

Esther Ferrer

03.10.12 > 30.11.12

Opening: Wednesday, October 3, 20 h.

In her second exhibition in the gallery, Esther Ferrer presents models from different spatial projects and drawings from her prime numbers series. This marks the first occasion when this work, which dates from the 70s onward, has left the studio and been made available to the public. The models are made from cardboard boxes, foam board, packaging tape and colored strings. The drawings are sketches, preliminary designs for her series Poem of Prime Numbers, work which has later taken form in a variety of mediums. In short, this exhibition shares the notes of an artistic discourse. In Ferrer's words, "I've never been too interested in creating projects in a real space, on a large scale. If the model I build functions, the work is finished. If I have the opportunity to build it in a real space, great, but if not, it's not a problem. I believe that art is a process, and perhaps I could affirm, without a doubt, that this is precisely what interests me, the process, my process."¹

To talk about *art against aesthetics* in our country isn't a banal conversation, especially this year with the loss of Antoni Tàpies who, as it is well known, used this title for an edition of selected writings he published in the seventies. The great Catalan artist advocated for social commitment and called on artists to challenge themselves and reflect on the material they use.

We mention this because Esther Ferrer is one of the more emblematic examples of both cases, and has been since the seventies. Alongside her work as a performer (which has made her, without a doubt, one of the most well-known figures from this field in Europe), she has worked privately in her studio creating scripts and models for her public actions and installations, with the modesty and patience of someone dedicated to growing as an artist and a person.

Yet, what is the material of this artist's project, which is both political and poetic (and artistic)? At first, an easy answer would be to claim that the material is her own body, but, oh!, now we have made a mistake; true works of art cannot be contained by conclusive, closed, answers. They cannot be contained because, as Tàpies has made clear in his writings, the true artist is able to reveal, through her work, a vision of the world, and – we would add – a cosmology. Effectively, the material, the body of Esther Ferrer's work, is as broad as the universe itself, from which it draws. For example, in her work with prime numbers – which can be seen in the gallery in a number of drawings – we find clues that help us understand that art practice is not a short cut that leads to a rational answer to any of life's big questions, but rather, it can introduce us to a certain poetics that pushes us, stimulating our sensibilities, to ask more questions.

How can we think about Esther Ferrer's work? We would argue that we must go beyond thinking about it, and live it. One must live it through the privilege of her company, as her work unfolds from a series of discourses, from the gesture of her performances, from her string models, her drawings, her photographs... spreading over a territory that seeks to share with us, often invoking absurdity, surprise and discovery, a place where we have been for some time, life, where the progress of art catapults us against aesthetics, to a space where we all belong.

However, her actions are never casual. The intention of her gestures is often quite evident. Approximately thirty years ago Esther began to sew – an action which becomes political in the hands of a female artist – and, little by little, with mathematical rigor, with the patience of a saint and the discipline of a soldier, she continued weaving her models, small traps where space (perhaps the whole universe) is caught, and traps us in the radical experience of extremely sensibility. Produced in secret, with the freedom of never having to be shown, we can now affirm that, after thirty years, these works emerge with the full power of their purity, staking a place in the grand theater of artistic representations. As it was for Penelope, the wait has been long, but at the end this weaving captures us, just as it did Ulysses, saving us from the siren call of the resounding noise of contemporary art.

Pep Agut, October 2012

Esther Ferrer (San Sebastian, Spain, 1937) is one of the principal European performance artists from the 1970s. A renowned advocate for free expression, activism and feminism, she has performed as a soloist and in collaboration with the ZAJ collective (active from 1964-1996), a pioneer in experimental music and performance. She has also collaborated with artists/musicians such as John Cage or Tom Johnson. Her work explores time, space and the body. She has exhibited and performed in a number of institutions, such as: MACBA (Barcelona), MNCARS (Madrid), Artium (Vitoria), Centro George Pompidou (Paris), Museo de Samtidskunst (Denmark); Statsalerie (Stuttgart); MUCA (Mexico), Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (Rio de Janeiro); Raven Row (London). Ferrer was the Spanish representative in the Venice Biennale in 1999, and received the National Prize for Visual Art in 2008.

¹ Esther Ferrer, *Maquetas y dibujos de instalaciones 1970/2011*, EXIT publicaciones, Madrid, 2011, pag. 15