

ESPAIS VOLART
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Lita Cabellut
retrospective

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TRADUCCIÓ I CORRECCIÓ

Català/castellà: Laia Farré

Anglès: Stephen Rumbol

DISSENY I MAQUETACIÓ

Ferran Giménez

IMPRESSIÓ

Vanguard Gràfic SA

Dipòsit Legal: B 19522-2017

ISBN: 978-84-697-5017-9

Lita Cabellut

retrospective

del 5 d'octubre de 2017
al 27 de maig de 2018

Ausiàs Marc, 20-22

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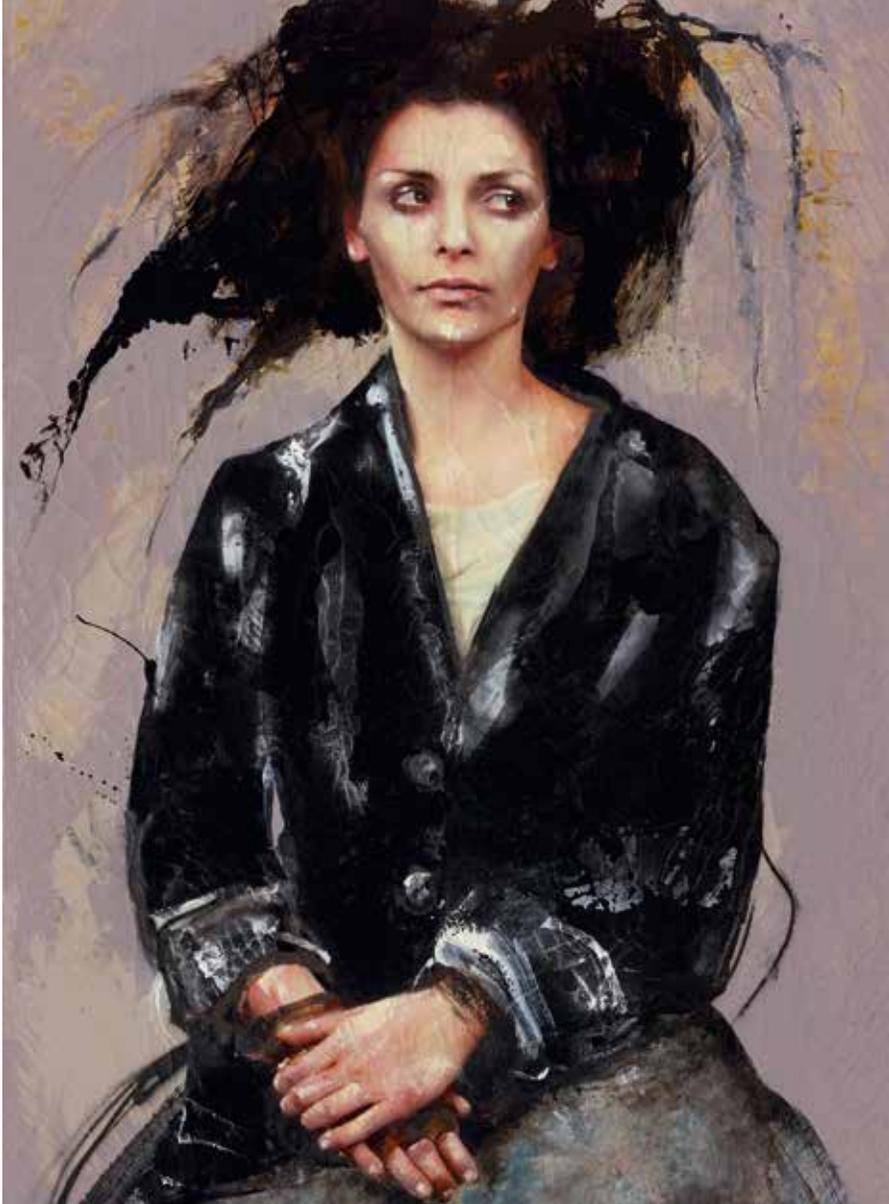
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ESPAIS
VolART
BARCELONA



Disturbance gitana 1 | 2015 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 280 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR

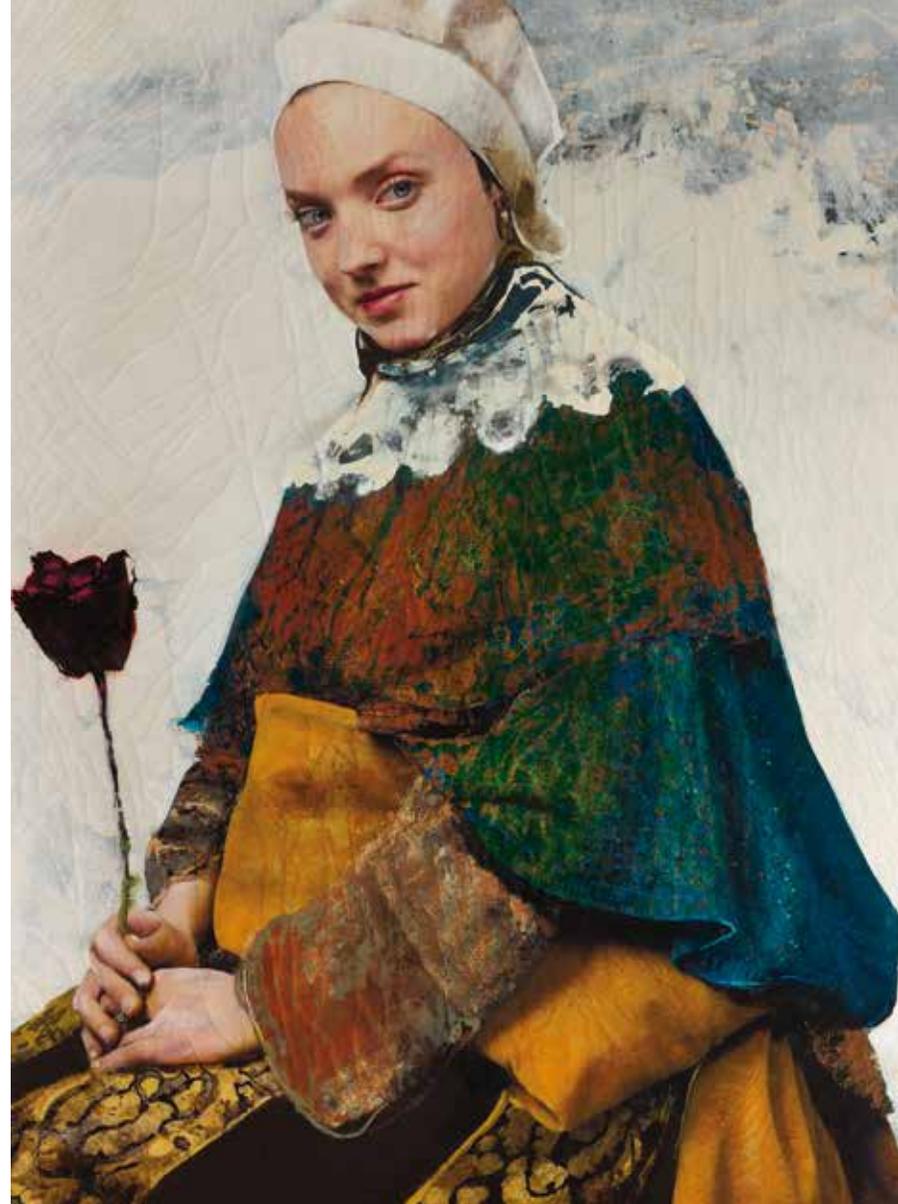
Disturbance gitana 2 | 2015 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 280 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR





Francois Blansjaar | 2014 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 280 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR

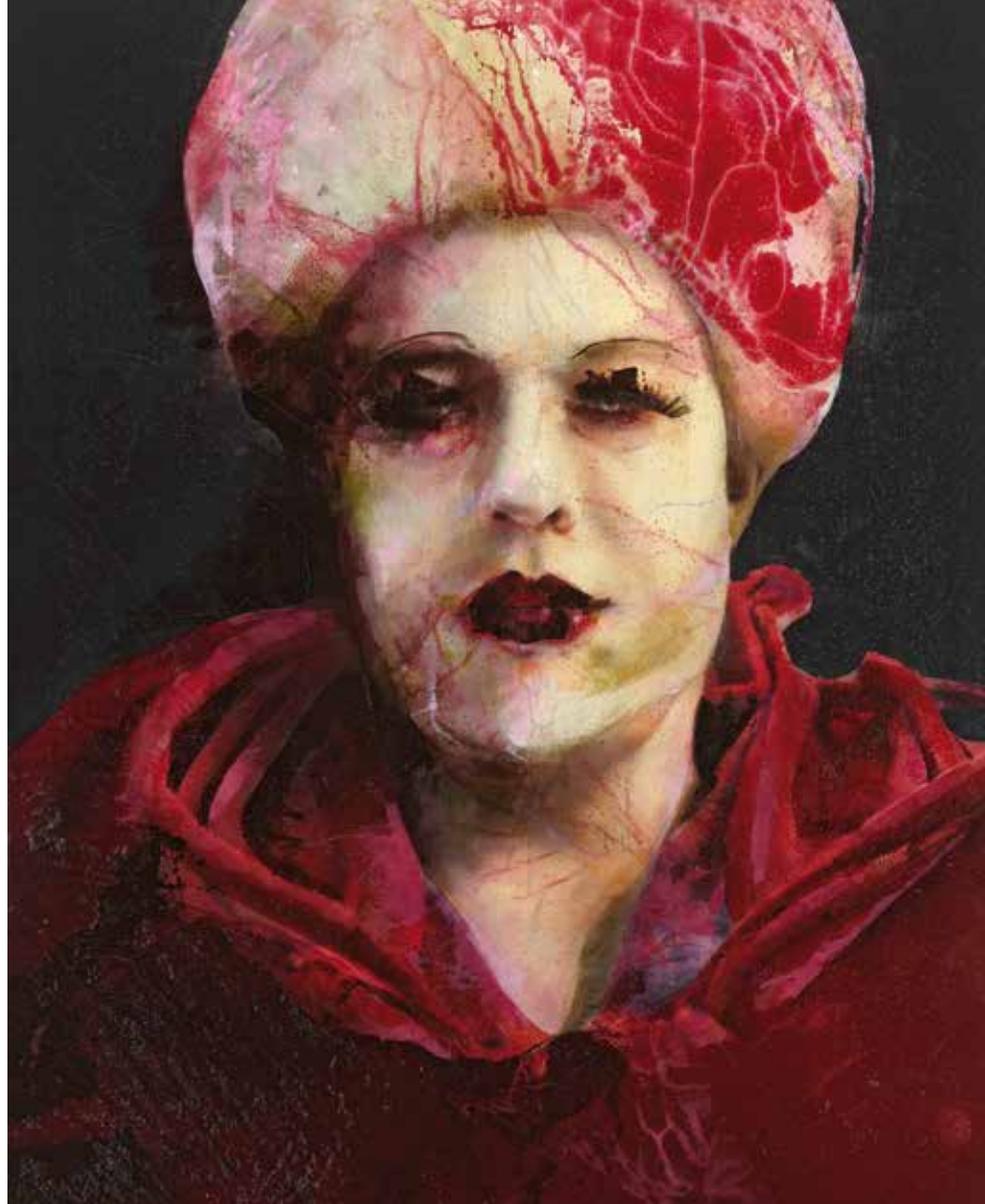
Sarah Blansjaar | 2014 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 280 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR





Spectacle 05 | 2012 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 250 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR

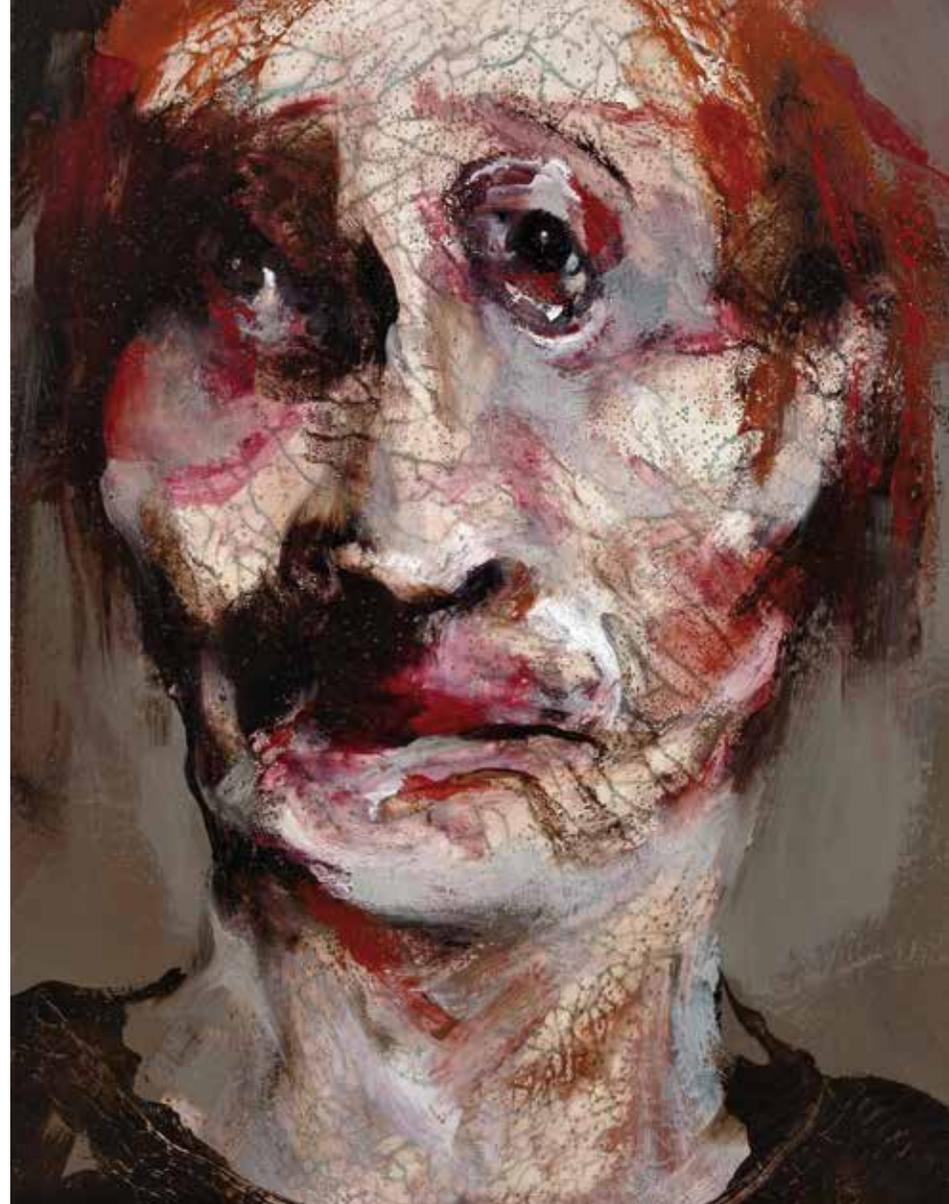
After the show 06 | 2012 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 250 x 200 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR





Cruzeta | 2009 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 130 x 100 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR

Trudi | 2009 | Tècnica mixta sobre tela | 130 x 100 cm
COL·LECCIÓ PARTICULAR



**Beauty and the sinister:
dialectical confrontations**

I did not really know the work of Lita Cabellut until the exhibition 'Trilogy of Doubt' at the Espai Volart 2 in 2013. Reading a review in an international magazine could not convey the feelings her work provokes when it is right in front of you, when you are viewing the original works by this artist, who likes and needs to push through the conventional limits of painting. Lita Cabellut's compositions are anything but conventional. Actually, it seems that she works independently of rules imposed by art schools, fashion and styles. She knows the classics from Spanish and Dutch museums very well and they are always present in her artwork, one way or another, thematically or formally. She uses historical elements and modern references to create pieces that appear to be festive yet counterpose tragedy and comedy – as in Greek theatre – and try to shake us up and make us think. In fact, her work is a reflection with existentialist roots (more related to Kierkegaard than Sartre) in a postmodern world that is

uneasy about what its customs, ways of life, human values and ideals need to be.

The first time I visited that exhibition in 2013 I was under the impression that I had to analyse the purpose and intention in Lita Cabellut's work from the perspective of my university teachings by the philosopher Eugenio Trias – a specialist in Nietzsche – who asserted that one had to locate thought at the 'limits': the place where counterposed positions are found, the verse and reverse of a question. In this artist's work, nothing is black and white, and anything could be true or false; so we need to look for its background context. She is convinced that 'art is a product that is velvet on the outside, but made of bleach on the inside'. She creates a sumptuous plastic that does not forget to highlight the weak points in contemporary society, and builds narratives which are more realist than real, that describe to us radical lives of ordinary people and human existence which all play a role in – as Calderón de la Barca described it – the 'great theatre of the world'.

The philosophy which Trias outlined in his book 'Beauty and the Sinister' (1981) incorporates, to a certain degree, the thought of post romantics such as Rilke,

Schelling, Kant and Freud, who asserted that everything that brings us adversity, misfortune and destruction is an integral part of life, just as is joy, enjoyment and experience of the sublime. This is what clarifies the apparently contradictory, yet very real and explicit, thesis in Lita Cabellut's work: that the sinister is a limiting aspect to the beautiful, to everything which appears to be affable, gratifying or flattering. In this way, she invites us to wake up, to lift the veil that hides the reality in her pieces.

Plastic impulses

Having said that, an analysis of Lita Cabellut's work cannot just be done using aesthetic parameters, because her iconography is completely polysemous. The cultural, social and moral elements that people live in the twenty-first century appear in an explicit, not only kind, way; perhaps in a more impertinent way because they really twist the knife in the wound. I do not know if it was coincidence, but when I was preparing this text I received one by the Portuguese author António Damásio. He is a specialist in the neurosciences, winner of the Prince of Asturias prize in 2005 and author of the book 'The Feeling of

What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness' (1999) in which I read these words: 'emotions are expressed through the theatre of the body. Feelings are expressed in the theatre of the mind'. I find this phrase to be very pertinent at this time when I cannot stop thinking about the immense representation that is life and the decisive role played by emotions and feelings within it, because it is these raw materials that Lita Cabellut uses. She is essentially an instinctive artist who obeys her impulses (in fact, that is the title of one of her series: 'Impulse'). The word impulse originates etymologically from Latin and is made up of two parts: *in*, meaning against or towards a specific thing, and *pellere*, meaning to drive, to follow an irresistible desire. Indeed, Lita Cabellut creates while in a state of propulsion, pushed, incited or spurred on, and that is precisely what her work induces in the viewer. In order to understand this methodology, it is important to watch the documentary that Curro Sánchez made about her, in which we see Lita Cabellut's creative process at work, and how in reality it forms such an important part of her artwork, as much as the completed work itself.

She does not paint on a traditional easel but instead works from impulses dominated by her strong desire and by personal energies that bring to mind the action painting of abstract expressionism, the drip painting by Pollock, body maculatures by Yves Klein or the spontaneity of the subconscious proposed by Dubuffet. I am still convinced that she ignores these precedents, though she knows of them, because she behaves in an uninhibited way and maintains her own concept of art, which she has been consolidating over time.

A kind of Sturm und Drang

The fascinating life of Lita Cabellut – in which she has experimented with the sharpest contrasts – has been dominated by a strong personality, an incorruptible determination and passion. All of these elements have enabled this instinctive artist to make the most of the opportunities life has given her, albeit belatedly. As such, her painting does not arise out of nothing. She began her artistic interest in her teenage years with private classes in Barcelona, though it was a course at Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam that was crucial to her training. However, as she has explained

on some occasions, what most inspired her motivation to be an artist were the visits to the great museums, beginning with the Prado and the Rijksmuseum. She openly admits to being a big fan of Goya, Velásquez, Ribera and Rembrandt, and I would add that she also admires Dürer, Rubens, Zurbarán, van der Weyden, or the portraits by Raphael and Titian. The knowledge of these paintings, the deep analysis of their compositions, the treatment of colours, the gesticulation and the realism all form part of the basic elements of her artwork. I would say that they are the foundations because, whether it is in her drawing, painting or making use of photography, this classicism is latent in her work. It is just that her temperament and impulsiveness draw her to such non-academic examples as the primary arts, the visual shocks of surrealism, the doughy materials of informalism, or the primitivism of graffiti. When she creates, she follows the axiom of the Dutch painter, and founder of the CoBrA group, Karel Appel: 'Art is a festival!'

Thoughts and feelings

Through this exhibition – that reviews several of the series she has made over

the last decade – Lita Cabellut has sought to share with us the apparently broad range of themes that she has most been concerned about over recent years. However, it does not take much to realise that they all have a deep psychological root, whereby the physical and metaphysical meet, and confront and oppose each other. Moreover, all of them are related to diversity, a diversity that she defends through this privileged medium that is art, and in which – in her case – she mainly uses human figures to express the moods they find themselves in, through the body and its clothing.

We attribute part of the communicative effectiveness in Lita Cabellut's work – generally using mixed media on canvas, or photographs on dibond – to the formats she works in. These are surfaces that usually range between four to six square metres, which she occasionally puts together as triptychs or altarpieces that impose themselves on the viewer and physically overwhelm them because the dimensions of the characters which she represents are almost always larger than their natural size.

However, it is undoubtedly the treatment of these beings that surprises the viewer. For this reason, I think it is

important to highlight, albeit briefly, some of the series included in this exhibition, because I believe this could help identify and understand Lita Cabellut's interests and concerns.

Scenes and actors

If 'Trudi', 'Cruzita', 'Lens', 'Evelin' or 'Meril' – all from 2008, and chronologically the oldest of her artworks you can see in Barcelona at the moment – show us the faces of some characters who, by their expressions, grimaces and gestures, seem to live between reality, confusion and utopia; then the pieces which make up the later series – 'Coco' (2011), 'Camarón' (2012) and 'Frida' (2012), dedicated as you might have guessed to Coco Chanel, Camarón de la Isla and Frida Kahlo respectively – not only seek to pay homage to, or make the most of these powerful characters, but to also penetrate into their interior.

In this exploration of the human spirit and soul it is logical that the dialectic sanity–rage would have attracted Lita Cabellut's interest so much that, in 2012, she made the series 'Madness and Reason'. Here she interprets the characters in Don Quixote: the visionary knight; the ingenious, uncultured yet wise Sancho

Panza; and the beautiful and virtuous Dulcinea – three different ways of being that the artist conveys with realism and dramatism.

In another attempt to analyse people and their truth, in the series 'After the Show' (2012) she dismantled the model of behaviour that is expected of entertainers. These are overwhelming pieces because they create another unmasking of the characters featured in them who – after all the exultation, and the physical and mental expansion that the show has brought them – now appear in their reality, which goes much deeper than beauty and ugliness.

If that series is moving, then 'Memories wrapped in Gold Paper' (2012) is captivating. It focuses on women with Arabic features and Lita Cabellut highlights their faces and the clothing that dresses them. The faces stand out because we identify each of the women – their eyes, nose and lips – and Lita gives them the maximum expressiveness, even though they only occupy 10%–15% of the surface area of the picture. The rest of the area is taken up – in very Rembrandt style – with all the clothing that covers the body. Therefore, it is that, which in some cultures is hidden and above

all forbidden, which Cabellut wants to highlight; to assert that behind the clothing and veils there is a person with feelings, desires and soul.

A woman is also the protagonist in 'Dried Tear' (2013–2015), a title that is both poetic and dramatic. Here Cabellut offers a reflection on how women feel after having suffered scorn or mistreatment that has damaged their soul, because – as we can see in these works – although the tear may dry out, the pain endures.

'Black Tulip' (2014–2015) is a tribute to the Dutch Golden Age. The author – who knows the society in The Netherlands very well because it welcomed her over three decades ago – brought together the entrepreneurial and hard-working spirit of the Dutch which thrived throughout the seventeenth century. It was a period when trade, science, thought and the arts flourished and generated an international recognition of their power and influence. The tulip flower is the national icon, although the bulbous plant actually comes from Turkey and arrived in The Netherlands in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

In all the work we have reviewed so far we can already see that Lita Cabellut is at

ease confronting the inside and outside of human beings, the body and soul duality, which is a dialectic she particularly dealt with in 'Disturbance' (2015). This series helps us understand well the artist's intention not to stay within appearances, but to penetrate the most remote or intimate place in people. On this occasion, she achieved this through the interplay between double portraits of the same person that, on one side, show the image which Lita wants to project of the subject and, on the other, a stripped down image, not just in a physical nudity sense but also liberated from any kind of emotional armour. These pieces are realist, not because the description is pictorially real, rather through the attitude, gesture and facial expression ... she tells us a lot about each of the subjects of the portraits. Hence, the series' title is very appropriate because it disturbs and upsets us to confront people liberated from their mask – which the Greeks called *πρόσωπον*, the origin for the word person and personality.

The influence of different religions on society is well known, but what differences are there between one religion and another? Moreover, what mark does it leave on each of us? This plurality is what

Lita Cabellut wanted to analyse in the portrait series 'Blind Mirror' (2015). With this metaphor, the artist brings the viewer face-to-face with a series of characters who profess diverse religions – from those of the spirit to those of capital – leaving the door open to feel mirrored in the work, or find oneself in front of a blind mirror.

The expanded work

I have wanted to end this review of the artwork that makes up this exhibition of Lita Cabellut's works in Barcelona, by commenting on two works which are different from the ones before due to the way they have been made.

In her photographed or filmed version, 'White Silence' (2014) creates a whole story that, in my view, has a lot to do with the interpretation Sigmund Freud made of dreams and the subconscious world. The figure of Pegasus serves as the trigger for an especially dreamlike narrative whereby some ghosts glide in space and where the artist blends imagination and reality to tell us a story in which children, and their feelings and dramas, are the main characters.

On a completely different note to that piece are the floral installations

(2015) where Lita Cabellut reveals the most baroque and far-fetched side to her character. They involve pieces that are composed of an accumulation of elements (vases, flowers, tables, paintings ...) which are preceded by a performance that she creates in some sculptures and photographs that are, or want to be, authentic still-lives of post modernity.

Coda

Lita Cabellut is a prolific creator and this exhibition only includes a small part of the immense body of work she has produced over the last decade. It is a strange work that neither leaves you indifferent, nor knowing how to value it technically. It does not abandon ugliness or kitsch but is undoubtedly personal and powerful, just like her. She is an artist who, through her compositions, reflects the heartbeats of her own existence, and an acute sensitivity, and reveals new mutations and creations. Although I am sure she will not give up searching for the depth in things and mistrusting appearances in order to give us her opinion of what she sees and feels, she will always do it located in two extremes: the raw descriptiveness of Goya – who caught her attention when she was younger –

and the charm, beauty and intimacy of Vermeer. She fires up her works with vibrant colours and material textures for which oils are just as useful as frescos, photography or new resources, and her ultimate aim is to give life to a picture and transmit this to the viewer.

Daniel Giralt-Miracle

