that are textile and metal and voice, is framed by a mixed edifice: the stone of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge now welcomes architectural supports that hark back to Beguine religious architecture. An architecture that indicates its own axes, rhythm and guide. A secret architecture that is also code; a code that entails reconsidering the contracts of performativity: the rhythms and movements in religious architecture are different to those of domestic architecture, the gestures and symbols are completely

different. And it will be in this place—and according to this contract—that the possible look exchanged between the two presented bodies marks a line and the surroundings: the space is made in this exhibition moment by matter, time, gaze, bodies, meanings and projection.

The two Beguines—the two sculptures—define their own axis, they close their route but open contact by means of the voice. The relationship with those people who enter the space is established by means of time, by means of possible words and attention. The symbolic theatricality becomes secondary when the gaze drifts; in listening, the eyes wander. Around them a symbolic itinerary offers various times and moments: the light filtered by codes and colours, the reliquary that points to the need to make what is important last, the relic that turns the mystical into the physical and the past into the present. In this context, a distant world is transformed into a vision in which we can re-encounter a future linked to falling bodies, lava and the void, but also to a desire to discover a place through which we can share.

And after the end. In the darkness—also in the exhibition—we will find machines in action, ash and the passage of time. We will discover the creation of geological places where we can hide or get lost. We will discover a flight and a feeling of weight. Everything falls, everything falls on us. We live in a world where various cultural contexts are approaching apocalypticism. And with this gesture, the reality of an end—already announced—is accepted and various fields of action unfold before us: from the acceptance and need to share tenderness to the idealisation of heroic figures who will open the door for this final moment. In this moment, in this place, hands appear again, the repetitive gestures and that idea of writing—and code—in progress. The physical and the distant, the foreseeable and the alteration, the stable and the fragile will join hands in a dialogue without precedents. The end makes all equal and grammar is deformed.

At the end of the world, in this apocalypse, Maudit will continue trying to connect the dots in order to go back to that twelfth century while being at the same time in the twenty-first; she will look at specific people and she will get close to their

gestures. She will search in books, in places, in spaces. She will search in letters, contracts and objects. And she will use all the information to generate a new code to be distributed via fragile lines. The lifeline no longer allows us to forget our own action or responsibility; the lifeline implies action, translation, transition and the capacity to take the symbolic on board. The Beguine will continue to write for a future, a future that arrived earlier.

If we consider the idea of finding a thread, one of the most powerful machines for generating discursive images—Hollywood—has offered us neurotic characters on a number of occasions—cops, private detectives, agents of order, murderers—who bring together images, names and moments on conceptual maps which—as they are constructed—gradually move further and further away from the primary goals. Rhizomatic maps that get lost in the detail. Once again, the gesture and the baroque, the shadow that generates other shadows in a constant need to know and discover based on a dual sense of fascination and fear.

The four exhibition rooms of *A Spiralling Ascent. Looking back from the End* are marked with figures that are references to chapters and verses, to intersecting moments of religious writing. In the fundamental books of a number of dominant religions, we find complex narrative structures, intersecting points of view and moments when those deemed secondary characters find themselves centre stage. The figures in the rooms are a distant echo, also a reading code—one that is almost secret—in the face of the need to locate a thread, a narrative, a discourse to cling to. In addition, a piece of music in four movements sets the tempos and tones in the exhibition: four movements for four spaces, four sound itineraries with long timeframes written and performed at a distance but with a desire for communion. The music and the possibility it affords for escaping from written language has always been a field of exploration for mysticism; music and poetry offer moments for individual consideration and a projection of particular content. Figures and music serve as a structural framework, as a reference and frame, as connectors of meaning for a difficult narrative unlikely ever to be told.

*A Spiralling Ascent. Looking back from the End* is code and voices, it is gestures and moments, it is situations and physical writing in progress. Based on a consideration of post-apocalypticism, the exhibition seeks ideals to which to pay tribute, it seeks the agents behind these ideals, it aims to see and look, to recognise and to recognise itself through solitude. The end of the world—at least, the end of our world—is here and it is unquestionably time to meet the Beguines; the moment for these invisible women, who for centuries have been preparing another reality, has come. To find bodies, to find gestures, to find remains amid the destruction. All that is left is to hold onto hope.



Curator: Martí Manen

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Opening hours: from Tuesday to Sunday  
and holidays, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Free admission



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