This first retrospective of the work of Mar Arza (Castellón de la Plana, 1976) features seven projects never shown before, conceived for the occasion, alongside fifteen pieces, spanning two decades of the artist's career. The title of the exhibition is an allusion to that multitude of voices which, on the basis of certain forms of vulnerability, repeatedly strike against any attempt to take control of our words.

Mar Arza

UNDERVOICE

16.11.2024 – 30.03.2025

Ajuntament de Barcelona
[LA VIRREINA] CENTRE DE LA IMATGE

Un círculo dentro de sí mismo (A Circle inside Itself, 2024)

SPEAK OUT

Valentín Roma

Mar Arza's artistic career has evolved with subtle and meticulous yet forceful poetics, calling on us to 'read intensely'. Thus, opposing the implicit arrogance inherent in any discourse, which invests the creator with authority, her projects ask us to regard and even remain attentive to that which withdraws and resists being perceived unequivocally.

Language, or rather, the rearguard of words, and how they contribute to dissent, plays a crucial role in the artist's grammar. Engaged with the abstractions upholding every message, she is especially concerned with their strict materialities, from the meaning of a typeface to systems of image construction and the corporeality of a symbol.

The Colombian writer Juan Cárdenas identifies lightness as 'a hallmark of great art, that which seems to float and avoids looking serious'. Indeed, we see lightness, meaning ideas freed from heavy doctrinaire solemnity, foundates much of Mar Arza's works, even in those that unmask how the arts have represented, stigmatised and influenced historically the social place of women.

From there flow her insights about the politics of femininity developed as underground currents, her reinterpretation of rebellions that conspired against their successive hegemonies, which were woven in the fissures of memory, undetectable but firm, sometimes fragile and secret, always moving forward to point out what is ready to take flight and what is foundering.

Mar Arza's entire oeuvre exists within a kind of epistemological blink that lets us glimpse the face and the tools of what is compelling and what deserves to be reconsidered and conveyed in a different way. And indeed, when certainty is hard to come by, when nihilism becomes a hollow ornament and especially when one must speak out, we need artists to turn perplexity into a manifesto and to link urgency with metaphor.

The great Peruvian poet Blanca Varela penned a few wonderful verses that speak of the rebelliousness unleashed when we unite our vulnerabilities. They read: 'slowness is beauty / I copy these strange lines / I breathe / I accept the light / under

the thin November air / under the colourless / grass / under the cracked / grey sky / I accept mourning and celebration.'

Room 1

Phylacteries are bands with rolled-up ends containing various inscriptions, from religious formulas to names or symbols. They often appear in Mediaeval paintings, sculptures and tapestries as an element that adds information about the depicted scenes.

The word comes from Greek and alludes to the idea of safeguard, though it also refers to the tefillin, a ritual object comprising small leather boxes joined by straps containing verses from the Torah. Jewish men wrap the straps around the arm and forehead during certain daily prayers.

Phylacteries are incorporated into Christian iconography as strips of parchment. The Old Testament prophets generally have them. However, it is more common to see them in images where a divine message is being conveyed, like that of the archangel of the Annunciation.

Mar Arza has isolated these motifs that pictorial tradition considered supplementary, and that often prescribed mandates or imperatives issued by a male character for a woman. In addition, she has drastically modified their messages and, in so doing, they have become a kind of proclamation about carnal desire, freedom of choice, or boldness to invent stories and say things. The result is a set of affirmations about a sovereignty that is expressed beyond the master-servant dialectic, which is so characteristic in religious painting.

Meanwhile, the use of Latin language and typographies, as well as support in natural wood, mean that these faceless thoughts, similar to the speech balloons in an ancestral comic book, can be read as a flipside of all these laws written on boards that, since time immemorial, have overseen and supplanted the will of women, their bodies and their ideas.

Room 2

Un círculo dentro de sí mismo (A Circle inside Itself, 2024) is Mar Arza's second foray into film after *Nora* (2012), based on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). It is a film that not only shifts the analysis of prehistoric representations of women beyond the strictly symbolic or formal, but also brings in perspectives and questions about them rooted in contemporary feminist subjectivities.

To do so, the artist examines artefacts from the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture, dating back 7,000 to 5,500 years BP, which are currently exhibited at the National Museum of History of Moldova and at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Museum (Iași, Romania).

Mar Arza takes up the mantle of scholars who linked the artefacts—mysterious groups of 21 figures and 13 seats found in various nearby sites, a sort of council of wise women arranged in a circle—with ovulation cycles. These scholars hypothesised that these groups could be a domestic calendar showing which days were most fertile.

Related to films like *Moon Goddess* (1976) and especially *The Great Goddess* (1977), both by Barbara Hammer, *Un círculo dentro de sí mismo* raises a deep understanding of the motivations behind these artefacts, the physical work required to make the sculptures and the new messages they send us. One of the culminating moments of the film takes place when the camera and Mar Arza's voice 'speak' with the old figures, bridging time, technique and language to strike up a conversation between artists who make women's bodies with their hands.

During the beginning of the film, Mar Arza explains what she aims to achieve: 'To dig into the conjectures emerging from the mud is also to listen to a time and a place that makes us imagine a society that was more closely centred around the navel than the axe.' At the end, she acts forcefully and unexpectedly upon a figurine that she has been modelling during the previous minutes.

The journey that connects her words at the start with this final act can be identified with another journey, one that takes place between conception and choice, an equally seminal odyssey through the awareness of having one's own body, which is also a body that cannot be appropriated.

Room 3

Alberto Giacometti's famous sculpture entitled *Figurine dans une boîte entre deux boîtes qui sont des maisons* (Figure in a Box

between Two Boxes which are Houses, 1950) shows us an individual walking determinedly between two opaque and identical cubes, like a myth linking birth and death, apotheosis and apocalypse, the womb and the tomb. This is the heroic subject par excellence, Man with a capital M, whose single step binds together or redeems the ephemeral passing of humanity.

This transparency that glorifies the idol and prods us to admire it seems shut down in Mar Arza's *Animal de fondo* (Background Animal, 2024). Thus, where before there was a person with no recognisable features, the artist presents a text that describes certain folds of consciousness, words that belong to nobody, being from anyone, that run dizzyingly towards a void in which they will finally manage to become absorbed.

Language may be the natural habitat of human beings. However, it is also a tool for different political, private and community uses. One of them, though perhaps the least obvious, can be found in the empty space that Mar Arza has left in the middle of her filing cabinet, reminding us how the unpronounceable continues to beat beneath what is hidden and to what extent losing the thread of an argument is the first step towards an experience of 'not knowing', towards a tribute to strangeness and its promising disorders and to that which rebels equally against classifications and an imposed clarity.

Using a word coined by Juan-Eduardo Cirlot as a title, *Aparecidamente* (Apparently) *I*, *II* and *III* (2024) explores the aftermath of *Animal de fondo,* since instead of suspending the reading of a text, it connects various paragraphs whose meaning was conceived independently.

There is something resonant in this triptych, a lack of air and breathing that negates the authoritative role of spelling. All the artist needs is a simple textual graft to deconstruct the perfect devices of pagination, the blocks of text that create skylines and the normative order of reading.

Untimely voices that burst forth from the back pages of a fictional book yet to come. Unsolemn phrases summoned by nobody and that yet nobody would disregard. The insularity of an idea is lost when any line decides to rise up, contaminate another idea and form peninsulas of meaning.

Room 4

Extraordinary work on imagery took place during the early Stone Age, in the Upper Palaeolithic, sometime between 40,000 or 30,000 and 12,000 or 10,000 years before the present, and more specifically throughout the Gravettian, Solutrean and Magdalenian cultural periods. A proliferation of female figures made during this time has been found in a rather limited area encompassing the Pyrenees, Aquitaine, Italy, the Rhine and the Danube, European Russia and Siberia.

Within this highly specific geographical area and over a period of 20,000 years, certain 'styles' of representation of femininity were developed. Like a network of subterranean influences, these representations cut across Homo sapiens' material conditions and different cultures, attesting to the importance of women in prehistorical societies and to communities' uses of the pieces made.

This space brings together twelve sculptures that Mar Arza made between 1997 and 2002 and that are now being displayed in a new museographic setting. With these pieces, the artist revisits some formal aspects that characterise prehistoric iconography: rounded bodies (steatopygia), associated with fertility; disproportionate bellies, like containers of life; abundant breasts invoking food security; imperceptible feet, sometimes consisting of a single point to stick the figures directly into the ground; faces without detail and tiny sizes.

Quadern negre (Black Notebook, 1997) is the oldest such piece. Mar Arza created it while studying at the Polytechnic University of Valencia's Sant Carles Faculty of Fine Arts. It is a bronze figure with a vaguely realistic appearance depicting motherhood. The woman has her arms open and is looking upward, her breasts falling over a massive belly resting on a rough stone base. In a way, the work is in dialogue with the popular Venus of Dolní Věstonice (31,000-27,000 BP), one of the earliest ceramic sculptures in human history. The name 'Venus' applied to Palaeolithic figurines stems from a now-refuted theory that linked them to supposed ideals of prehistoric beauty.

The exhibited works should not be seen merely as a technical transposition of certain iconographic elements, nor as an exercise in modernity in contrast to various ancient aesthetics. Mar

Arza delves and challenges into the ancestral imagery of women, aligning herself with another 'tradition' that includes artists like Alina Szapocznikow, Carol Rama, Anna Maria Maiolino and Louise Bourgeois. This is the context for her work *Shield* (1997), which she considers the originator of a series of later works on the subject, and for *Feuille volante* (Loose Leaf, 2008), in which words become embodied, incarnated and even striated.

Femme Gaine (Woman Girdle, 2012) alludes to the etymological link between the word 'vagina' and its Latin ancestor *vāgīna*, meaning 'sheath', which has a secondary meaning of 'plant pod' in Spanish. The work consists of elongated seed pods collected from a Catalpa tree, with words and phrases replacing the original seeds. *Femme gaine* and *Vessels* (1999) could be linked to other famous examples of the subject, such as the Chamber of the Vulvas at the Tito Bustillo site (Asturias), whose Palaeolithic paintings reproduce the external part of this female organ, and the Utroba Cave in the province of Kardzhali (Bulgaria), a grotto in the shape of a uterus.

The series *Gleva* (Clot) *I*, *II* and *III* (2019-2020) and the stand-alone work *Grávida* (Gravid, 2019) show images of mothers holding children in their arms, carrying provisions, or female figures with spherical volumes, in the style of the Venus figurines found at Lespugue, Willendorf, Hohle Fels, Savignano, Laussel, Gagarino and the ones featured in the Avdeevo, Renancourt and Zaraysk collections, all of which date back to the Palaeolithic. According to these works produced by Mar Arza, ancient representations focused on the idea of abundance are today retorts to the normativity imposed by art history in its depiction of women's bodies. Thus, the clots associated with clods or lumps of earth compacted by roots—which is what 'gleva' means—not only discredit the dominant beauty standards that film critic Laura Mulvey described as 'the male gaze', a term coined by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972), but they also refute the pathologisation of bodily nonconformity and, in another and completely opposite sense, invite us to imagine that the protuberances are additions of wisdom or reserves of meaning.

Finally, *De centro grieta* (Centre Crack, 2002) is a sculpture with painstakingly detailed concentric circles of wood

that recall a belly cracked from its navel to infinity, as well as a parting—a departure, a partum or birth—that is about to show what has been gestating within.

The most recent piece, *Incontinental* (2022), is a ceramic container with many imperceptibly perforated bulges that prevent the vessel from retaining any liquid. In the face of abundance, incontinence; against the functionality of objects and bodies, loss and the act of emptying. The piece suggests a reinvention of functions that bring together vulnerabilities in order to demolish stereotypes.

Room 5

The installation *Papers tímids* (Shy papers, 2024) is structured around an unpublished poem written for this work by Mar Arza that uses a modernised Gothic typeface (Gandur New) similar to the one used in missals.

The writing appears in several superimposed layers and its legibility depends on where the viewer is located. Thus, when viewers look at it in a 'traditional' way, meaning frontally, they barely understand anything. They only see a beautiful abstract composition. However, when they cross the physical wall (which is basically a mental barrier), they reach the 'back side of the verses' and can finally decipher the poem.

The shyness mentioned in the title is a declaration of intent, a statement, a manifesto that is not fully expressed, or is expressed in a whisper. Shyness infuriates whatever invades us and demands that we speak and it unnerves whatever neither allows speech nor is prepared to listen.

This piece is like a great metaphor: some indecipherable and incoherent outward signs, no more than a stammer, but behind them, inside, sheltered from gratuitous demands and blinding spotlights, in the shadows, we find words that require calm and that call for easing down the redemptive cacophony, the inane gesturing and the attempts to save us or condemn us in every opinion.

Room 6

In *Hoja de ruta…* (Roadmap…, 2015), Mar Arza superimposes four pages taken from the book *El arte de no pensar en nada*,

(The Art of Thinking about Nothing), written by Noel Clarasó in 1947. Only the headings of these pages indicating the different chapters are legible and the work includes a blank page as a closing or 'title page' for this succession.

Related to Dadaist variations, mantras, psalms and musical fugues and counterpoints, the work uses a phrase that is replicated as it descends, linking increasingly definitive meanings that transform the initial idea into a kind of algorithm whose progressions place us before a certain declaration of principles, as stressed by the title of the work.

From that 'art of thinking about nothing' to the impossibility of conceiving life without any art interceding, 'the nothingness of not thinking about art', *Hoja de ruta…* describes a journey through certainties and conviction, the concise, laconic and arid odyssey of artists working with materials whose fragility rises up against the most ostentatious gestures. This journey can depart—and indeed usually does—from certain simple and even banal ideas that act as triggers. Yet unlike exemplary epics, at the end of the artist's journey (before the silences), no awards or praise are given, but there is a return to the beginning of words, a return to the language used by everyone, to find there what seemed unheard of.

Mar Arza writes, regarding *Avenç* (Savings, 2010-2011):

'As if it were a game, I open a bank account to save words and establish rules for making deposits. Everyday experiences and significant dates throughout the months are reflected in the words chosen as deposits. Each letter adds one euro; other signs add half a euro more. In the charges, where the lack is more evident, each letter removes up to seven euros. The seventh and final page of the passbook shows the last transaction as incomplete and a symbolic amount of economic insecurity. The limitations of the banking code are transformed into possibilities and a routine action becomes a poetic one.

'My main motivation came from the feeling of vulnerability that can be brought on by heartbreak: the feeling of total emotional destitution, of being out in the open and unprotected. It highlights the need for a good supply of beautiful words

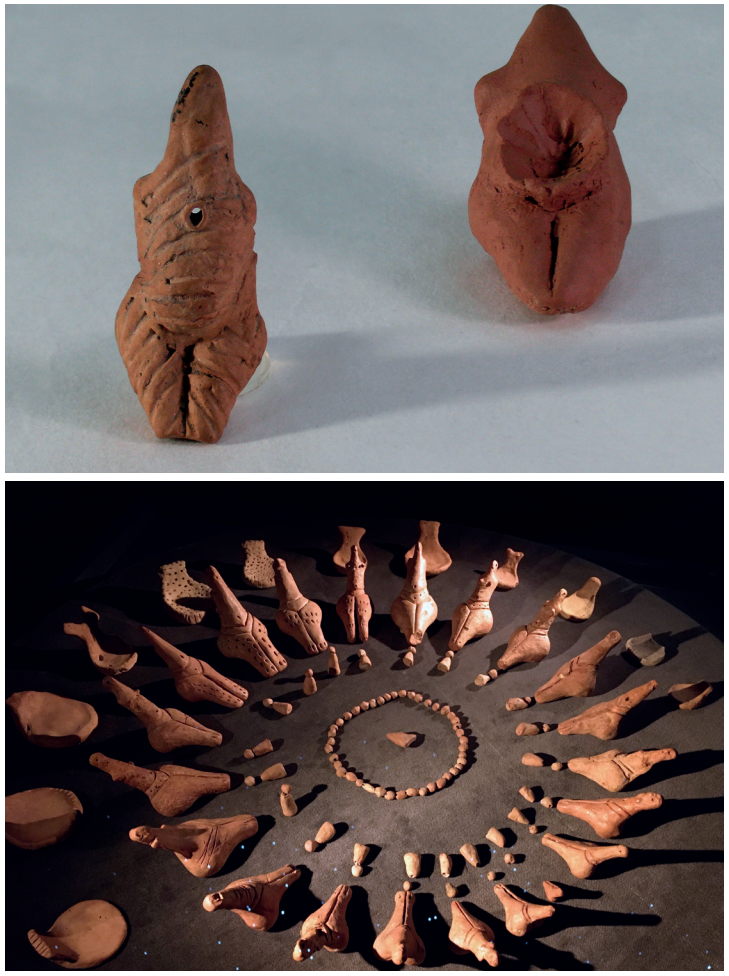
Animal de fondo (Background Animal, 2024)

Filacterias del bosque III (ad libitum) (Phylacteries of the Forest III [ad libitum], 2024)

Libro de ahoras… [Polifonías] (Book of Nows… [Polyphony], 2010-2024)

Femme Gaine (Woman Girdle, 2012)

Gleba III (Clot III, 2020-2024)



Un círculo dentro de sí mismo (A Circle inside Itself, 2024)

as emotional support, a reserve of warmth that welcomes and comforts, a resource of poetry that lights the way…

'Which leads to the hypothesis: if we save money for when we need it, maybe we could also save words for when we need them?

'In the end, it's a trap that parallels the intangible nature of poetry and bank statements. There is sarcasm in this truth, in our need to seek out security and to obsessively try to predict, because we risk contingencies and think we can navigate them with a few more numbers in the bank, which may be as volatile as the mechanical writing in a passbook. And this is because there are events that can suddenly overturn everything.

'It ends up being a critique of the established system. Given the current circumstances[1], including a financial crisis caused in part by certain irregular and speculative practices of banking institutions, slipping poetry into their accounts is quite a subversive act, a scathing poetic revolt with its own mechanisms. Every trip to the bank, every word deposited, every passbook update turns out to be an inversion of the code, a subtle invasion to upend the system.

'What is immaterial—such as feelings—is precisely what can invade that place reserved for numerical coldness in the most flagrant contradiction. If the symbolic space of power is flooded with the use of words, beauty and poetry, perhaps numbers can become more humane.'

Sala 7

La piel del lenguaje (The Skin of Language, 2016-2024) is composed of five pages of porcelain devoid of graphic elements whose surface 'houses' different baroque reliefs, a series of folds and bends.

This work connects viewers' sensorial predisposition with a broad system of metonymic and metaphorical resonances, meaning that as they see how the pearly material is compressed, moves or rises sinuously, they make associations that range from abstract emotion to the memory of physical, geographical, textile and even epidermal forms.

1 The artists refers to the years following the 2008 financial crisis.

In *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996), Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa proposes a haptic review of our links with built space. In this sense, he argues that elements such as a doorhandle, the smell of circulating air and the auditory codes associated with each domestic space are much more important than the photogenic aspect that we so admire in certain buildings or the role that the history of architecture reserves for them in its successive rankings.

This valorisation of faculties other than the hierarchy imposed by the sense of sight, the all-knowing eye, is also palpable in *La piel del lenguaje*, where the page ceases to be an organisational chart and becomes an organism in which echoes of non-existent bodies 'appear', in which the twists, interstices, rictuses and silences make up an inventory of scars, a collection of epiphanies that reminds us of Paul Valéry's mysterious and beautiful aphorism that the skin is always the deepest.

Dining Hall

In the installation *Libro de ahoras… [Polifonía]* (Book of Nows… [Polyphony], 2010-2024), eleven bells of different sizes are struck by devices that incorporate a branch cast in metal that is attached to respective clock mechanisms.

Like in a orchestra of hunches, each second we hear the out-of-sync sounds that gradually acquire their own frequency, depending on variables related to their technical equipment. They are free from possible musical orders, but at the same time they create unforeseen melodies that are random to a certain extent.

Silence is a cultural construct, a political demand and a private aspiration. Silence does not exist for human beings, as we saw in James Turrell's project in which visitors entered a small soundproof chapel, willing to not hear any sound. After a while, however, they found that even if they held their breath, they transmitted a repetitive thread of sound: that of the beating of their own hearts.

This was also pointed out by John Cage, who visited the anechoic chamber at Harvard University when he was composing *4'33"*. As he was leaving, he described the same absence of silence, because he said he had heard a loud sound and another low sound. The engineer in charge explained that the high one was his nervous system in operation and the low one was his blood in circulation.

Apart from the reference to the Book of Hours, a collection of illuminated manuscripts popularly used during the Middle Ages that contained prayers, psalms and hymns to be read at different liturgical moments of the day, the 'nows' indicated in Mar Arza's title refer to a sense of time that has nothing to do with chronologies or ephemerides, but rather with the micro-historical, the situated, the celebration of the present, that which occurs, like a tuning fork, between insignificance and everlasting moments, between a brief musical note and the din that surrounds us and to which we add, despite ourselves.

Corridor

Legs en la disparition (Legacy in Vanishing, 2020) consists of six handmade cotton and linen sheets of paper with the legend 'LE PATRIARCAT' (the patriarchy) written in Didot typeface, emerging from the very fibres of the support, like a watermark.

As the inscriptions of these two words follow one another, the artist modified the imprint left by their letters so that each sheet of paper bears witness, as the title of the work indicates, to a gradual disappearance with respect to the initial legend.

References to Georges Perec's novel *La disparition* (1969) —translated into English as *A void*—and Stéphane Mallarmé's famous poem *Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard* (A throw of the Dice will never abolish Chance, 1887) are linked here to project a certain desire on the future of the patriarchy, which sends out violent messages even during its strictly graphic dismemberment, as can be seen in the last two sheets of paper, where we read 'ATACA' (attack) and 'ATA' (tie down).

In *Ode with a Silence in It* (2016), American poet Sharon Olds asks: 'What is the sweetest / word? Is *consent* the sweetest word / on earth? It has a *con* in it, a / girl's own spiral universe.'

The etymologies of these terms bear ancestral traces of their harm: ideas rendered invisible and presences that vanish into thin air through the exercise of solid power. Through the gaps left behind by a name that is difficult to pronounce, it is

not silence that breaks out, but rather a voice that brings with it new statements: a healing voice.

WISE WOMEN'S COUNCIL

Montse Romaní

A while ago, Mar Arza had spoken to me about the studies published by the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas on the ways of life, art and mythical imagery of what she called 'Old Europe'; a set of Neolithic societies scattered across south-western Transylvania, Moldova and western Ukraine between 7,000 and 3,500 BCE, approximately.

The decorated pots and the multitude of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic clay, stone and bone figurines found at numerous sites sparked broad debate within and beyond the field of archaeology about the complexity of such forms of representation linked to the universe, life, and death.

In May 2024, Mar Arza and I travelled to Iasi in Romania to document the main collections of the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture[1], one of the most unique cultures in 'Old Europe' (5,000 to 3,500 BCE) dedicated to the creation of figurines, most of which have been identified as being female, with a smaller number of male, asexual and androgynous ones. Besides the fascination for their formal characteristics, we were interested in delving deeper into the narratives that have associated them with fertility and motherhood, their symbolic capacity on the female body, and the historical perspective that connects them to our present.

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In *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1973), Marija Gimbutas defines the figurines by their symbolic use as agents of worship to a mother goddess or Great Goddess, the source of life and of everything producing fertility. Romanian archaeology stressed their religious function by calling them 'idols'. These are usually decorated with incisions or painted with geometric patterns of a symbolic character: the rhombus represents the union of the sky and the earth, the ascending direction, the aspiration towards Divinity, as well as the horizontal

1 The name comes from the excavations carried out between 1884 and 1893 in the villages of Cucuteni (Romania) and Trypillia (Ukraine).

direction angled towards matter. And the serpent-like spiral is associated with the power of nature's cyclical rebirth and regeneration (Lazarovici: 64).

The appearance of miniature figures is associated with the first agricultural and sedentary communities that made pottery. And their disappearance, with the abandonment of the Neolithic way of life, indicates the end of a social structure in which women managed the crops. Despite the backlash in part of the predominantly male archaeological community, which branded Gimbutas's approach as myth-making and essentialist, the idea of a social and religious organisation of a matrilineal nature in European prehistory resonated strongly with the ecospiritualist and feminist movements of the 1970s. The Great Mother Goddess archetype then reappears as a symbol of an alternative history to enlightened thinking, which returns to the identification of women with nature in order to challenge the civilising logic of modernity.

Alternatively, other interpretations have emerged that tend to attribute functions to the figurines that are more closely linked to identity, learning and socialisation: 'dolls, toys, magical items, afterlife accessories, sexual aids, fertility figures, effigies, talismans, ritual figures, concubines, slaves, puberty models, training mechanisms, votive and healing objects' (Bailey: 12). While not all appear to reflect the characteristics of the period in which they were created, they nonetheless question the exclusively divine nature of the figurines, suggesting a performative dimension as intimate, social, political and cultural objects.

In this regard, the analysis performed by the archaeologists Emma Watson and Bisserka Gaydarska is significant. It was based on an exceptional set of 21 anthropomorphic female figurines (12 large and 9 small), alongside 13 small chairs, found inside small containers in the domestic spaces of two Pre-Cucuteni period (4,900-4,500 BCE) sites some 200 km apart in north-eastern Romania.

Romeo Dumitrescu (2008), a physician and archaeologist, was the first person to develop a hypothesis that related each figurine to the 21 days of the menstrual cycle, defining the set as a 'kit' or material resource for educating young couples about fertility. While it is not impossible that Cucuteni women may have had a shorter menstrual cycle, Watson and Gaydarska claim that they most likely had cycles of approximately 28 days, which would be related to the lunar and seasonal calendar. The figurines' various sizes and forms, from the tiniest to the largest, would correspond to the days after menstruation until the next ovulation.

They describe it thus: 'The women would have their "period" as normal, usually 7 days, and their last day would equate to the first figurine, the tiny one. Each day thereafter, the figurines would increase in size, until, as R. Dumitrescu points out, the ovulation stage. Here would be placed the 4 open-legged figurines, indicating sexual intercourse on those days. From day 16 onwards, the female would need to rest and keep relaxed, so the seats would help her to do this, as it is clear from numerous studies that this can aid implantation and therefore more likely result in a pregnancy' (Watson & Gaydarska: 120).

Given the circular arrangement in which the figurines and chairs were found, the set has in itself been interpreted as a kind of symbolic council of women linked to the transmission of wisdom about sexuality, conception, motherhood, etc. It served not only as a tool for female empowerment aimed at solving infertility and pregnancy problems, but also as a means of controlling reproduction itself, in light of the high mortality rate among women.

In close relationship with the cycles of nature, women would learn to recognise ovulation, in which each day was indicated by the presence of a figurine. In the observation of the body and its biological process, in the care of one's own life and in the self-preservation of the community, a ceremony of learning was therefore established.

Thus, in contrast to the interpretation that reduced them to objects of fertility worship, the 21 figurines constitute both a domestic and collective device for regulating reproduction, the repeated use of which would enable the infertility problem to be solved. In other words, the idea that claimed women's subordinate position was due to their identification with nature and their contact with the divine undergoes a plot twist by giving them a central role in decision-making bodies in regard to the community's social organisation, survival and continuity.

Bearing in mind the prolonged period of existence of the Cucuteni society, Watson and Gaydarska's feminist and gender-related contribution posits a new approach that underscores how, historically, archaeology has tended to exclude female reproduction and everything connected with it.

*

The approach to the 'Cucuteni kit' as a 'prehistoric metaphor' for talking about infertility is not insignificant because the topic remains little normalised in our Western society. Endometriosis, anovulation, polycystic ovary syndrome, alteration in a partner's semen, ingestion of contraceptive pills for years, and infertility of unknown origin are still some of the reasons for the burdens and feelings of guilt that women bear, while at the same time concealing the mental and physical dysfunctions they generate within and on the body itself.

Like the women of today's world, the women of the past suffering from the causes of infertility must also have experienced uncertainty, sadness, desperation, anxiety, fear, anguish or stress (Vivas: 38). Similarly, Watson and Gaydarska asserted that those infertile couples that needed the 'kits' must have felt as vulnerable as today's: 'It is difficult to assess the build-up of personal psychological tension deriving from the physical inability to achieve something that most contemporaries were capable of—an achievement widely recognised as personally and socially valuable. However, diminishing self-esteem and the feeling that the infertile woman is a lesser person do not perhaps constitute overstatements. Today, couples are prepared to undergo costly, invasive and time-consuming medical treatments in order to resolve their infertility issues. It is therefore not unreasonable to accept that infertile women in the past would have needed support' (Watson & Gaydarska: 122).

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