

MUSEOLOGICAL MEMORY

SHADOW & LONGING

Poetical imaginaries : Francesca Woodman y Sylvia Plath

Curatorial script written by: Ana Paola Escoto

JUSTIFICATION

In the poetic imaginaries of Sylvia Plath and the enigmatic photography of Francesca Woodman paradigmatic universes are created, full of shadow, mystery and a very powerful emotional charge that leads to reflection on the intimacy and scope of our emotions.

It is in this line that both the choices of Woodman's poems and photos start, works that will be in constant dialogue with each other. For this, we will start from the proposal of Julia Kristeva, which proposes the polylogue, that is, the multiplicity of voices in constant dialogue. Kristeva enunciates it as "an interaction of many voices, a kind and creative 'barbarism' that would interrupt the monological and centrist impulses of civilization." With this in mind, the exhibition seeks that the artists are in speech, without limits or certificates, exploiting the power of poetic imaginaries.

The interpretations that derive from this conjugation really seek individuality, completely abstaining from the text apart from the poetic, so that the relationships between photo and poetry are evident without the need for an explicit script.

In this same search for poetic imaginaries and Kristeva's polylogue, the exhibition will also have the participation of the public, beginning as self-portrait and poetry workshops that will take place online. The results of these workshops will be added to the physical exhibition - planned for 2021 - and the poems and self-portraits will also be discussed.

Likewise, it seeks to carry out interventions that transcend the exhibition space in the manner of prints, which will be placed in different parts of the city.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Two united voices, linked by their fantastic creations of poetic imaginaries, both sound and visual, dialogue with each other to explore new dimensions between poetry and photography. If we listen carefully to the discourse between them, we see that unbreakable relationships are formed that complement each other and work to portray the word and vocalize the image.

This exhibition invites us to interpret the paradigmatic universes of shadow and mystery that we find in the work of Sylvia Plath and Francesca Woodman, which undeniably have a very powerful emotional charge.

As you enter, open your ears and listen with your eyes. Let yourself be enveloped by the imaginary and explore the personal and affective relationships that could be born to you, which are as important as the relationships that we propose.



BIOGRAPHIES

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963): Born in Massachusetts, Plath is known for being part of the confessional poetry genre, which is distinguished by using personal experiences and powerful statements in order to reach an emotional catharsis. Throughout her career, she wrote more than 445 poems and a novel, which were continually rejected. She let her writing express the elemental forces and primitive fears from the depths of the soul.

Francesca Woodman (1958-1981): Born in Colorado to a family of artists, she began taking photographs in her early teens. During her short career, she took more than 800 similar photographs. Woodman continually challenged the idea that the camera fixes time and space. Her photographs explore themes such as relationships, sexuality, body image, alienation, isolation, and confusion or ambiguity about personal identity.

BACKGROUND

Poetry in motion (1992),

This project had the purpose of inserting poetry into everyday environments, part of the ordinary routines of New Yorkers in order to promote the relevance of poetry in a less hostile environment such as academia. The consequent exhibition, *The poems in the Subway* (2018), was organized by Amy Hausmann, Senior Curator and Deputy Director of the Transit Museum. This was a selection of the poems that for so many years had been in the subway, now exhibited together. As visitors walk through the corners of the poems, they are heard remembering the first encounters with them. Poems take on new meaning if they are in unexpected, everyday places. From here I take inspiration for the surfaces on which I want to place the prints of the poems, I don't want them to be just walls, I want them to be something more familiar, ordinary.



It is also from here where I take the inspiration from the affective relationships that can be derived from poetry. I think that with the inclusion of the photographic imaginaries of Francesca Woodman as well, associations will be created that also challenge the visual. I seek to find a collective experience.

Carambolages (2016),

Organized by Jean-Hubert Martin in 2016 for the Grand Palais in Paris, this project presents an ahistorical, non-chronological and anti-category selection of 184 objects, spanning thousands of years. Each group of works was arranged in a continuous sequence. Each work presented not only depending in some way, either visually or conceptually, on the one that preceded it, but also "announcing" the one that followed. Martin's presentation underscored the importance of individual interpretation of the viewers' parts, who were perceived as active participants in the construction of meaning. The most forceful statement was "listen to your eyes", an idea that he would like to translate in this exhibition.

From here I derive seeing the viewers as active participants and the open relationships that productions made by different artists can have.



Furthermore, I think that the relational approach that frames Julia Kristeva's polylogue is latent in this exhibition, since dialogue is allowed from the moment one work announces the other. In this case, the poems and photographs announced the thematic nuclei and the interpretations that they seek to suggest.

RE.ACT.FEMINISM ·2 -A PERFORMING ARCHIVE (2013),

Curated by Beatrice Stammer and Bettina Knaup, this project began as an exhibition of videos of female artists, as well as photographic documentation and performance artifacts. It included a video archive, a series of live performances and a lecture. Each segment was organized according to a series of thematic fields designed to emphasize the connections, differences and compatibilities among the female artists. These shows, as Barbara Kruger points out, "play catch-up after centuries of women's marginalization and invisibility."

The Plath and Woodman exhibit that I propose is also a strategic intervention against the continuing erasure of women from the cultural record, which is an act that continues today. Using only two female artists has feminist overtones of vindication and appreciation of their work in the artistic field.



My relational approach is also derived from here, since I return to the idea of thematic fields, in order to emphasize and create relationships between the artists. I would like this feminist relational power to be noticed, used in various exhibitions as well as: Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art.

STRATEGIES



For the interventions outside the exhibition space, I will look for the conglomeration of both Plath and Woodman's works in the form of prints and posters. There will be a series of designs, taking as a guideline the thematic nuclei and the specific relationships that can be made with their works. The intervention spaces can be varied, placed on posters, posts, garbage cans, personal belongings. The idea is not that it be permanent, but only that the work comes out in search of taking potential affective and creative relationships out of space, in search of a wider audience. These designs will also have their space within the exhibition. I have attached above examples of how this idea could be carried out.

The purpose of the workshops is to generate affective relationships with the works and put them into practice, as well as to continue with the idea of the polylogue and introduce more voices - both poetic and photographic - to the exhibition. While within the first four nuclei there will only be dialogues between Plath and Woodman, this will establish the basis for dialogues between the photographs and the poems derived from the work produced in these workshops.

The workshops will be online and in order for them to be carried out with the precepts of the exhibition, a review of the list of works will be made in both workshops, so that it is understood what is being related. Participation in both workshops will be mandatory for those who register.

SELF-POTRAIT WORKSHOP

	Content
Sesión I	Woodman's technique and how to apply it with current tools
Sesión II	Guided workshop: self-portrait exercises
Sesión III	Analysis of the work produced and feedback session

POETRY WORKSHOP

	Content
Sesión I	Reading and technical comprehension relevant to Plath's poems
Sesión II	Guided workshop: writing with the help of teachers
Sesión III	Analysis of the work produced and feedback session

EXHIBITION SPACE AND AUDIENCE

1. ZOOM The exhibition, as I already mentioned, will have two stages. The first will be as an online workshop -due to the contingency for COVID-19- which will be via a Zoom link provided by the Image Center. Ideally, the workshops will have a maximum capacity of 50 participants, chosen for their experience in photography and / or writing. They will need to provide a portfolio.

2. CENTER OF THE IMAGE The second stage will be a face-to-face exhibition at the Image Center, preferably in one of its interior exhibition rooms. The nuclei will be physically divided, either by temporary walls or partitions, since for each nucleus I would like to have audio that reads the poem that corresponds to the nucleus aloud by different readers, including Plath herself. This will allow to continue with the thematic of the polylogue, taking the multiplicity of voices to a literal sense.



GOAL

MAIN GOAL

This exhibition, above all, seeks to relate the poetry of Sylvia Plath and the photography of Francesca Woodman, using the strategy of Julia Kristeva's polylogue, with the purpose of establishing dialogues between the artists and also interpretations by the public. With the same importance, it seeks to forge links to the chosen works, taking as a starting point for this the emotional and affective charge that the photographs and poems have.

PARTICULAR GOALS

- Include the audience as part of the polylogue from the productions that arise from the workshops.
- Remove the work from the exhibition space so that it reaches more people, who can generate affective bonds with the works in everyday spaces.
- Resist, through the use of only female artists, the heteropatriarchal hegemony that still predominates in curatorial dialogues.

THEMATIC CORES

The thematic cores have the name based on a phrase extracted from the poems that I will use by Plath, since, as the works will dialogue by themselves without the use of supporting text, I want the Woodman's photos to be arranged from the imaginary that Plath outlines with his words.

The only nucleus that does not fit within this parameter is the last one, since here will be the works of those who participated in the workshop.

- I. **The long wait for the angel** (extracted from *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*)
- II. **Shadows. Something else** (extracted from *Ariel*)
- III. **The eye of a little God** (extracted from *Mirror*)
- IV. **I may be skin and bones** (extracted from *Lady Lazarus*)
- V. **Interventions: interwoven voices** (workshop artists' interventions)

LIST OF WORKS (IN ORDER OF THEMATIC CORES)

All the work listed below belongs to the Moderna Museet archive, located in Stockholm. The work can be loaned or it can even be dispensed with if the physical loan is not viable, since it can also be reproduced in gelatin or laminate prints. Even to be amplified the format, it could be enough with the copyright to be reproduced and modified. This, above all, is pertinent to the intervention stamps.

1. The long wait for the angel

Here I will include the photographs of the Angel Series by Woodman, along with the poem *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*, which contains strong poetic imageries linked to angels or celestial beings. The connection with Angel Series is clear, both metaphorically approach the image of the angel to speak of the descent of the soul to earth.

Black Rook in Rainy Weather

Of whatever angel any choose to flare
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur.

If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance
Miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel,

For that rare, random descent.

Sylvia Plath, *Black Rook In Rainy Weather* in *Ariel: The Restored Edition*, traducido por Mirta Rosenberg, Harper Perennial Modern



Francesca Woodman, *untitled, Rome, Angel*
Series 1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14 x
14 cm



Francesca Woodman, *untitled, Rome, Angel*
Series 1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14 x
14 cm



Francesca Woodman, *untitled, Rome, Angel*
Series 1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14 x
14 cm



Francesca Woodman, *Untitled, Rome,*
1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14.8 x 15.2
cm

2. Shadows. Something Else

I use this poem to talk about the shadow and how it is a recurrent resource in Woodman's work. She uses the shadow in a variety of ways, from including it in her compositions as an extension of her corporeality, to literally embodying it by using black clothing and sharp sweeps to emulate a dematerialization.

Ariel

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,
Shadows.
Something else

Hauls me through air—
Thighs, hair;
Flakes from my heels.

And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry

Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* en *Ariel: The Restored Edition*, traducido por Mirta Rosenberg, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2017

Melts in the wall.

And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning



Francesca Woodman, *untitled Rome*,
1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14.8 x 15.2
cm



Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Providence,
Rhode Island, 1976, silver print on gelatin,
20.3 x 25.4 cm



Francesca Woodman, *untiled*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976, silver print on gelatin, 20.3 x 25.4 cm



Francesca Woodman, *Space*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976, silver print on gelatin 20.3 x 25.4 cm



Francesca Woodman, *Self Deceit, Rome*,
1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14.8 x 15.2
cm

3. The eye of a little God

The mirror is a resource that addresses the different representations of identity that Woodman explores with the pictorial compositions that include it. I relate it to Plath's poem, which also talks about the incidence of reflection in one's own perception.

Mirror

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful ,
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Sylvia Plath, *Mirror*, en *Sylvia Plath: The Collected Poems*,
traducido por Javier Hollend, Harper Perennial Modern
Classics, 1992

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old
woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.



Francesca Woodman, *Charlie the Model*,
Nueva York, 1980, silver print on gelatin,
20.3 x 25.4 cm



Francesca Woodman, *A woman, a mirror. A Woman is the reflection of a man*, New York, 1980, silver print on gelatin,
20.3 x 25.4 cm



Francesca Woodman, *Self Deceit 1*, Roma,
1977-1978, silver print on gelatin, 14.8 x 15.2
cm



Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, Providence,
Rhode Island, 1976, silver print on gelatin,
20.3 x 25.4 cm

4. I may be skin and bones

The poem *Lady Lazarus* has been described as the clearest example of Plath's method of poetic catharsis. In this poem she articulates her innermost truths, her deepest pains; all while exploring her being in the world. With this theme in mind, I chose Woodman's portraits where she shows her total corporeality, specifically with her face, which I think is an element that allows us to access a very deep place within the artist

Lady Lazarus

And I a smiling woman.

I am only thirty.

And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.

What a trash

To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.

The peanut-crunching crowd

Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot—

The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands

My knees.

I may be skin and bone.

Sylvia Plath, *Lady Lazarus*, en *Sylvia Plath: The Collected Poems*, traducido por Javier Hollend, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1992



Francesca Woodman, on Being an Angel,
Rhode Island, 1977, silver print on gelatin, 12.9
x 12.9 cm



Francesca Woodman, untitled, Providence,
Rhode Island, 1978, silver print on gelatin, 20.3
x 25.4 cm

MUSEOGRAPHIC RESOURCES (ACCORDING TO THEMATIC CORES)

1. The long wait of the angel

- I think of heavenly sounds, invoked by wind chimes and crystals hanging from the ceiling, over which lights will shine from the floor or blind spots, bouncing off the works and flooding the room
- There will be an audio of several readings of the poem *Black Rock in Rainy Weather* by different readers. They will be repeated one after the other and the audio will start again when it is finished. I will also include the reading of the poem by the author -Plath- herself, since she read this poem aloud
- Black vinyl on white walls and supports

2. Shadows. Something else:

- I would like to adapt this room with lights that generate strong contrasts (except for the lights that illuminate the pieces directly). One wall will be blank with a light in front of it, so that when the audience passes by, blurry shadows are created, alluding to both Plath's poetic shadow and Woodman's photographic sweeps. The purpose of this is to invite the public to also be a shadow, as Plath and Woodman explained in their works
- Audio of readings by different people of the poem *Ariel*, including Plath's reading
- White walls and supports to generate contrast, black vinyl

3. The eye of a little God.

- The mirrors here will play a big part, being this object the one that invites to the reflection and even generates an ephemeral self-portrait of the spectator

- Full-length mirrors will be placed on a wall in the living room and Plath's poem will be taped on top of them in vinyl, inviting the reader to look at himself while reading
- Audio of *Mirror* readings, including Plath reading
- White screens and supports, black vinyl

4. I may be skin and bones

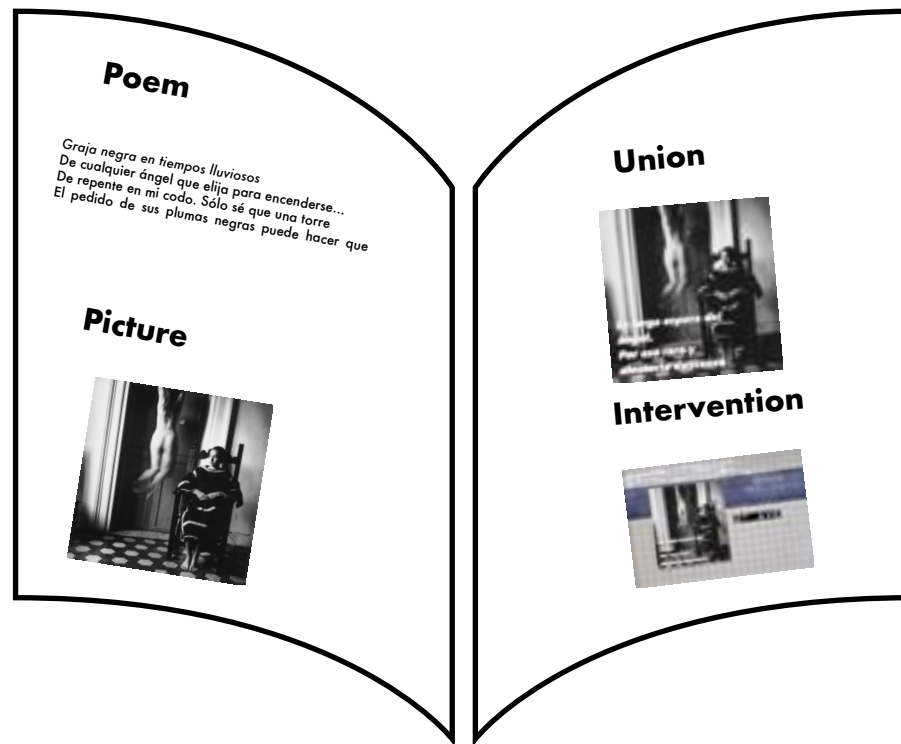
- The images will be printed or projected on canvas in order to emulate the texture of the skin
- They will be hung from the ceiling, not attached to a support as such
- Audio of readings by Lady Lazarus, including the reading of Plath
- White screens and supports, black vinyl

5. Interventions: Interwoven voices

- I will use the same technique that I use for the prints; that is, placing the poems onto the self-portraits
- They will be placed without order, to fill the room with voices of the artists
- Audio readings of the poems of those who participated in the workshops
- I would like to place the final images - that is, the images on which the self-portrait plus the poem will be gathered - on top of light boxes, so that when the audio reads the poem aloud, the corresponding image is illuminated, thus guiding the viewer's gaze to the work that is pertinent to the poem being read
- The screens and supports will be black, white vinyl

EDITORIAL OUTPUT

I think that as part of the strategies that I outlined above, there is already a sort of outlet from the exhibition area in the form of prints. As I proposed, these are the union of text/image on the same surface. From this strategy comes my idea of putting all the photographs and poems in an album book in the following way:



The book album, above all, is characterized by establishing a dialogue between text and image, so that both languages complement and relate to each other, which is precisely what the exhibition seeks to achieve. Therefore, this editorial output would be the perfect embodiment of what I have been trying to articulate.

Also, printing the prints in a more permanent place-as opposed to placing them outdoors only- serves as an archive that captures the exercise of intervention.

Equally important, I think this editorial output will record and promote the art of those who participated in the workshops. The book album would also serve as a sort of promotional platform for their work, as well as for Woodman and Plath's.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The biggest problem I faced throughout this curatorship was to find the starting point to unite the artists from a strategy that was not theoretically heavy or confusing. In fact, I began to unite them from the explorations that they make from their intimacy - both of their spaces, bodies and thoughts - which was quite complex and I could not really find a clear thread.

What unleashed the ease of connection was Julia Kristeva's polylogue, which at the same time gave a completely new meaning to the workshops, since the participation of more voices made much more sense. Also, this theory allows the images and poems to dialogue without the need to include even more text, which could have made the experience quite tedious.

The polylogue was also the key to the book album's editorial output and the intervention prints, since both strategies aim at taking the exhibition discourse out of the institutional sphere. I think that in the end the exhibition became more of a collective exercise than a retrospective of the two artists' work.

The contributions that I think are the most valuable in this exhibition are precisely the deconstruction of the exhibition hierarchy by including more voices of people who are not necessarily known in the art world. Equally important is the fact that Plath and Woodman are women artists, who are not always given the same discursive spaces, let alone the solely feminine ones.

In this sense, the exhibition, as I said, serves as an intervention to the hegemonic exhibitions. At the same time, one of the basic objectives is to create affective relationships between the work and the spectator, something that is not always explicitly sought and which I understand as something very valuable to try. Likewise, in this exhibition the spectator is thought of as an active participant whose personal conclusions are as important as the exhibition itself.

Finally, I believe that this exhibition is viable, in the sense that the work does not have to be borrowed, but the copyright. External supports and resources are not as expensive, nor are prints. The most expensive thing would be the printing of the book album.