

Exhibition: Natividad Navalón. My Mother's Suitcase

**IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
18 December 2009 – 21 February 2010**

Organised by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

**Viennese Art Curator Barbara Steffen curates
show of Natividad Navalón at IVAM, Valencia**

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The exhibition “La maleta de mi madre” (“My Mother’s Suitcase”) which Natividad Navalón is presenting at the IVAM consists of five recent installations, not previously shown, based on the poetics of the transmission of values between mothers and daughters. The show is conceived as an exploration of the different stages that a woman encounters in the mission of passing on the legacy of her journey through life. The entire exhibition is organised like a play, progressing from childhood to puberty, then to the onset of adult life, separation and finally the loss of the mother.

The narrative – rich in literary references to authors such as Elena Poniatowska, Soledad Puértolas, Lisa See and Amy Tan, among others – evokes the voice of the daughter who one day herself becomes a mother, taking over from her mother and accepting the responsibility of passing on the legacy to her descendants.

The first installation is called *El sueño de vivir* (The Dream of Living). The mother’s bedroom is presented in a large space where there are bronze sculptures representing girls examining concealed objects belonging to

their mothers. This obsessive search for life in the mother's places invades the daughter's habits, memories, dreams, doubts and terrors.

De madres a hijas (From Mothers to Daughters) is the title of the second installation, in which there are fourteen pairs of oversized chairs placed facing each other and linked by pieces of white cloth. They refer to the stories of love and indifference between mother and daughter, their rivalries and reproaches, and the intrusion of pain in the long process of the adolescent's search for identity.

A series of twelve felt suitcases makes up the work *La maleta de mi madre* (My Mother's Suitcase), the metaphor on which the whole exhibition hinges. Life converted into a ceaseless transition, from girl to woman, from daughters to mothers, from learners about life to transmitters of legacies. The suitcase becomes the symbolic container in which the mother's most precious objects are guarded and transferred, and also a symbol that represents departure, distance and change, leaving home and the loss of the mother.

The installation *Tiempo de arroz y sal* (Rice and Salt Time) consists of a large lead boat containing nine hundred white towels, representing the need for transition, for the journey and departure. According to the artist, it "is the time when woman seeks a new identity and tries to recognise herself as a mother and no longer as a child. It is the longest path: bringing up children, caring for them, solitariness and finally infertility. Again and again we try to find our place, again and again we try to recognise ourselves as women. In the process, we try to purify the legacy, we set about clearing up doubts, mistakes, revelations and so on. The daughter appears as a tie between the past and the future. Through the daughter's eyes we see the mother again, we are the link between before and after."

The installation *El paso del legado* (Passing On the Legacy) provides the final chapter in the story. It deals with passing on the baton, transmitting the legacy and preparing for a new transition, the path that leads to death.

A catalogue has been published to accompany the exhibition, with illustrations of the works exhibited and essays by Barbara Steffen, Consuelo Císcar, Natividad Navalón and Gertraud Diem-Wille and an interview between the artist and the curator of the exhibition.

Natividad Navalón (Valencia, 1961) is one of the artists who were prominent in the transformation of sculptural practice in Spain during the late 1980s. In her work, closely associated with installation, we find significant connections with the feminist discourse and with poetry and

fiction written by women which address problems such as the woman's identity and the woman's body, fear, struggle and oppression, solitariness, isolation and emancipation.

Barbara Steffen

Curator, currently living in Vienna. Studied Art History and History of Theatre, University of Vienna and Courtauld Institute of Art, London (1980–86). Degree: Master of Art.

Exhibitions

Austrian and American artists, a series of exhibitions at the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York, 1994–96 (including: Paul McCarthy, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Valie Export, Anne Walsh).

Multimedia Art projects for Zürich Insurance: Projects with Sarah Morris, Kiki Seror, Coop Himmelblau, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Heimo Zobernig and Robert Wilson, Vienna, 1999–2001.

Francis Bacon und die Bildtradition. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 2004, catalogue by Skira.

Visions of America – Ileana Sonnabend Collection. Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, 2004, catalogue by Edition Sammlung Essl.

Gerhard Richter. Aquarelle und Zeichnungen. Albertina Museum, Vienna, 2009, catalogue by Hatje Cantz.

Positions

1984–86 Gallery Director of Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna.

1986–88 Gallery Director of Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery, Santa Monica (CA).

1988–92 Curator at the Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica (CA).

1992–98 Director of European Projects at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

2006–09 Head of Collection Development and Curator of Contemporary Art, Albertina Museum, Vienna.