

ESTHER FERRER: Self-portrait in time

BARCELONA
DELS ÀNGELS GALLERY

It's me in all of them

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When we enter the new space of the Dels Àngels gallery, which is presenting, for the first time in a private space in Barcelona, the work of Esther Ferrer (San Sebastián, 1937), the first thing that attracts our attention are the traces, still visible, of a piece of tape which begins outside the gallery and marks an itinerary inside it, even around the areas which are not visible to visitors, i.e. it covers the entire gallery including a private area which is about twice as large as the space open to the public. The traces of its action symbolically and objectually take over the space of the gallery to recreate a discourse which, over time, becomes indelible. Even outside, the tape sets an itinerary, while the unusual appearance of the tape on the dark pavement conveys a sense of something taking place inside. And, indeed, this is so, for

the fact that Esther Ferrer is showing these pieces, in addition to two performances, one of which has already taken place, is an event in itself, despite a feeling of déjà vu.

Ferrer makes no concessions to mundane vanity or to herself, although her work does convey a sense of a search for an aesthetic harmony, for the construction of a balance founded on the very lack of balance brought about by the changes in our physiognomy over time and the imperfections of our attempted symmetry, a requirement of beautiful and pure forms. Ferrer uses proportional relations and serial and numeric canons, and conveys a sense of joy in her drawing of the reconstruction or transmutation of her own image, aged by time, in order to recreate, perhaps not deliberately, a creative representation in which, in her *Self-portrait with drawing* (1999), for example, she evokes Op-Art with her game of perceptive distortion. Undoubtedly, the star piece of the exhibition is *El libro de la cabeza - Autorretrato en el tiempo* ("The book of heads-self-portrait in time") (since 1981), which is divided into two linked series, as, every five years since 1981 she has made a self-portrait, which she has then divided in two and combined with previous portraits, a process which gave rise to *El libro de las cabezas* with combinations from 1981-2004. In her *Autorretrato en el tiempo*, we see the five pieces from a same period, which will be completed in 2009.

It is obvious, as the artist herself explains, that the effectiveness of the project would be threatened if she used a different model; this pragmatic decision, however, does not exclude her intention of turning herself into an added interest in her very well produced work. As has been mentioned, in *Autorretrato con dibujo* she conducts a process of disintegration of her image, which she has previously drawn and scribbled on, by means of a dissection of a multitude of paper strips, lending a sense of expansion to the plane, which can also be seen in *Evolución-Metamorfosis* (2005), although on this occasion it displays a series of volumetric aspirations in an elaborate process which is not exempt from entertaining dramatism. In both pieces, the references to Duchamp are visible, particularly in the way they are finished; they display that unique hand-made nature that causes all of her pieces to be unfinished works which come together to give rise to "new" creations. There are two interesting issues in terms of the gallery's approach to this selection of works: it's curatorial loyalty to discourses on representation, a field in which Esther Ferrer is a respected expert, and the freedom to exhibit important pieces never seen in Barcelona, and which are not the latest pieces by artists, or unseen ones, except for the performances, but which deserve the celebration of this long delayed encounter.



El libro de las cabezas. Autorretrato en el tiempo, 1981-2004 - work in process.
Installation of 25 photographs. Courtesy: Dels Àngels Gallery