

## She, once and again

In 1968, Eugènia Balcells travels to the USA for the first time. As well as an uncontrollable desire to see the world, she has a strong will to begin a cinematographic career.

She soon encounters the new wave of Women's Lib and, ever since, she has always held a keen interest in the presence of women in different areas of public life and the need to break with predetermined models of life.

In the seventies, once she completes her master's degree in Arts at the University of Iowa, Eugènia Balcells questions reality through the eye of the camera and becomes particularly interested in the human stereotypes that cinema has been immortalizing through the huge Hollywood production companies.

This exhibition presents different works from the late seventies to the early eighties – *Fin*, *Re-Prise*, *Boy Meets Girl*, *Going Through Languages* – which show her incisive questioning of the image of women.

The exhibition continues with *Àlbum portàtil* (Portable album) (1993), in which Balcells pays homage to all women without exception, and *Autoretrat* (Self-portrait) (1980-2018), which speaks through the video camera about her place in New York city, where she has lived for nearly thirty years.

The exhibition closes with *Becoming* (2022), an installation based on the work *Un espai propi* (A Space of One's Own), in which Balcells celebrates the life and work of Virginia Woolf. Brief quotes from the writer light up the way like a small torch.

Following closely the artistic vocabulary created by Eugènia Balcells throughout her career, the exhibition begins with the work *Fin* (The End) (1978), in an attempt to never disassociate what the works reveal from what they only insinuate or directly hide.

Eulàlia Bosch

## FIN (The End)

1978. Audiovisual montage based on 100 final vignettes from photonovels.

This is presented for the first time as a continuous loop.

Eugènia Balcells is an avid collector, and she accumulated a large amount of photonovels, that she had bought at second-hand markets, and which she used to give visibility to all the stories that began with the words 'The End'.

*Often one has to make do with seeds; the germs of what might have been, had one's life been different.* Virginia Woolf in *Moments of Being*, 1939-1940.

## RE-PRISE

1977-1991. Audiovisual installation based on frames cut out from 35 mm films that have been shown in cinemas.

*Re-Prise* features a simultaneous projection of eight series of real frames from commercial films that the artist found, and subsequently bought, stored in matchboxes at a flea market: title credits, female characters, male characters; actions: hand gestures; relationships: the couple; situation: on the telephone; crowds; and The End.

These series of frames reveal different archetypes, symbols and icons in cinematic language.

The audio is a collage of excerpts of soundtracks from a wide variety of films.

This exhibition features the series "Female characters", "Male characters" and "Couples".

*Who am I, what am I, and so on: these questions are always floating about in me.* Virginia Woolf in *A Writer's Diary*, 1926.

## BOY MEETS GIRL

1978. Digital version based on 16 mm format, colour. Length: 10 minutes.

This film starts with a question: What image would an extra-terrestrial have of men and women if they had never seen live human beings and only viewed images in the media, books and magazines?

This film comprises over a thousand images taken from newspapers, magazines, advertising, etc. which create an archetypal portrait of contemporary women and men as seen in the media.

*There is no panacea ... against the shock of meeting.*  
Virginia Woolf in *The Waves*, 1931.

## GOING THROUGH LANGUAGES

1981. Made in collaboration with Noni Benegas, poet, and Marta Moia, anthropologist. U-Matic ¾", NTSC, colour. Digital version. Length: 28 minutes.

A two-channel video that explores the contrast between the public language of television, in this case the image of women shown by the media in the programme "Miss Universe" (1981), and the personal and intimate language of two women at home.

In the first case, the camera looks for the images it wants to show; in the second, Eugènia Balcells uses a camera that rotates freely on a stool with wheels and she lets it record what is happening around it. This freedom with the camera has been very important throughout her career.

*... all are stories. But which is the true story? That I do not know. Hence I keep my phrases hung like clothes in a cupboard, waiting for someone to wear them.*  
Virginia Woolf in *The Waves*, 1931.

## ÀLBUM PORTÀTIL (Portable album)

1993. A transparent plastic coat with pockets full of postcards with images of women.

The performance in which this Àlbum portàtil was presented – Tartessos bookshop in Barcelona (1993) – was recorded and the artist's voice expressed these words:

*I carry in me all the women, the known, the unknown, the young, the old, the wise, and the less wise... I carry them all with honour and deep gratitude.*

*Characters are to be merely views.* Virginia Woolf in *A Writer's Diary*, 1923.

## AUTORETRAT (Self-portrait)

1980-2018. Action carried out and filmed in New York by the artist.

Audio: Excerpts of sound from the installations and audio works by Eugènia Balcells that took place in New York from 1980 to 2018, with the collaboration of Peter van Ripper.

With a camera mounted on the front of her hat, Eugènia Balcells recuperates a mirror ball that she had kept as a treasure in her studio and, thus, she is the filmmaker filming herself – and is simultaneously filmed by her assistant – as she walks from Soho, where she lived in the early eighties when she arrived in New York, to her studio in Brooklyn, passing famous landmarks in the city such as the Metropolitan Museum, New York Public Library on 42nd Street, Grand Central, the bank of East River, the Museum of Natural History, etc.

Eugènia Balcells has lived in the USA for over thirty years.

# EUGÈNIA BALCELLS

## ELLA, UNA I ALTRA VEGADA



*It's life that matters, nothing but life – the process of discovering – the everlasting and perpetual process, not the discovery itself at all.* Virginia Woolf in *Night and Day*, 1919.

## BECOMING

2022. Four-channel video installation based on the work *Un espai propi* (A Space of One's Own). Sound installation: Barbara Held. Character played by Gemma Sin.

*Becoming* features a woman who is continually reborn and evolves facing the waves of the sea, earth, air and light.

It arises from the installation *Un espai propi* in which Eugènia Balcells pays tribute to the life and work of Virginia Woolf, presented at the CCCB in Barcelona in 2000, as part of the *Fars del segle xx* (Lighthouses of the twentieth century) programme.

It is presented for the first time in the four-channel format.

*What is the word for full of the sea?*  
Virginia Woolf in *A Writer's Diary*, 1933.

*Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated.* Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, 1929.

*A central concern of Eugènia Balcells' art is how time and images construct our relationship to the world around us.*

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*It is as a visual poet that Balcells selects and makes the images which compose the space and place of her installation projects.*

John G. Hanhardt. "Eugènia Balcells: An Archeology of Time". In *From the Center*. Nova York: El Museo del Barrio, 1987.

*On several occasions, Balcells has mentioned the great attraction she has for bridges, as she says: "identity are the bridges"; postcards, an important resource in her work, as "bridges between people"; and New York, her "other" city, as "an island with bridges that connect territories". And her art is undoubtedly a perfect translation of the metaphor of open bridges. The real amalgam of the different disciplines such as science, philosophy, mysticism, literature, architecture, cinema, music, fine arts, unity or a particular empirical and at the same time critical sense, make up Eugènia's mental map, or from which she creates her own artistic discourse.*

...

*The frequent simplicity of the formal solution in her work, that plays with the idea of fragility, purity and immateriality, contrasts with the network of deep meanings encrypted in the very contents of the artistic proposal.*

...

*Eugènia has really developed a science to physically and mentally process the fragmentary "data" of our reality, rescuing them from their surroundings, endowing them with a space-time dimension and letting them speak for themselves.*

Claudia Giannetti. "Reflectáforas. Eugènia Balcells". In *Eugènia Balcells. Sincronías*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1993.