

Exhibition

# Carmen Calvo

14 Jul. — 6 Nov. 2022



*Son ideas sentimentales*  
(They're sentimental ideas), 2015.  
Artist's Collection

Press Dossier  
IVAM Centre Julio González

IVAM

Exhibition

# Carmen Calvo

14 Jul. — 6 Nov. 2022

Curators:  
Nuria Enguita and Joan Ramon Escrivà



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# Carmen Calvo

Throughout her long career, the recovery and resignification of material remains, objects and images has formed an essential part of the working methodology of Carmen Calvo. For the artist, the world is a field of experimentation that allows her to trace multiple histories on the basis of an archive in constant transformation. Showing the artist's studio, opening the archive and taking it to the museum is the action that gives rise to this exhibition.

On the occasion of the award of the Julio González Prize to Carmen Calvo (Valencia, 1950), the IVAM is organising an exhibition that reviews the main lines of research of this artist from the late 1960s to the present day through a broad selection of works and installations. The award is one more in a long list of prizes and distinctions for the work of this artist, such as the Alfons Roig Prize of the Diputació de València (1989), the National Prize for Plastic Arts (2013), the ACCA Critics' Award (2013), the Medal of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Valencia (2014) and the Distinction for Cultural Merit of the Generalitat Valenciana (2016). In 1997, Carmen Calvo and the artist Joan Brossa represented Spain at the 47th Venice Biennale.

Using collage as a technical and conceptual tool, the artist has constructed a powerful imaginary out of recycling and the resignification of objects and images discarded by the consumer society. This fiction is to be understood as a complex web of plots that address us on the themes of religion and sexuality, childhood and education, violence and inequality. They speak of our dreams, desires and fears.

Presented for the first time in the central hall of Gallery 1 is a recreation of the artist's studio, which unfurls in space like a sort of old cabinet of wonders. Old shelving and chests of drawers serve as a motley support and refuge for hundreds of antique objects, mannequins and scraps of notebooks and magazines rescued by the artist from flea markets and antique shops, and intervened in the studio. These chattels are indispensable for activating her impulse to fantasise and estrange.

Over the last decade, the artist has used retrieved and intervened photographic images to intensify her critical gaze on the oppression and inequality of women. These concerns are reflected in the previously unseen installation that marks the finishing point of the exhibition, the enigmatic *La naturaleza agita* (Nature Stirs, 2010-2018).

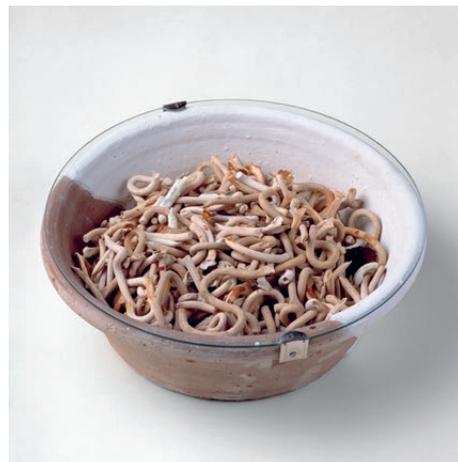
## WRITINGS / COMPILATION / RECONSTRUCTION

This show begins with a selection of works produced in the 1980s that belong to her emblematic series *Escrituras* (Writings), *Recopilación* (Compilation) and *Reconstrucción* (Reconstruction). In these orderly compositions, archaeological in inspiration, the use of plaster moulded in flimsy cardboard domestic receptacles has been one of the artist's hallmarks since the beginnings of her career.

Groups of invented plaster objects share a location with real objects rescued from the rubbish tips of History: a taxonomic repertoire arranged on showcase-tables now converted into a sort of sample display of ironmongery where the remnants of old imaginary ruins are exhibited.



*Serie Recopilación-Reconstrucción*  
(Compilation-Reconstruction Series), 1977  
Azcona's Collection



*Recopilación naturalezas*  
(Nature compilation), 1988.  
Artist's Collection

## SILENCE I AND II

Made in plaster and stone, the work *Silencio I y II* (*Te prometo el infierno*) (Silence I and II [I Promise You Hell], 1995) occupies a prominent place in this exhibition as it is one of the artist's first incursions in the field of the installation. Dozens of white slabs are piled on a wall from which hundreds of threatening daggers are hung, bearing reminiscences of cemeteries and tragic events and the memory of absence.



*Silencio I y II* (Silence I and II), 1995  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía



*No espero al otro que también soy yo*  
(I do not await the other that is also me), 2021.  
Artist's Collection



*El mensajero* (The Messenger), 2020.  
Artist's Collection

## MANNEQUINS

Dolls, wax figures and mannequins are an indissociable part of Carmen Calvo's creative imaginary. The hieratic grimace on their faces, their stiff false hair, the elaborate articulation of their extremities... everything seems to invoke a morbid state of transition between life and death. Or perhaps, even more importantly, the automated condition of the human being turned into a malleable portion of the social machinery. A system devised for dividing up an individual transmuted into a marionette.

The latest mannequins intervened by the artist accentuate their arrangement in a dramatic and dislocated setting as metaphors for systemic violence on bodies.

## POSTCARDS – BOOKS

Like the poet Paul Éluard, Carmen Calvo is fascinated by postcards. On these images printed on cardboard, she incrusts fragments of photographs and enigmatic handwritten phrases in a

ludic procedure of subversive intrusion aimed at destabilising the affable fictions propagated by the tourist industry.

The same process of abrasion and intersecting meanings acts in the series of books intervened by the artist. The methodical coldness of accounting ledgers or the solemnity of the literary or philosophical discourses that have sought their refuge in old books are subjected to the insertion of small objects that unleash ironic new interpretations in the viewer's gaze.



*Cuando se tienen diecisiete años*  
(When one is seventeen years old), 2018.  
Artist's Collection

## ET POURLÈCHE LA FACE RONDE

The piece *Et pourlèche la face ronde* (And the Round Face Licks its Lips, 2013), a large terrestrial globe from which a mane of hair hangs like a cloak, articulates a set of works where the artist Carmen Calvo uses hair as a powerful detonator of meanings beyond the spiritual idea of beauty.

In Carmen Calvo's imaginary, hair is a symbol of woman's identity, of her sexuality, and of the punishments to which she has been subjected over the centuries. In the disturbing works *Negro corsé velludo* (Hairy Black Corset) and *Sexo en la cara* (Sex in the Face), hair is



*Et pourlèche la face ronde* (maquette), 2013  
Artist's Collection



*Negro corsé velludo* (Hairy black corset), 2002. Artist's Collection



*No sé lo que persigo al convocaros*  
(It is not what I seek in convening you), 2004.  
Colección de la artista

exhibited in unabashed abundance, with no hint of prudishness. The dank material occupies much of the space of the composition, provoking a mixture of attraction and morbid repulsion in the viewer.

**¡NO ES UN SUEÑO!  
¡ESTÁ PASANDO DE VERDAD!  
(IT'S NOT A DREAM! IT'S  
REALLY HAPPENING!, 2020)**

During the months of confinement owing to the COVID pandemic, the artist used those long days of solitude and seclusion to rewatch many of the films of the classic American cinema and the *Nouvelle Vague* that have stimulated the development of her creative imaginary. With the camera of her mobile phone, Carmen Calvo captured fragments of those films, images of scenes and faces that remained caught and petrified by the click of the device. Assembled and projected in a dark room, these diffuse stills resemble a phantasmagoria, a claustrophobic narrative on the sense of uneasiness caused by the situation of isolation.



*La naturaleza agita* (Nature stirs), 2010-2018  
(maquette). Artist's Collection

## FINAL ROOM

In the artist's work, the problematics of the relations of domination and violence exercised over women have acquired increasing centrality.

Like a scene taken from a dream, a large cabin – the installation *La naturaleza agita* (Nature Stirs, 2010-2018) – houses hundreds of terracotta fingers that protrude from its walls. They are women's fingers. Their invasive and seductive arrangement in the space seems to invoke the stimulation of sexual desire and the charms of earthly pleasures. At the same time,



*Queridas mías* (My dears), 2020.  
Artist's Collection



*Decálogo de la esposa*  
(The wife's commandments), 2020.  
Artist's Collection

these fingers acquire a menacing appearance, as they resemble the jaws of carnivorous plants with piercing spikes evocative of punishment.

On the basis of photographs retrieved from abandoned albums, Carmen Calvo constructs a sort of memorial in this room to anonymous women, a visual metaphor for the subordination of woman in the past and even in the contemporary societies of today. Faces and bodies are blurred, covered and erased. Eyes and mouths are deprived of their primal function of looking, saying and deciding.



*Carta a un profesor*  
(Letter to a teacher), 2018.  
Artist's Collection

## ACTIVITIES

Presentation of the Julio González Prize of the Generalitat Valenciana to Carmen Calvo

Date: 14 July 2022, 7 pm

Place: Auditorium

Carmen Calvo will receive as the Julio González Award of the Generalitat 2022, a sculpture from the special edition of *Woman with Amphora II*, given by the Julio González Administration since 2000. Julio González Administration strives to promote the work and legacy of Julio González and his entire family, pursuant to the efforts of Roberta Gonzalez, Carmen Martinez and Viviane Grimminger.

## PUBLICATION

On the occasion of this exhibition, the IVAM is publishing a catalogue that includes texts by Nuria Enguita (co-curator and director of the IVAM), Estrella de Diego and Rafael Gil, together with images of the works included in the exhibition. The publication is available at the museum reception and from the online shop: <https://tienda.ivam.es/>

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