

- **Exhibition:** “Inmaculada Salinas. Pressed Women Out”
 - **Artist:** Inmaculada salinas.
 - **Inauguration:** 3 March, 20:00 h.
 - **Date:** 31 March 12 June 2011.
 - **Curator:** M^a Luisa López Moreno
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We Never Look Once and for All, But Inside Time

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“In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence...”

Gertrude Stein

Repetition as a mechanism or stylistic feature is an essential element of the works by Inmaculada Salinas (Sevilla 1967) showed in this exhibition. The alignment of meaning and feeling, looped in a circular and repetitive time, is the base of her poetics. The four series she presents now – *Espejo*, *Visión de las vencidas*, *Prensadas* and *Como fondo* – share with the works of the last two years – *Postales*, *Callejera*, *Asocial1* – the small format and the specific focus on women (with the exception of *Como fondo*). Her new series of small-scale works on the social subject of “women” represent a stark change with regard to her previous work, done in the first decade of the 21st century, which was mainly pictorial, abstract and big scale. Nevertheless, the pieces of both periods have something in common, something about which Gertrude Stein declared: “I like a thing simple, but it must be simple through complication. [...] William James was my big influence when I was at college. He was a man who always said ‘Complicate your life as much as you please, it has got to simplify’.”

These new pieces not only represent a break but also a “complication” in Salinas’ career, because she has giving up the aesthetic paradigms in which she was trained (she studied at the Fine Art Faculty in Seville) and to which she has dedicated all her research and emotions over more than fifteen years of silent studio work. However, she has not abandoned the simplification that Gertrude Stein found so interesting.

Certainly there is a big difference between the previous pieces and the current ones (closer to the idea of drawings, of works on paper), but once again she sets the drive against the gesture. No inaugural sense of gesture can be found in her paintings, despite the interaction between painting and the body. Her paintings are not geometric, either, even though they are almost exclusively structured by lines, while colour has always been a functional element. Her idea is closer to calligraphic painting and serialism, but without abandoning the notion that lines, which wander between restrained geometry and unconscious fantasy, form organic and symbolic shapes. These sexually charged shapes could be considered part of a “female imagery,” using the term that Lucy Lippard coined in *From the Center* to discuss the iconography that a group of women artists were creating in the 1970s.² From this point, Salinas’ lines seem to suggest ties to another debate: identification through recognition, and how this can be an implicit confirmation of the dominant ideology, while hinting at its huge “potential importance as an agency of psychic and social change,” as Kaja Silverman analyzes in *The Threshold of the Visible World*.³

Drive, together with learnt visual values and a talent for drawing, is the construct behind both the pictures and the recent works by Salinas. The notion of drive is here understood in the psychoanalytic sense, as a psychic energy which directs behavior towards a goal and runs down after achieving it. In Salinas’ case, this happens after composing each one of the pictures in the diverse series and, also, after working systematically to shape this new group of works.

Among the different ways in which drive can show up, the drive for knowledge has lead Salinas to the current state, in which she again needs references external to painting (as in the *Emblemas* series from the second half of the 1990s). However, the formal features of her work remain the same: in three of the series which could be called “drawings” she still starts from minimal elements such as the line and a basic colour, and in the fourth series, *Prensadas*, she starts from the minimal acts of selecting, cutting out and labelling press photos.

Drawings and found “images” have the common factor of displaying the word *mujer* (woman) or representations of women. It is obvious, Salinas says, that we need to reflect on the binomial formed by women’s visibility and invisibility, by voice and silence.

The linguistic sign substitutes the lines which Salinas compose her pictures with; or rather the new lines are made of such signs, which wholly sketch the *Espejo* series and mostly the *Visión de las vencidas* series. Calligraphic painting has evolved into calligraphy exercises that involve writing a word in an impossibly illegible, specular fashion, as she may have written before educational and societal constraints were imposed upon her. The word is repeated along a line, constantly multiplying until there is no more space left, and then fills every remaining line on the first sheet of paper. On the second sheet, the word is revealed, appearing in the “usual” way on the first line only: *mujer*. Then, line by line, sheet by sheet, for 40 pages, the word is repeated, and on the last page all the lines are taken up by the revealed word. Although she has not been traumatized by being forced to change her way of writing or of doing other actions with the left hand, this fight between her two hands, between the power of autonomy and the subordination of discipline, helps her (herein lies the therapeutic power of art) to reflect on the part (both in the literal and in the figurative sense) of the assigned social roles, on what is considered normative, on so-called “bad characters,” on the naturalizations and denaturalizations to which the body is subjected by different mechanisms of power.

Specular writing is used once more in *Visión de las vencidas*, where Salinas handwrites the English word for *mujer*, woman, together with wife and womanizer (the three terms that she found in a pocket electronic dictionary as the English translation for *mujer*, a surprising fact when it comes to womanizer). Here there is less space for calligraphy: 50 lined cards, 25 in one colour and 25 in another; on yet another 50 cards, equally divided into two colours (note how she continues using colour in a functional way), Salinas writes 50 sentences from the book *Visión de los vencidos*⁴ that contain the word *mujer* or other terms associated with it: *madre, hija, doncella, reina, vieja, esclava, infanta*, etc. (mother, daughter, maiden, queen, old woman, slave, princess, etc.). By altering the gender of the title of the book, Salinas gives a name to the series, establishing an analogy with the vanquished. In doing so, she tries to appeal to the power systems, which authorize certain representations while hindering or making others invisible, instead of portraying women as victims, something she viscerally rejects. The sentences take up a random part of the card and other lines are painted with a pencil; the words referring to women are also shaded in, composing graphical rhythms.

The 100-card sequence is organized both randomly and by the rigorous methodology followed during the composition process. The cards combine alternating variations and repetitions where the stressed words seem to comprise notes in a pentagram and recall other sensorial spheres like minimalist music. However, the marked words draw the viewer's attention away from the text, a distracting effect which hinders reading by interspersing subjective gaps and short circuits in the canonical vision. Creating a sort of blurring weft, a resource she has been using from the beginning of her career, gives way to new resources, like specular writing, at the service of new politics of representation.

These perception tricks (in one of her last paintings, if paying thorough attention, it could be seen how the lines drew the word *mujer* – the genealogical starting point that explains where she is heading with this new phase) allow her to distort the dominant codes.

Plastic resources are still present in Salinas' recent works but now they are used for constant constructions of the subject. Inmaculada Salinas sees her previous plastic work not as a defeat, but as a turn. She does not reject or deny it, she has just taken another path; a path which allows her to break from and move towards new practices where it is possible to combine poetics and politics (or, as historical feminism said, "the personal is political").

That is why before materializing these works, before investigating beyond the pictorial field, she spent a long time away from the studio, leaving the canvass at home and going out "for a searching roll" (in her own expressive words). First, she searched inside herself through different psychotherapies, and then she researched contemporary critical discourses – both artistic and sociocultural – and discussions about subject formation. Judith Butler claims that the concept of subject has generated much controversy; some defend it as the pre-condition for power while others revile it as a trace of "domination" that must be rejected. So, she proposes "to take account of how a paradox recurrently structures the debate, leading it almost always to culminate in displays of ambivalence. How can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency? [...] 'The subject' is sometimes bandied about as if it were interchangeable with 'the person' or 'the individual'. The genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation."⁵

The training that Salinas has gained in these five or six years has helped her to redirect her steps towards her study, although obviously she has taken a different stance there, as she says. This does not imply a disconnection in relation to her previous training, but a broadening. She has expanded her knowledge, now open for signifiers and thus for their content: the signified. Following Saussure's school, the word *mujer*, repeatedly used by Inmaculada Salinas, would be the signifier that points at the signified of what a woman is. Following Lacan, for whom the signifier is such when it is inscribed at the symbolic level and the thinking is formed by signifiers whose signified changes constantly, the signifier may have some conscious signifieds, but it may also refer to unconscious signifieds. The "complication" is here again at the service of the artist, especially if we take into account the rich feminist debates about gender and the subject woman. Since this is not the place to expose, not even synthetically, the genealogy of essentialist feminism discussed by constructionist feminism and its evolution, I just want to mention some milestones formulated in negative or interrogative form: "one is not born a woman" (Simone de Beauvoir), "ain't I a woman?" (bell hooks), "lesbians are not women" (Monique Wittig). I also want to recall the gaps opened by the problematization of identities, which have provoked new crises in the subject of political and ontological representation of feminism. From this thinking emerges the seminal theory of Judith Butler on "performativity" that considers gender as a ritualized repetition of conventions, rituals imposed "socially, thanks partly to the power of compulsory heterosexuality." Recently, a polyphony of voices from new generations questions gender because they consider it "a power mechanism that imposes man/woman and masculine/feminine categories in a rigid, violent and hierarchical way with the aim of producing bodies which adjust to the established social order."⁶

Salinas' methodology is based on structures, on rules, on mechanical acts. The sign and calligraphic action and the idea of serialism (she obviously empathizes with Hanne Darboven), even when selecting media pictures as she does in *Prensadas*, is equally structured. This series is composed by 624 cards systematically catalogued during nine months (though not premeditated, it coincided with the length of human gestation), from the 5th of February to the 15th of November 2009. Each card shows an image of a woman (or something that symbolizes her and thus represents her) cut out from a major newspaper – *Público, El País, El Mundo, ABC* –, together with the name of the newspaper, the date and the number of pictures of solely women, solely men, and women and men together published in the newspaper that day. The taxonomy she has created reveals the result of her research and displays before her and the spectator the statistical reality that can be drawn from the recount: the number of pictures of women is less than half the number depicting women and

men together, and less than a third of the pictures of men (despite the great number of images showing women as objects in the media). With this experiment, Salinas questions the legitimacy of representation and remarks what the feminist discourse has been saying for decades: there is a need for the “displacement of the subject of scientific statement,” for the “decolonization of hegemonic representation.” Critical thinking has highlighted how we see ourselves and how we are seen through pictures and, with regard to the current visibility regime of disciplinary society, how current social powers exercise a disciplinary regime over the visibility of women and the role of the media.

Against the automatism that combines sight and feeling with no more mediation than the weft linking the paintings, Salinas has started to create new mediations from the reflection that her recent training has implied, new “screens” between sight and feeling. She is conscious of the fact that, as Kaja Silverman says, the normative features of the screen can be so deeply rooted in our psyches and mingled with our hopes that they can determine what we see when we first look at an object. Nevertheless, Silverman claims, “no look ever takes place once and for all. Rather, each act of spectation is subject to a complex series of conscious and unconscious ‘vicissitudes,’ which can completely transform the value of what is originally seen [...] the eye may invest libidinally in the given-to-be-seen, or pursue a radically other itinerary, one which works to derealize rather than to affirm the visual standard. [...] if the look acts in concert with enough other looks, it can reterritorialize the screen, bringing new elements into cultural prominence, and casting into darkness those which presently constitute normative representation.”⁷

Once Salinas has made it complicated, she focuses on rigorously simplifying the work. The series *Como fondo*, chronologically conceived in the first place, can be considered the hinge between previous and current works. The solitude of the silent studio work and the repeated and passionate insistence on painting had a double effect on the artist, both filling and emptying her. As has been before said, she decided to escape from the “isolated body,” to go out of the studio to work on the inside and the outside: in the figurative sense, to approach different fields of knowledge; and in the literal sense, to approach the street, the community, and the conflicts that arise there, absorbing the changes that take place in the public space. She acted on attraction and this escape allowed her to start living the aesthetic experience in a different way, to glimpse new frameworks where the poetics of image could also imply other politics of image and, thus, to understand the artistic experience in relation to the sociocultural context where it takes place. Salinas also observes the fate of the paintings

when they leave the studio and enter the market, where they become immediately reduced to but a few of their many features, particularly their visual potential as decorative objects (even though we know that the commercialization of society turns the most immaterial work into decorative objects). This is why she decided to make use of the new methodologies she is developing and selected a group of press pictures where a person or a group of people appear in front of a painting in offices, official places or museums. After, she covered the bodies with a layer of colour so the coloured silhouette appeared outlined against the painting in the background. Then, she contrasted each one of these pictures with a card painted with wavy lines of the same colour of the layer until completing the Pantone colour scale on the 100th card. With this series, Salinas tries to question the use of her own painting as the prelude for future aesthetic experiences and constructs a new temporality from her own life.

Butler, again, affirms: “The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That ‘becoming’ is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being.”

1. Inmaculada Salinas. Paper presented in the workshop “Capital y territorio. ¿La construcción de un sueño?” UNIA artepensamiento, Sevilla, 2009. http://ayp.unia.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=582
2. Lucy R. Lippard. *From the Center, Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1976.
3. Kaja Silverman. *The Threshold of the Visible World*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996.
4. *Visión de los vencidos* (lit. Vision of the Vanquished, translated as *Broken Spears*), by Miguel León-Portilla, compiles indigenous codices written between 1519 and 1521 that present the Conquest of Mexico from the Mesoamerican point of view; the importance of this work lies in the break with the story spread through the texts written by the Spanish.
5. Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997.
6. Mirian Solá. “Reflexiones feministas sobre el no binarismo. La fragmentación del sujeto y la apertura del género, un nuevo escenario para las luchas feministas”. Jornadas Feministas Estatales, Granada, 2009, published by Coordinadora Estatal de Organizaciones Feministas, Madrid, 2010.
7. Kaja Silverman. *Op. cit.*