

## MARGA XIMENEZ, AN EXPANDED GENEALOGY

By Laia Manonelles Moner

Marga Ximenez (Barcelona, 1950) and the seven heteronyms that accompany her in this show propose various areas of thought that involve the ethics of care, attachment and coming to terms with an unease that is both personal and systemic. Marga Ximenez amalgamates her vital and her artistic experience and generates other identities so as to revisit her work, open new lines of action and, above all, succeeds in addressing her daily presence from another angle. Creation arises from the need to approach her genealogy, to penetrate the domestic architecture and the connecting tissue between the private and the public spheres.

The determination to intersect these processes is made clear by the juxtaposition of different realities across which the artist travels, between MX Espai 1010, the gallery that she and fellow-artist Nora Ancarola have managed since 1999, and her home which is undergoing a process of change. The work that introduces the first area, “*D’aquest fil que encara ens connecta* (2017)” (Of the thread that still connects us),- is made up of a strip of perforated paper, with weaving boats, weights, notebooks, drawings and photographs that collect the intimacy of the two spaces located at number 7 of Carrer Llibreteria; the first floor (that hosted the exhibitions and activities organised by MX Espai up to 2016) and her home on the third floor of the same building. Marga Ximenez together with Almira Olmayan connect the two worlds and the artist explains that the heteronyms arose at a time when she was simultaneously taking care of her mother and of MX Espai. These new identities allowed her to start working in different ways, leaving the lengthy craft-oriented techniques –that she had developed earlier in her textile installations– to begin creating with a rapidity directly associated with the needs of the moment. Marga Ximenez converses with her heteronyms about her mother’s ageing process and the life they live at home, a *domus* shared with unease and the need to escape, subjects that she previously attended in the series “*Trilogia de la Privadesa* (2004-2010)” (The Trilogy of Privacy) carried out with Nora Ancarola.

The artist illustrates how creation becomes a mechanism to care for oneself while caring for others. Thus, she focuses on art’s potential as a tool to give shape to unease in order to share it, crossing the divide where the intimate sphere becomes politic. What

Marga Ximenez proposes is directly related to Carol Gilligan's "Ethics of Care". In her book "In a Different Voice" (1982), the psychologist examined the responsibility and the empathy generated in situations of dependency that make it necessary to take care of people who are vulnerable, sick, very young or very old. Connected to the management of human relationships, "Ethics of Care" re-thinks the links, affections and emotions while avoiding the abstract paradigms connected to Justice, to concentrate on everyday situations. These ideas and the role of women can be related with the ethics of care and the feminist movement, recalling the maxim that what is personal is political and the relevance of the political awareness groups in the late sixties. The "different voice" underlined by Carol Gilligan emphasizes the potential of feelings and affections, undervalued in a rationalist, patriarchal and neo-liberal context. However, it is important to notice the clear intention to transcend "essentialist determinism" and appeal to personal responsibility, to the *homo empathicus* instead of *homo lupus*<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, the artist and her heteronyms Gena Lestemar, Sergio Galán and Pía Remedios, propose the work "*de llibres i llars*" –2017– Marga Ximenez (Of Books and Homes), in which she gives thought to the old age homes and the management and care of the elderly in the present neo-liberal society. The four artists' literary reference is Jean Améry's book "*Revuelta y resignación*" (1968) (Revolt and Resignation), that features as part of an installation representing a library –built by recycling the cupboards of a kitchen– that contains books made of black cloth from the family environment.

Marga Ximenez and the heteronyms who participate in the show undertake a revision of her personal archives, playing with them, de-constructing and remaking them. The artist creates a series of characters so as to analyse –from a distance– the backbone that vertebrates her work, examining from various viewpoints the intersections and crossings between domestic and artistic, private and public spheres. In the last twenty years, Marga Ximenez has generated a multiplicity of voices, personalities, otherhoods. Participants in the exhibition "*HETERONYMS – On Intersecting Processes 1998/2017*" are Almira Olmayan, Col·lectiu Punes (a team of five emerging artists), Pía Remedios, Edith Andreu, Gena Lestemar, Sergio Galán and Feliu Esteve, of different generations, origins and backgrounds. They all have clear-cut identities and some of them have

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Gilligan, "La resistència a la injustícia: una ètica feminista del cuidado" (Resisting Injustice: the Feminist Ethics of Care), Cuadernos de la Fundació Víctor Grífols i Lucas 30, 2013, p.65. Available at: <http://www.secpal.com/%5CDocumentos%5CBlog%5Ccuaderno30.pdf>

extensive and recognised artistic careers. In her paper “*Plural com l’univers*” (2008) (Plural as the Universe), Nora Ancarola points out that each of the 19 heteronyms that Marga Ximenez has created, always show some features of her personal biography, revealing Pia Remedios, from Zaragoza, as the one who most truly represents the artist’s “alter ego”:

“She is the one that embodies her own story, the other names concealed in her birth certificate, which are the names of her respective grandmothers. She talks of her as about herself, crossing over the past generations that preceded her and the future that might have been the the figure of her mother, likewise concealed behind the heteronym Gena Lestemar”<sup>2</sup>.

Marga Ximenez has created a multiplicity of heteronyms who have lives of their own although they maintain an umbilical tie with the mother figure. The artist becomes a fertile *matryoshka* undergoing a deep process of introspection that culminates in the conception of a unique saga. Indeed, Laura Mercader points out that «the Italian term *parire*, to bare, to give birth, has a double meaning, also implying the act of severing, dividing, as well as the act of producing, generating, or providing» and she reminds us that the etymology of *parire* includes “to make room”, emphasizing the relevance of preparing a space, of “making way” for children as part of the experience of giving birth<sup>3</sup>.

The expanded autobiographical space is also akin to the works of Fernando Pessoa and his more than sixty heteronyms. In several of her installations the artist uses quotes from Pessoa’s “*Livro do Desassossego*” (1982) (Book of Disquiet) and “*Regresso dos Deuses*”(1986) (Return of the Gods) that go deeply into the creation of numerous or even infinite biographies of a literary and poetic nature. Other literary references, such as the poet Joan Sales and the philosopher Jean Amery, also appear in the exhibition. Simultaneously, Marga Ximenez complements her works by bringing in journalistic articles reporting on the consequences of war, violence, and other injustices.

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<sup>2</sup> Nora Ancarola, “Plural com l’univers” (2008), written for the exhibition *Heterònims* at MEXEspai.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Mercader Amigó, “La genealogia femenina de la casa natal”, . Published in the magazine DUODA, *Estudis de la Diferència Sexual*, 53 (2017), pp. 5-6.

Marga Ximenez and her heteronyms share the will to give a poetic rendering of everyday life, to link up what is personal to what is political. The multiple identities enable the artist to reflect upon the ethics of care, the problems of frontiers, of refugees and the abuse suffered by many children. In her installation piece “*de Família i Famílies–2017– La família, Pía Remedios–2001*”, Marga Ximenez presented a series of mattresses and a gold-leafed plank to capture various angles of the reality of those who have to emigrate, evoking the difficulties of her grandmothers in the context of the Spanish Civil War in rural Aragon. The work also denounces the precarious existence suffered by displaced persons, which she connects to the novel *Incerta glòria* (1956) (Uncertain Glory) by Joan Sales. “*De família i famílies–2017– La família, Pía Remedios–2001*” is related to “*D’aigua i de cal–2017– Cementiri blanc*”, Marga Ximenez–2001 in which she and Edith Andreu presented an installation with cut-open water containers filled with babies’ socks and lime, pointing directly to the dramatic results of military conflict. The heteronym Edith Andreu has emphasized the tragedy contained in *Cementiri Blanc* by introducing two cardboard zebras –that originally stood guard in the stairway between the first and the third floor at number 7 of Carrer Llibreteria– and now represent all that the unfortunate children have been deprived of. In another of her pieces, “*De visions de futur–2017– Una llar social (fragment)*”, Marga Ximenez–2002, (Visions of the Future–2017– A Social Home (fragment), Marga Ximenez–2002), the artist continues to focus on the barbaric aspects of war by presenting a collection of soldiers’ duffel bags (made of a material used by armies as protection against chemical attacks. Made for display out of doors, each bag has been printed with the phrase “*visions of the future*”.

The artist makes visible and returns to society what society obscures, pronouncing what is silenced, omitted, passed over. Carles Hac Mor referred to these ideas in his article “*Marga Ximenez. Un cop de puny molt ben donat*”(2000) (Marga Ximenez. A well-aimed punch), about her installation *La vuitena arma* (2000) (The Eighth Weapon), which was dedicated to the rapes and murderous attacks suffered by women during the war in Timor in 1999.

“As Joan Miró recommended, Marga Ximenez and her work give the spectator a well-aimed punch on the nose. These nine sculptures are, as it were, true art with a vengeance, (as opposed to a surrogate). And this rare sort of art never allows for one single reading but invites a wide range of interpretations, many of which,

have little to do with strict logic, but are much richer than any line of thought, waterlogged or not with logical and coherent politics, correct or incorrect”<sup>4</sup>.

Marga Ximenez focuses on vulnerability, showing the wounds and abuses of power. Deconstruction of the hegemonic structures runs through installations such as “*de festes i des-fetes*” (2017) (Of fêtes and defeats) - “*Triptic*”, Marga Ximenez (1984) in which the heteronym Feliu Esteve has intervened the artist’s work –rolling up the haute-lisse tapestry– to underline the connotation of power and wealth traditionally associated to the history of tapestry, and denounce the exploitation of the work of children by complementing the work with objects indicative of child abuse. Feliu Esteve proceeds to underline such realities in a series of tiny books that contain two counterpoised pages; one of them shows images of tapestries in luxurious eighteenth-century interiors and dance halls, designed for the pleasure of the upper class, the other has press photographs showing child soldiers, the tortures suffered by prisoners of war during the war in Iraq, and Amina Lawal Kurami, whose sentence to be stoned to death for adultery was finally lifted thanks to the pressure of international opinion. The heteronyms subvert and undo the prevailing narratives, construct counter-narratives, revising the artistic techniques that Marga Ximenez has developed, recycling the recycled, Some of them, such as Edith Andreu or Col·lectiu Punes, take apart, break up and deconstruct the works of Marga Ximenez to put them together again, recreating them.

The exhibition *HETERÒNIMS - d’una Intersecció de Processos 1998/2017* (Heteronyms – of Intersecting Processes 1998/2017) presents installations by Marga Ximenez that have been intervened by her heteronyms, creating bridges between her different registers. Marga Ximenez transcends the autobiographic account to focus on social unease, denouncing injustice, violence, and the precarious conditions many people inhabit in our times. The artist and her heteronyms transform, intervene and participate in the production, approaching creativity from the angle of commitment. Her work remains open-ended, in a process of permanent construction; as it arises from necessity, the practice of art blends with life, pointing at other ways of relating that come from a realm of affections and empathy.

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<sup>4</sup> Carles Hac Mor, “*Marga Ximenez. Un cop de puny molt ben donat*” (Marga Ximenez, a well-aimed punch), *Papers d’Art* (2000).

