

# FINA MIRALLES

## I Am All the Selves I Have Been

- ▶ Fina Miralles (Sabadell, 1950), **broke with the academicism taught in art schools at that time** and with established behavioural norms. **Her practice reconfigures the concept of the artistic**, within the multiplicity of attitudes that blur what traditional historiography had encompassed under the heading of Conceptual art.
- ▶ 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**.
- ▶ The artist **has generously donated some of the works in the exhibition to MACBA** Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

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**Title:** *FINA MIRALLES. I am all the selves i have been*. **Opening:** 4 november 2020 **Dates:** 5 november del 2020 – 5 aprill de 2021. **Organized by:** MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona **In collaboration with:** Museu d'Art de Sabadell and Ajuntament de Sabadell **Curated by:** Teresa Grandas, exhibitions curator

### PHOTOS

<https://www.macba.cat/ca/sobre-macba/premsa/imatges-2020>

## ► FINA MIRALLES. I Am All the selves I Have Been

**Press conference:** 3 november 2020

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**Fina Miralles** La justícia (Sèrie Matances) 1977  
Tècnica mixta, 51,5x66,5 Col·lecció Museu d'Art de Sabadell, ©Fina Miralles

Fina Miralles (Sabadell, 1950) is one of the most significant Spanish artists. Miralles broke with the academicism taught in art schools at that time and with established behavioural norms. Her practice reconfigures the concept of the artistic, within the multiplicity of attitudes that blur what traditional historiography had encompassed under the heading of Conceptual art. The history of art has ascribed Miralles' production to the Conceptual, Land art or even feminism, without attending to the breadth and complexity of her ideas, which challenge the limits of those labels.

This project seeks to readdress by journeying through a body of work of enormous importance.



Fina Miralles *Imatges del zoo*, 1974  
Fotografia a les sals de plata Col·lecció Museu d'Art de Sabadell ©Fina Miralles

In 1974, Miralles presented the exhibition *Imágenes del zoo* (Images of the Zoo) in Barcelona's Sala Vinçon, an exhibition space within a shop specialising in designer products. Presenting it as a visit to a zoo made it more obvious that the exhibition was being held in an unusual context, although it should be remembered that the absence of cultural institutional spaces at that time frequently forced artists to exhibit in alternative spaces outside the field of art. The exhibition became a visit to a zoo, not the local zoo but a zoo created by the artist in a cultural space.

It consisted of a series of caged animals that included Miralles herself. The dislocation, the critique to the authority, the focus between what is natural or artificial, are questions that Miralles use to confront visitors with the artist, the woman, the individual, as an object to be exposed and contemplated, as a work of art. And this is but one small example of the richness of readings raised by the extraordinary work of this artist.

The exhibition at MACBA is presented as a journey that delves into some of the crucial issues addressed by Miralles: the transversal relationship with nature in her work; the language with which we express ourselves and communicate; artistic languages and the way they overlap in the service of an idea, whether through actions, performances, photographs, paintings or videos; power relations and the ubiquitous imposition of power on our lives (especially under a dictatorship),

although the more forcefully that power is exercised, the more it calls for subversion; the historical, political and social background that determines and conditions our lives and work; the status of women, at that time in an inferior social position, subject to male authority and restricted by specific laws largely aimed at maintaining moral codes of behaviour and the singular objective of nuclear family life; or the constant duality in her work between nature and artifice, reality and appearance, to give but a few examples.



**Fina Miralles**

*Translacions. Dona-arbre [Documentació de l'acció realitzada el novembre de 1973 a Sant Llorenç de Munt, Espanya] 1973*  
Fotografia a les sals de plata Col·lecció MACBA. Dipòsit de la Generalitat de Catalunya. Col·lecció Nacional d'Art  
©Fina Miralles

The works presented here break the limits of artistic conventions: the monochrome landscape, painting as gesture, the artist as an artistic object, in a body of work in which process is more significant than the formal result and gives the work value, albeit within a notion of 'value' that is constantly held to question, however it is materialised. Miralles demystifies the work of art as a contemplative and untouchable, univocal object, while confronting us with our own condition as individuals in nature.

Beyond making known the work of this exceptional artist, this exhibition also sets out to restore her place in the historiography of art. The project will be accompanied by a publication with critical texts about her work and a compilation of images.

## THE EXHIBITION

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**FINA MIRALLES: I AM ALL THE SELVES THAT I HAVE BEEN** addresses the work of this artista 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.

## ACTIVITIES

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### ***Parlem de Fina Miralles. I am all the selves I have been***

The programme *Let's talk about* generates discussions on the Museum's exhibitions between the different agents and artists in the city and our regular public. It is a meeting point that regards exhibitions as powerful devices capable of activating the imagination and generators of discourses that often go beyond the preconceived readings of the institution or the curatorial team.

Throughout the exhibition, various voices will dialogue with the work of Fina Miralles. These artists, curators and thinkers will offer approaches from multiple perspectives, including the vital impulse that sustains artistic practice, the context in which it is framed, ancestral knowledge, magic, feminism, the close symbiosis with nature, poetry and the artist's own condition. With the participation of the artist Mar Arza and art historians, researchers and curators Tamara Díaz Bringas, Maite Garbayo, Juan Canelas and Amelia Jones, among others.

## VISITS

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### **VISITS**

Check out the complete schedule of visits at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

#### **Accessibility visits**

Visits for the hearing or visually impaired, and accessibility supports for 'Let's talk about...' are available by prior request to [educacio@macba.cat](mailto:educacio@macba.cat).

#### **MACBA Friends**

Check out the exclusive visits for the Friends of MACBA at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

#### **MACBA App**

With this app you can enjoy the explanatory texts and audio descriptions of a selection of pieces from the exhibition.

Explore detailed information about the exhibitions and activities, as well as videos, curiosities and all the practical information regarding access to the museum.





## AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTARY FONDS FONS #6: FINA MIRALLES

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On the occasion of the exhibition **FINA MIRALLES. I Am All the Selves that I Have Been**, we are presenting **FONS #6: FINA MIRALLES**, a new edition of AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTATION FONDS, directed by the artist Mireia Sallarès.

### PUBLICATION

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*I Am All the Selves that I Have Been* presents a number of aspects that are central to Fina Miralles' oeuvre: the relationship between nature and artifice, the language we use to express ourselves and the relations of power in our everyday lives.

'Being an artist isn't a vocation, a devotion or a profession; you're not aware of it, but everything pushes you towards it and drives you to being who you are.' With these words, Fina Miralles sums up her life.

The book includes essays by Tamara Díaz Bringas, Maite Garbayo-Maeztu, Teresa Grandas and Valentín Roma, and a wide selection of her work.

Fina Miralles. On the Political Potential in the Beauty and the Poetry of the Image

**By Teresa Grandas**

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As mentioned at the start, the purpose of this project is to look back at a part of Miralles' oeuvre but not to dwell on the taxonomic principles attributed to her by art historians and which many readings of her work have emphasised in recent years. It is hoped that this review of this aspect of her art will contribute to new accounts and interpretations that will enhance the artist's already rich, complex and extremely beautiful body of work. Consequently, this publication has been envisaged as an opportunity to present other critical discourses. The selection of

authors was the subject of considerable thought and stems from proposals put forward some time ago that remain valid.

Towards the end of 2007, the Girona-based magazine *Papers d'Art* published a special issue on Conceptual Art entitled *Vivid Radical Memory*. Valentín Roma contributed an article on the historical and aesthetic context of the Grup de Treball in which he formulated an idea that to me seems fundamental as a starting point for taking a fresh look at Conceptual Art, particularly framed within the practices that emerged in Catalonia in the 1970s: 'If we analyse the successive overviews of Spanish conceptual art that have been carried out in the last fifteen years, we perceive a number of paradoxical aspects that are repeated in a symptomatic way and somehow outline a certain stereotypical "model" of interpretation when it comes to framing these same art practices in historical discourse.'<sup>21</sup> In his diagnosis, Roma refers to the museification of Conceptual Art as a 'revisitation, at times isolated and not very complex' in which, he believes, lies one of the greatest problems: 'the reconstruction of those same activities as a confrontation with the contexts that fostered them; that is to say, their representation as a phenomenon that confronted a particular time and particular conditions – social, economic, political, ideological... – rather than as an "archaeology" or a set of artistic forms or styles.'<sup>22</sup>

The article prompted considerations regarding the Grup de Treball that this is not the place to discuss, but it proved successful in focussing the debate on ways of analysing Conceptual Art. In the same issue, Jesús Carrillo referred to the "reifying" and "trivialising" programmes devised by the art history institutions'<sup>23</sup> concerning the historiography of Conceptual Art in Spain. Shortly after the publication of that issue of *Papers d'Art*, the *Where the Political Was (Or Went Astray)* seminar was held as part of the *Art after Feminism* course organised in the context of the MACBA's Independent Studies Programme (PEI), with a session entitled 'Between conceptualism and feminism: the case of Fina Miralles' in which Assumpta Bassas, Jesús Carrillo and Pilar Parcerisas took part. The workshop was run by a team of participants in the second edition of the PEI, consisting of Julianne Debeusscher, Tamara Díaz Bringas, Fernanda Nogueira and Linda Valdés. The event was posited as a questioning of a number of historicist and critical practices that had advocated the neutralisation of the conflict and the elimination of any differences and which had stripped it of any political aspect. Despite the years that have passed since *Papers d'Art* was published and since the PEI seminar was held, some of the questions formulated in them still remain valid. Hence the invitation to Valentín Roma, Tamara Díaz Bringas and Maite Garbayo-Maeztu, who have addressed Miralles' work most recently.



The authors responded generously to the invitation and it is our hope that this project will make it possible to access those realms that Miralles' work addresses. *I Am All the Selves that I Have Been* seeks to avoid spaces of comfort, epistemological biases and even approaches that legitimise a discourse based on an innocuousness that we believe is alien to her work. The idea is to understand the mechanisms whereby her work speaks to us and to analyse what she proposes today. It is a question, then, of opening up new interpretational spaces.

Teresa Grandas,  
exhibitions curator

## BIOGRAPHY

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### 1950, Sabadell, Spain

**Fina Miralles** studied Fine Arts in Barcelona. She then spent time in South America, France and Italy, before settling in Cadaqués (Alt Empordà) in 1999. Her first actions, at the beginning of the seventies, place her among a group of Catalan Conceptual artists concerned with nature, involving elements such as trees, earth, water and the artist's own body. With great simplicity and forcefulness, they emphasise the dialogue between nature and artifice, while displaying a social and political critique in the context of the end of the Franco era, touching on themes of totalitarianism, patriarchy and violence. At that time, she participated in the founding and management of emblematic spaces of contemporary art such as the Sala Vinçon, Barcelona, Sala Tres, Sabadell, and Espai 13 at the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. In the eighties, as a result of her travels, her pictorial and graphic work was marked by a search for spirituality, with lyrical gestures and signs inscribed with a restrained simplicity. After the Millennium, she returned to action and performance art as a dialogue with the land, sea and the rhythms of nature. In recent years, she has published some of her poetry.




Her early solo exhibitions include those at Sala Vinçon (1973, 1974), Museu de Mataró (1976) and Galeria G, Barcelona (1977). In later years she has exhibited at Museu de Sabadell (2001) and created several interventions for the Trobada Internacional de Poesia d'Acció i Performance, La Muga Caula (Alt Empordà) (2012), the Nadala (Christmas installation) at the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (2014), and Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (2016). She has work in the collections of the Museu d'Art de Sabadell, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid and MACBA, Barcelona.

 PHOTOS

<https://www.macba.cat/ca/sobre-macba/premsa/imatges-2020>

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