

LOLA LASURT

PICTORIAL CURATION I: ESTHER GUILLÉN, HER CONTEMPORARIES AND THE SCHOOL OF VALLECAS

This exhibition by Lola Lasurt revolves around the work of the ceramist Esther Guillén. The show has been developed specifically for Galeria Joan Prats's space and it brings together a group of pictorial installations by Lasurt and a group of ceramic sculptures by Guillén. It is a project that also relates to the practice of the artist as curator.

The project is based on the research that Lasurt carried out around the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the 1937 Exposition Internationale in Paris, following the invitation to conceive and carry out part of the activities that were part of the Public Programme for the exhibition by Goshka Macuga, which I curated for the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in 2022. Lasurt and Macuga share a common interest in history and its political implications in the present, as well as some artistic methodologies, hence my interest in Lasurt to direct the activities on that occasion.

For the Public Programmes at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Lasurt proposed a series of activities under the title *La secció en risc* [Section at risk], which was based on the section of the Pavilion devoted to popular arts and crafts from all over Spain. Three workshops corresponding to each of the sections of the Pavilion were held: ceramics, basketmaking and fabrics. Each workshop was led by a guest artist and the ceramics workshop was led by Esther Guillén.

At the Galeria Joan Prats, Lasurt brings together ceramics by Guillén and paintings by her that take her pieces as their motifs, as well as other important references in the field of contemporary ceramics and sculpture. The references are as diverse as Angelina Alòs, Magda Martí-Coll or M^a Dolores Gimeno (contemporaries of Guillén), the sculptor and participant in the Spanish Pavilion Alberto Sánchez, the surrealist painter Maruja Mallo and a piece by the British sculptor Barbara Hepworth.

The first piece the visitor encounters when entering the gallery is a pictorial frieze hanging from the ceiling, where Lasurt shows a sequence of stills from the film Frédéric Rossif made about Pablo Picasso in 1981. The sequence selected is the one in which the artist from Malaga is shown making a dove from a ceramic piece that is still soft and abstract in form. The first thing that must be done is to kill the father.

Lasurt's paintings are figurative and mostly based on photographs and reproductions. On this occasion, she carries out, on the one hand, an exercise in translation - where the three-dimensionality of the abstract ceramics and sculptures becomes two-dimensional - and, on the other hand, a precise study of colour. It should be noted

that, as part of the study of colour, the artist questions the use of colour in the presentation and reproduction of works of art and, therefore, the construction of an art historiography. This last instance is particularly relevant in the case of the paintings devoted to the three selected sculptures by Alberto Sánchez: *Mujer en verde* [Woman in Green] (1958-1962), *Maternidad* [Maternity] (1930-1965) and *Dama del Pan de Riga* [Lady with Bread from Riga] (ca. 1958). These three sculptures represent figures of women and Lasurt took the respective reproductions to make the paintings from books of the 1970s, specifically from publications of 1964, 1971 and 1977, which coincided with a moment of vindication of the sculptor towards the end of the dictatorship. Although the original sculptures are small in scale, none of them are larger than 90 cm, the paintings transport them to an almost human scale: there is a 1:1 relationship with the spectator. The background colours for the sculptures are amber, khaki green and lemon yellow, the same colours that appear in the background of the photographs in the books; they flee from the white museum colour they appear in today if we look them up on the internet.

The reference to Alberto Sánchez continues to be central in the second part of the exhibition, where the ceramics by Guillén, the paintings by Lasurt - in a pictorial analysis of the three pieces on the central pedestals - and the paintings based on the sculptures of the ceramists who were Guillén's contemporaries are shown. The pedestals with the three pieces by Guillén, *Fruit*, *Dona* [Woman] (1979) and *Eva* (1981), occupy the centre of the room and, as a background for each of them, there is a cloth held up from the ceiling; each of the pieces has a cloth of a different colour which is intended to be as close as possible to the background colour of the photographs of Sánchez's sculptures in the publications of the 1960s/70s. On the wall behind each of Guillén's ceramics are the paintings Lasurt has made of each piece, showing different points of view of the respective ceramics.

This exhibition curated by Lasurt is an homage to Esther Guillén that is part of the current will, need and interest in repositioning women artists who have been overlooked or forgotten in the construction of the history of art; also in the relevant appreciation of the minor arts (weaving, ceramics,...) as well as in the re-establishment of the figure of the sculptor Alberto Sánchez, above all in his indisputable role, but also neglected, in the Spanish Pavilion, both in terms of content and museography.

In this sense, the works on display are nevertheless part of the modern debate on the approach to the rural which, as Lasurt points out, "can be explained by Sert's interest in esparto grass". Likewise, the project can be understood as a way of strengthening the bond with Guillén on the part of Lasurt, who over the last year has made recurring

trips to the small village of Santa Pau where Guillén has shared his shop/studio with her husband since the 1980s.

Lola Lasurt's projects are characterised by the fact that they are the result of long research processes that take the form of works and large-scale installations. Although her methodology has been related to what is known in English as "re-enactment", a recreation, it also exceeds this definition or artistic practice in many aspects.

In a recent article, the art historian and critic Claire Bishop¹ tackles the evolution since the 1990s of what has been called "research-based art" and the role that the introduction of the internet has played in how research is currently carried out and how this has affected artistic practices.

Bishop identifies three moments and three very different ways in the evolution of art based on research taking into account its relationship with digital media. The first moment, which could be situated at the end of the 1990s and the irruption of the internet, is characterised by works that take the format of installations where the artist arranges large volumes of information that he has been collecting (newspaper clippings, documents, books, videos, interviews, etc.) and where the spectator is a co-editor for the purpose and effect of finding a narrative. It is an approach that rejects linearity in the construction of narrative, authorship, and emulates the internet in the sense of exhibiting the super abundance of information.

A second moment, which overlaps slightly with the first one temporarily, is precisely the one characterised by the rejection of digital technologies and the valorisation of everything that is considered obsolete. This is the moment in which some artists recover technologies from the past, such as 16mm film, slides, etc. And the references are to be found in the art of the 60s and 70s. In these cases, the artist's work often recovers a forgotten chapter of history, which is partly recreated or fictionalised.

The third phase is already post-internet, where the internet is already fully accepted and incorporated as a working tool and where the artist constructs large maps by compiling material that he or she extracts from the net and reconfigures it in the construction of an epistemology related to a theme or concern.

Returning to the case of Lola Lasurt, we find that, although we can identify some of the aspects with which Bishop characterises the second phase, her work goes beyond fictionalisation, recreation and/or the presentation of material. Lasurt metabolises the

¹ Claire Bishop, Information Overload in "Artforum", April 2023

research she carries out to turn it into work, not data; she creates an artistic synthesis full of subversion in which authorship and its position in the narrative are re-established; and also, and crucially, she reclaims the materiality of the work and the elements of the physical exhibition.

Neus Miró
