

# BCN PRODUC- CIÓ '16

Espai Cub – 15.09 to 13.11

## BÁRBARA SÁNCHEZ BARROSO *LETTERS FROM THE FOREST*

A year ago Bárbara Sánchez decided to leave behind her life in the city and move to a community in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire County (England), a natural place removed from everything she knew and from what any city represents: the competitive individual distanced from everything natural, 24-hour consumerism and technological, ideological and cultural dependence. This experience has made her reflect on the authenticity and beauty of what has always been here, predating us, which we did not create. It led her to understand that sooner or later the way you treat the other has an effect on you – “you reap what you sow” – and it is making her question more things than can really be explained in words since when we internalize the experience of the forest we understand what John Fowles wrote,<sup>1</sup> that “its secret is being, not saying”. The English author, one of the artist’s referents, opens a question Bárbara shares: “The wood waits, as if its most precious sap were stillness. I ask why I, of a species so incapable of stillness, am here”. Hence a central theme of this project is the notion of time; the passage and administration of our time, which, compared with the temporal magnitude of the forest where past and present are interwoven, is futile. The fact is that “there are tenses human language has yet to invent”, Fowles warns us.

The “romanticization” of nature and its contradictions today is another of the concepts the artist confronts, so when she obsessively rereads Henry David Thoreau,<sup>2</sup> “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only

the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived”, she at the same time reviews the link between the economic crisis with this sort of return to the origin we are experiencing today. Leaving the city, having a garden, living with fewer resources and recycling, does this reflect a sincere return or do we have no other option? When much of the generation of our parents emigrated to the cities in search of a “better life”, does this return indicate reconciliation with nature? Is there still time? And lastly, is isolating oneself in nature a real act of political commitment, civil disobedience and peaceful resistance to the imposed system? Bárbara, like Fowles, doubts that nature can be reached by turning it into a ‘useful’ therapy, since “The subtlest of our alienations from it, the most difficult to comprehend, is our need to use it in some way, to derive some personal yield. We shall never fully understand nature (or ourselves), and certainly never respect it, until we dissociate the wild from the notion of usability – however innocent and harmless the use. For it is the general uselessness of so much of nature that lies at the root of our ancient hostility and indifference to it”. From there the artist adds other referents: from the controversial (and at once epic and stupid) story of Alexander Supertramp, the nickname of Christopher McCandless, star of *Into the Wild*, who died of starvation (or poisoning) in the bush just a few kilometres from civilized food, to the notion of ecofeminism and reinterpretation of the Anthropocene concept Donna Haraway

<sup>1</sup> John Fowles, *The Tree*, New York: Ecco Press, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, New York: Empire Books, 2013

makes when she speaks of returning to origins by placing woman at the centre, among others.

When the artist arrived in the forest she found a typical English red post box in front of the house she would live in. For some time she had wanted to work with correspondence as an artistic project and she chose to do so through video letters, filmed letters that pay tribute to the critical documentary of Chris Marker and Harun Farocki, the mystical and psychological dimension of Tarkovsky's cinema and the poetic correspondence between Víctor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami. She will send them to La Capella weekly and the postman will deposit them in a similar post box placed at the entrance to La Capella on Carrer Hospital. They are addressed to any spectator who sits down to "read them/watch them" at Espai Cub, and they can be "responded to" by depositing the correspondence in the same post box, following the instructions at the gallery.

The "nature" of intimate, complex, layered narrative without a given structure that Bárbara finds in the filmed letter recalls the analogy Fowles made between trees, the forest and fictional prose when he said that he came to writing through nature, because here the artist also sees in the essence of the forest a unique process of concealment and human research that she transfers to video. This serves her in narrating how the experience of nature is an almost mystical and falling-in-love process that incorporates subjects as vast and immeasurable as nature itself. This is the theme that runs through all the others and which the artist wants to deal with: the inability to grasp, measure and understand nature fully. And formally she does so based on a fertile contradiction: she uses technology as an "artisanal" process removed from any "updating" with videos recorded on DVDs that are physically sent by post. As she says, "I use technology, but I inundate it with materiality".

When I ask Bárbara if she thinks that the life she leads now is really a more authentic and liberated life, she replies that she doesn't know yet, that

perhaps after the project she will know. The thing is that here the artistic practice is approached not only as an investigation or experience but as "direct observation", in the same sense that Fowles gives to the observation that nature entails and which the artist sees as a synthetic activity distinct from science: "Science has little time for minor exceptions. But all nature, like all humanity, is made of minor exceptions [...] A belief in this kind of exception is as central to art as a belief in the utility of generalization is to science".

We are thus witnessing a project in progress, deeply experiential and in open communication, that eschews the grandiloquence of "the gardened word" and which is ultimately the artist's sincere and intimate correspondence with herself that does not close because she knows that hers is not a solitary sentiment: "The shadow of the Wild Woman", Clarissa Pinkola Estés reminds us, "still lurks behind us during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed".

*Bárbara Sánchez Barroso (Lleida, 1987) studied art, communication and literature. She has taught communication and education. Her artistic work takes an interdisciplinary approach, using performance, video and installation. Through them she covers subjects such as feminisms, personal relationships and everything susceptible to remaining on the periphery. She is interested in the political dimension of the personal, the vulnerable and the power of narrative, whatever its form; this is why she does not understand the practice of art without writing, cinema and poetry. She is part of the Nenazas collective with which she publishes fanzines and gives performances.*