

Fina Miralles

I Am All the Selves that I Have Been

Exhibition until 5 April 2021



Relationships; The Body's Relationship with Natural Elements. The Body Covered in Straw (detail) [Documentation of an action carried out in January 1975 in Sabadell, Spain], 1975. MACBA Collection. From Government of Catalonia Art Fund ©Fina Miralles

A cloud is water and air,
Rain is water and air,
Lightning is fire, cloud and air,
A bird is air, earth and water.

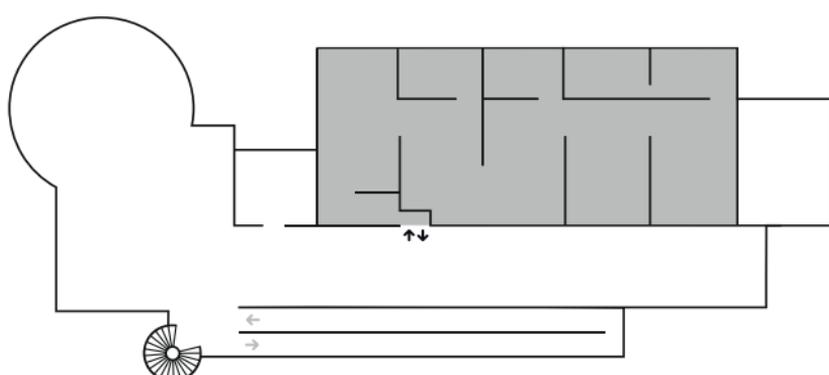
A cloud when no longer
a cloud is rain,
Rain, river; the river is
the sea; the sea is a cloud.

Fina Miralles
Notebook, no. 1

Recommended itinerary

Meier Building

Level 0



FINA MIRALLES: I AM ALL THE SELVES THAT I HAVE BEEN addresses the work of this artist through a number of her actions, photographs, installations and paintings. Not only does her reflection on nature and artifice subvert the conventions of our relationship with the environment in which we live and develop as individuals, it also invites us to rethink what we mean by the artistic, the values that underpin art and what gives it meaning.

The exhibition does not follow a chronological order, but focuses on a series of works that are central to the structure of Miralles' practice. These are works that question concepts such as belonging, authority, power and the established order, as well as what gives them value, constantly inverting the notions of art, artist and viewer. The critical potential – denaturalising, even – and the differences and conflicts evidenced by these works demonstrate that the poetic image can also be political.

Fina Miralles (Sabadell, 1950) studied Fine Arts, but soon rejected the academic and conventional values of her training. In 1974, she exhibited *Imatges del zoo* (Zoo Images) at Sala Vinçon, where she presented herself and a series of domestic animals enclosed in cages, like a zoo, surrounded by photographs of wild and exotic animals in the Barcelona zoo. This installation subverted the established order, with its exhibitionism contradicting the idea of what constitutes a work of art, the question of authorship and the experience of the viewer, while undermining the very values that sustain them. The durability, value and meaning of the work are displaced, as are the values of what is understood as 'natural', 'normal' and 'artificial'. What is being kept in a cage and why?

In *Natura morta* (Still Life, 1972), the elements that constitute a landscape are present, but represented as a repertoire or menu of the ingredients that make up the natural space: water, algae, stones, sand, leaves..., identified by name, and signed. The artist 'draws' a still life in a way that implies the negation of the act of painting and the gesture of the hand with the brush. In a similar way, *Naturaleses naturals, naturaleses artificials* (Natural Natures, Artificial Natures, 1973), also shown at Sala Vinçon, was an intervention that presented a repertoire of decontextualised natural elements and those same elements in their artificial condition, thus establishing a dialectical relationship between these two possible conditions of existence; two categories that our increasingly industrialised society tends to hybridise.

Dona-arbre (Woman-tree, 1973) documents an action that took place in Sant Llorenç del Munt, where the artist was 'planted', supplanting the tree and rooted in the ground. This was part of *Translacions* (Translations), a larger project developed that same year, showing natural elements that have not been transformed, but which are displaced from their usual context. A woman, a human being and an artist, Miralles not only places herself in the middle of a field; she also places sand on ploughed land and grass in the middle of the sea. Furthermore, she went on to move earth, straw, grass, stones and a tree into a home environment. In this way, the artist questions the order of things, the limit of what is established, both in the natural and social environment, as well as the artistic.

Relació del cos amb elements naturals en accions quotidianes (The Body's Relationship with Natural Elements in Everyday Actions, 1975) is a photographic journey through our daily routines, a repertoire of each of the actions we habitually perform; whereas in *Relació del cos amb elements naturals* (The Body's Relationship with Natural Elements, 1975) she surrenders her body to sand, straw, grass or water, burying herself until she disappears or becomes diffused, as her body merges with a different element. This same theme is taken up in *El retorn* (The Return, 2012), where the artist submerges her naked body in water and thus returns to this relationship with nature that is at the core of her work.

Petjades (Footprints, 1976) is a film that documents Miralles on a walking journey through her city wearing shoes with adapted soles. A foam pad, impregnated with ink in the form of the artist's first name on one shoe and her last name on the other, leaves her mark on the asphalt with each step, in a gesture of appropriation of the public space upon which she transfers her own authorship: not only filming the walk, but signing the work. Here she denounces the sense of ownership that governs capitalist society, from the public to the most intimate, as well as the power relations that derive from it and which condition our lives. Similarly, *Standard* (1976) analyses the ways in which education, culture, religion and power condition how we are connoted as individuals. Images of a mother dressing her daughter are projected together with family photos and others taken from the media that reveal what is expected of the girl socially: to take the First Communion, to marry, to become a mother, to have a family, but also to be attractive and desirable. Miralles presented this work, sitting and tied to a wheelchair, with a *mantilla* in her mouth, immobilised and dumb, witnessing the social and artificial construction of her character.

Matances (Slaughters, 1976-77) is composed of several elements, most notably photocompositions. It reflects on the exercise of power over humans and animals; on the socio-political, educational and religious context, and on how it influences, determines and manipulates us. The piece also explores the boundary between play and tragedy, entertainment and violence; the boundary between the pornography of pain and its entertainment value. The idea of the 'objectification' of individuals is very present in *Standard*, but also in *Matances* and in other works such as *Emmascarats* (Masked Figures, 1976), where the face is covered and hidden, blurred and diluted, in a critical exercise that plays with the construction of socially, culturally or politically imposed subjectivity; sometimes even self-imposed.

With these photographs, *Emmascarats* dissolves identity, draws non-being, erases the image and challenges the artistic conventions of the portrait. While in *Natura morta* Miralles sidestepped the still life and the very notion of painting, she subsequently dissolved the anilines in water in order to paint without using her hand. In *Fragments* (1980), the painting is created when the pigments permeate the blotting paper by capillary action, thus denying the idea of the gestural. From 1979, painting reappears in Miralles' work through the series *Paisatge* (Landscape) and *Doble horitzó* (Double Horizon) (1979–81). In the first, she 'paints' the landscape by placing a stone, a handful of earth or a branch of thyme on the canvas. In the latter, the canvas and the stretcher are presented as means of expression and construction; a relationship is established between the two elements in which the canvas folds, unfolds or reveals the stretcher through a gap. These are constructive exercises in paintings in which the stroke does not arise from the brush but from the political, real or mental gesture, which constitutes an evocative and powerful poetic.

In the mid-1980s, Miralles began to 'draw with my hand what my eyes saw', a change resulting from a new project determined by inner search, introspection and self-knowledge. Her travel notebooks recapture the mark, brushstroke and hand-made drawing, which will often be scaled-up into large paintings. *Fina Miralles: I Am All the Selves that I Have Been* includes drawings and notebooks in which the artist brings together projects, processes and reflections about the pieces on which she is working, as well as ideas for future projects. The selection included in the exhibition reveals a highly politically-committed work, which inverts artistic conventions and critically rethinks the social conventions that shape us as human beings. Conventions that leave their mark on the construction of subjectivity and the articulation of the artistic fact, on how we conceive it and what we expect of it. A footprint or trace that, as in *El rastre de la sirena* (The Trail of the Siren, 2014), opens a new perspective and understanding of things.

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Curated by
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(Curator, MACBA).

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