

Trilogia de la privadesa as a Whole

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To understand Marga Ximénez and Nora Ancarola's *Trilogia de la privadesa* (Trilogy of Privacy) we must first discuss MXEspai 1010, since, as the artists themselves indicate, the work they have been carrying out as managers and curators of this gallery, which began in 1999, has gradually permeated their personal creative projects.

Nora Ancarola describes it thus: "As we developed the MXEspai 1010 project, Marga and I soon took on a work style in which the personal and the private, the professional and the creative, the relational and the social gradually melded."

In fact, *Trilogia de la privadesa* was not born of the intention of creating a trilogy from the very start. It was only over time and based on experience that the authors realized they had generated a creative series arising from the same concerns, among which one of the determining themes was the treatment of limits and the dissolution of the limits between public and private space, an aspect that is perfectly exemplified in MXEspai 1010.

MXEspai 1010 is not an ordinary art gallery, it is not a space at street level that would allow the entry of multitudes of people passing through such a central area as is Barcelona's Carrer de la Llibreteria, nor is it a white cube, but rather an apartment that retains all of the elements of a domestic space, perhaps the most characteristic being the kitchen and bathrooms, or the division into different rooms.

When we enter MXEspai 1010 we are entering a private space open to the public and blurring and melding these two aspects of reality is one of the main motifs in the work of Marga Ximénez and Nora Ancarola, as it has been in the past for many female artists.

The woman-house combination can be found in the paintings and drawings by Louise Bourgeois by the title of *Femme-maison* from 1946-1947, in which she

showed a claustrophobic image of woman in the domestic setting that at the same time was an area of (especially feminine) socialization and refuge.

The topic of the domestic space as a place of creation and exhibition, demanding recognition of women's condition and history, became a central theme of works with a clearly feminist consciousness of the 60s and 70s in the States. One of the most well-known examples is *Womanhouse* (1972), a project organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, co-founders of the California Institute of Arts (CalArts) and its Feminist Art Program. In this case, a number of women artists presented their works in different rooms of an abandoned house. Among the most renowned were the *Nurturant Kitchen* installation by Susan Frazier, Vickie Hodgetts and Robin Welstch. Inspired by this project, Kate Walker created the work, *Death of the womanhouse* (1974), while Martha Rosler presented *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), to give but a few examples. This subject has continued in more recent art, such as Eulàlia Valldosera's silhouette projections of everyday objects, the majority of them from the domestic sphere, as in the work *Envasos: el culte a la mare* (Packaging: Mother Worship, 1996).

Another basic element of *Trilogy of Privacy* closely related with MXEspai 1010 is its ties to history, in this case with ancient history dating back to the Roman *Barcino*, to Mont Taber and the Pillars of Hercules (as indicated in the catalogue published on the gallery's tenth anniversary).¹ Marga Ximénez and Nora Ancarola live in a setting with a Classical heritage and they have used the symbolism and metaphors of Classic mythology to explain a series of themes that have become leitmotifs in their works.

The role of women in mythology has been seminal. Women have been the true protagonists of myths. Erika Bornay's book, *Las hijas de Lilith*² is a highly illustrative example. Although myths have been historically referenced by men, women have been the home, receptacle and transmitters of transcendental

¹ Nora Ancarola and Marga Ximénez (eds.), *MX Espai 1010. Catàleg 10 anys*, Edició MX Espai, Barcelona: 2008

² Erika Bornay, *Las hijas de Lilith*, Ediciones Càtedra. Ensayos de Arte, Madrid: 1990

messages and the power of the female figure as a generator of life have made her a metaphor of creative and destructive forces.

Through *Trilogia de la privadesa* and using myths whose protagonists are women figures, Marga Ximénez and Nora Ancarola have worked on such topics as transcendental to our lives as they are silenced by society, topics that are relegated to the private sphere, to the home, to one's own body, closed spaces that become at once sanctuary and prison, topics that are dealt with "behind closed doors." In *Sibil·la* (Sibyl) and *Domus Aurea*, the mythical and historical background is obvious, and in *Antikeres* as well, as we will explain below. This rereading of the historical facts and myths can also be found in works by other women artists, as for instance, Mary Beth Edelson's *The Goddess Head* (1975) and Betsy Damon's *7,000 Year-old Woman* performance (1977) or, recently, in projects such as Dora García's 2005 computer program *Yes or No (The Sphinx)*.

A third and last important aspect of *Trilogia de la privadesa*, which diverges from the MxEspai 1010 factor, at least on the surface, is that of questioning the canons and criticizing the established social models: in *Sibil·la*, the text by Elsa Plaza that can be read in the installation refers to the dictatorship of the imposed canon of beauty; in *Domus Aurea*, the idyllic home in which women have historically been secluded and confined is also questioned and deconstructed, becoming an arena for experiences: some positive, emphasizing evasion; others negative, in which violence is present. *Antikeres* takes up an aspect that had emerged in *Sibil·la* and which is also connected with the canon of beauty: "old age" as a dramatic loss of the socially accepted "beauty"³ and the illness that thrusts us into the abyss of inaction and dependence, contrary to the current imperative of action and individual independence and in which it seems there is no time for the necessary caregiving or acceptance of the processes of dependence.

³ In Catalan, the only difference between the words "bellesa" (beauty) and "vellesa" (old age) is the first letters, B or V. *Translator's Note*.