

Rosa Martínez: You are one of Spain's most international artists at this time. In the last three years you have participated in biennials in Sydney and Korea, in Manifesta 1 in Rotterdam, in SITE Santa Fe, in Istanbul and Johannesburg. And with Kasper König's selection of your work for Münster, you were the only Spanish artist to participate in the major German events of 1997. How has your participation in these international events enlarged your vision of the contemporary art scene? How has it influenced your work?

Eulalia Valldosera: Based on my participation in international exhibitions, I have the impression of something like having arrived on time. Of saying something in the moment it should be said. Because, basically, these are generational exhibitions. I have also felt that I shared a new way of working, one that is not so closely linked to the production of objects as to the production of meaning, assuming a certain degree of nomadism and a certain precariousness in the work's constitution, although this also stems from the fact that a great deal of the work of my generation tends toward the ephemeral. We are talking about projects more than about works. For example, my studio is an empty storefront. My work only exists while it is being exhibited. The biennials are large "circus parades" where the works "occur" rather than "remain". This temporary nature, this constant coming and going between different places, is of course an influence on my work.

I think that for the first time artists are contributing a vision that is critical – but most of all creative – with regard to the mass media and the collective

INTERVIEW WITH
**EULALIA
VALLDOSERA**
...
ROSA MARTÍNEZ

imagination born of that media. This might also lead to the deduction that we are reducing distances. I am fascinated by how easy it is for people coming from different backgrounds to coincide on the same subjects.

Also, my work is freed from the weight with which the Spanish context circumscribes it; for example, the lack of an up-to-date evaluation of the feminine condition, or for example, my independent way of working.

R.M.: Do you think that working with specific commissions stimulates an artist's creativity?

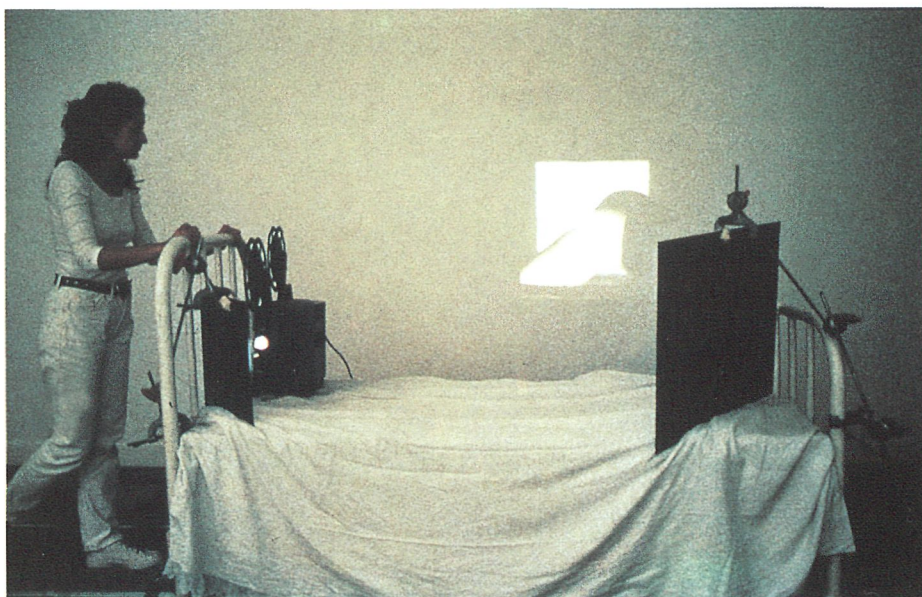
E.V.: In my case yes, they have helped me grow tremendously. I am interested in including the meaning of a site within the content of the work. It forms part of the philosophy of installations, which only rarely can be carried out.

A while back I devised, for my own use, a metaphor: the museum as hospital, as a place that preserves the work of art from other potentially polluting visual elements which the spectator should leave behind. But this ideal of cleanliness and

neutrality is false, since the place is still just another set of surroundings in which certain objects might be perceived as artistic or as authentic. Objects where power is dependent on the white surroundings of the museum walls, or of the gallery. This metaphor engendered in me a critical stance in terms of which media would be chosen for my work, and how they would be manipulated for the spectator. I thought about *Bandages* and about *Packages*, both of which were created for specific places. The last one took place in a church, and in fact I think that the piece was talking about worship. It was as if the place itself acquired consciousness once the works had been installed. In Münster, there was the additional factor that the artists themselves chose the site in the city. I chose a commercial space in order to situate myself on the border between public space and private space. The building was completely new, built after the war, and faced another building from before the war. I wanted to talk about the emptiness that separated them. Münster was a full experience for me; the issue was not only creating the work's structure but also its infrastructure.

R.M.: You have achieved your international status working on your own. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of being a sharp-shooter?

E.V.: I have noted how the mere presence of a work in some exhibitions has been enough to find people interested in offering me new and more interesting possibilities. This has only happened to me outside Spain. It has pleased me to know that it is possible to find opportunities without the personal



Eulalia Valldosera. *Bandajes*. 1992. Performance with a 16 mm film. 18 min. Bed, rails, mirrors. Space around 5 x 18 m. Sala Montcada. prod. Fundació La Caixa. Barcelona. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

intervention of the artist, or of a representative, or of any other political or commercial interest. The key word is information. To always be ready to offer or exchange information. This experience has made me unfit for the prevailing situation in my own country, where information is kept secret.

In order to participate in most international exhibitions one has to struggle incessantly for the economic support of public organisms. For me, this has meant an enormous logistical effort that has hardly seen compensation in terms of recognition for my work. Nor has it alleviated an unbearable economic void. Artists are far from being considered producers of culture. Our society is one that demands and accepts immediate economic compensation, but the figure of the artist seems to be anchored to a romantic past.

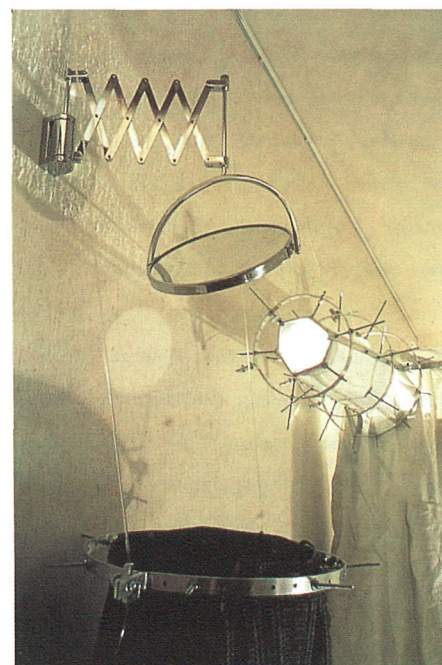
I see the contemporary artist as just another unit of production. I would venture to say that the way an artist works is inseparable from the type of artistic proposals being made. However,

the approach of most of the leading galleries only partially covers the post-production stage. I always make the comparison of the division of roles in stage or film productions, where the creative element indeed functions with logistical support. Where the artist is limited to the role of creating meaning and all the other tasks are lumped together and delegated to a staff that knows how to handle them. Perhaps this is more like what is understood by distribution in the film or music industry. In my case, each piece requires the creation of a specific infrastructure. I depend on technology that is only available to me in a limited fashion, technicians and all kinds of resources. In my experience, the production involved in any work – management, promotion – always exceeds what was anticipated and buries the initial energy. But who is able to take this on?

R.M.: My fascination with your work is based on the fact that for me – as I think for you as well – it is curative. It helps

give form to the phantoms that inhabit our unconscious, and it provokes thoughts on how our feelings shape our relationship to the world. Although it has been said that your work is private and excessively subjective, I think that it is also profoundly political insofar as it helps question the fundamental pillars on which the patriarchal society is based. Your analysis of family relationships, the role of the maternal figure, the relationships of dependence and abandonment that love and affection create are also a metaphor for the method of construction of the social ideal that forces women (and men) to accept certain roles.

E.V.: In general, in my work I create situations that are directed at first toward the physical part of the spectator. Then, crossing through what we might call the perceptual equipment, contact is made with the emotional potential. And emotions are the door that opens onto the



Eulalia Valldosera. *Shelf for a hospital bathroom*. 1992. Fragments. Konsthallen Göteborgs, Sweden, 1995. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

unconscious. Perhaps it is in this context – i.e. the unconscious, contact with which can be traumatic or, as you said, restorative – that gender roles of masculine and feminine are situated. The defining characteristic of the unconscious is ambiguity. Thus the feminine and the masculine can be seen as internal, opposite forces that are in everything human. Or to the contrary they can be seen (as happens too easily when discussing these terms) as personal roles fastened onto men and women through the weight of the social legacy of the Patriarchal tradition. In analyzing my work I think that it helps to situate both roles in keeping with the first of these perspectives that I have mentioned, although it does not lack an element of social critique. Although I find the word critique to be impoverishing; in fact, I think that what I do is an attempt at recovering a positive vision of roles that are socially feminine but which feminism has tried to bury. And it is not easy, since the work is subject to the projections imposed on it by the spectator and that even today continue being overly mimetic toward the prevailing social values.

But I would like to attack the problem from an angle that we should not overlook: the formal element. On the formal level, my work is based on the utilization of pre-existing objects. I do not manipulate them, nor do I manufacture them artificially; instead, all my resources are available to the spectator, although perhaps only in appearance. Objects, light projections and two-dimensional shadows are the dismembered parts of a whole that the spectator must reconstruct by vainly weaving a story in the air, making use of subjectivity. The objects on display are nothing more than clues to



Eulalia Valldosera. *The dining room: figure of the mother*, 1994-5. Luminous installation (lateral view-exterior). CAAM, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

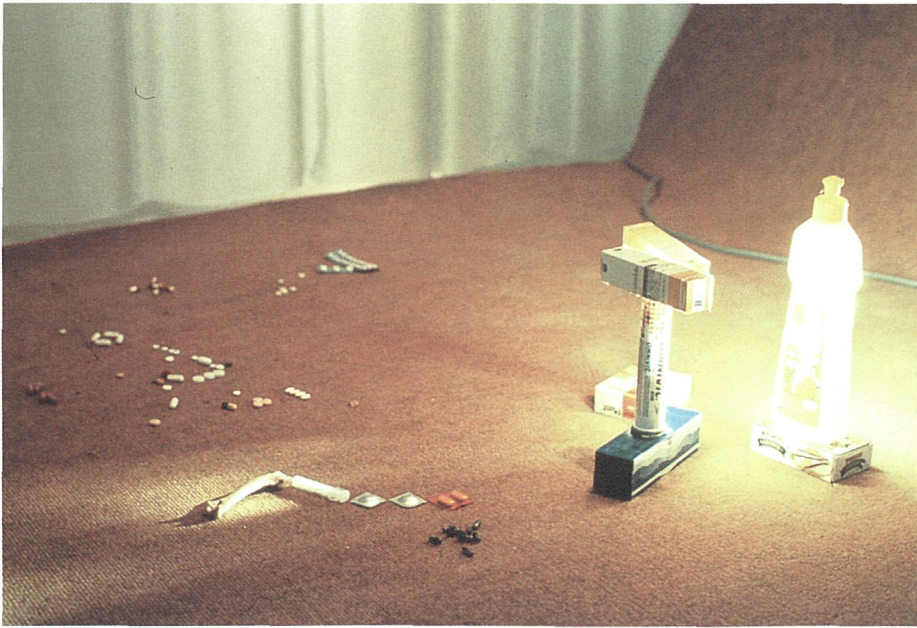
which spectators relate however they please. Via fragmentation and the dispersion of disorder, I try to fill the symbolic void that people currently suffer and that in particular affects women, who lack an updated social model of their own. This fragmentation can also be seen as a metaphor for the atomization of the family, or of the displacement of migrations...because I utilize ordinary domestic objects, objects used in everyday life.

I also think that the desire to display openly the trick which traditionally and conventionally artists have concealed is a desire to unmask the highly rated value of artifice, of the technical ability behind which much art has taken refuge. I might even venture to call it masculine. This leads me to place my work in the realm of what is considered beforehand as private and intimate, and to work with ephemeral pieces.

R.M.: Jorge Luis Marzo wisely defined your work as “pornographic” because, on a formal level, you let us see everything:

the ghost and the object that creates it, the lighting, the interference and the shadow that is created. Your reflections on sickness also touch upon the issue of how we are forced, socially, to live with our bodies. How the ideal of health is constructed. This is another form of political and publicity-generated pressure. It forces us to believe in a healthy body that eludes death, when in fact sickness is a fundamental part of life. Ideologically, the forms in which we understand our body as house, prison, punishment or source of knowledge are products of the prevailing ideology, and this is why it seems to me that an exploration of the personal is a profoundly political act. Do you agree with this?

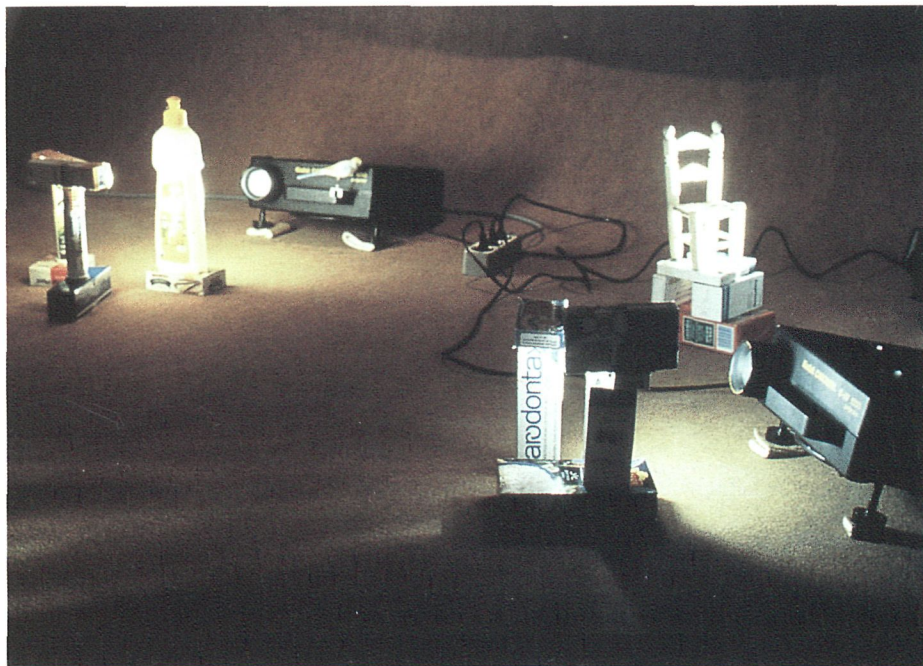
E.V.: Of course, although to place sickness on the personal plane is to succumb yet again to the taboo that surrounds the reality of “falling” – take note of the metaphor – sick. Our culture does not provide us with the tools for



Eulalia Valldosera. *The dining room: figure of the mother*, 1994-5. Luminous installation. CAAM, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

taking responsibility over our own bodies, because Western medicine deals with the body as if it were a mechanism separated from the psyche; we lack the language for unifying the processes that affect both, and as a result we turn the processes of sickness into something communicable

and acceptable. For example, in my internal discourse I set out to relate each room of a house to the parts of the body with which they are primarily involved. The result was *Aparencias*. Over the years, with this house-body binomial relationship I created a series of



Eulalia Valldosera. *The dining room: figure of the mother*, 1994-5. Luminous installation (view of the inside). CAAM, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

installations where I discovered the role of the psychological shadow in our causal relationship to the world. And I was only able to approach common archetypes insofar as far as I explored my own shadows. There was no other way for me to do it. Don't you think that when discussing the subject one has to begin with oneself? When I decided to work with my own body I did so in order to strip myself of any other material that might bring with it excessive cultural implications. I used my body as the only tool possible, and I carried out an exercise in self-observation in order to free myself of the gaze that the Other wields over oneself. What you call oppression. Perhaps because as a woman I lacked an image of my own that was free of prejudices. And this statement bears political connotations.

I dealt with sickness insofar as it constitutes a social taboo; so do filth, disorder, vice, passivity and sex. In the 90's I chose to work with all kinds of residue that I defined as the "noises" that interrupt reason's discourse. Cigarette butts, bread crumbs, wrinkles in a sheet, shadows, domestic objects, the body itself in its nudity; those weak materials let me speak of the passivity implicit in chance, and in our culture passivity is considered something negative.

By means of photography I imposed order and meaning onto what was coincidental, wondering if what we call chance is nothing more than our *ignorance of coincidence*. It was in this sense that I questioned our inherited ignorance of the symptomatic processes that are manifested in the body, and I spoke of building bridges that might unite bodies and minds which have been separated by our Western traditions.

R.M.: Seen in perspective, your work has evolved with great coherence, or at the very least it can be said *a posteriori* that it seems to possess an internal logic, that it traces lines that take on meaning when seen in retrospect. From the drawings with ink stains to the installations in which you drew your own body on the floor with cigarette butts, later progressing onto installations in space and performances. You have now arrived at a point where you use quotidian objects in installations and light is converted into a medium and a metaphor of the darkness that fills us. How do you combine formal investigations and the use of new technologies with the exploration of existential questions such as sickness, phantoms of the unconscious and Jungian archetypes?

E.V.: Games are fundamental for me, and in my case they have an implicit sense of humor. The game, and the transgressive attitude it brings with it, lets me discover perceptive material that I later put at the disposition of my intentions, which are considered at length. But before playing I have to choose my materials. When using light, I have utilized tools that are quite different but always available on the market. I have not been seduced by the *formal search in terms of how light is produced*, just as I have not been interested in manufacturing colors in order to paint a canvas. However, I am interested in light-producing artifacts as objects which intervene as part of the image. I place projectors in the same category as objects in a bottle. Because the incursion of technology in our daily life has become something almost natural.

At the same time, I am interested in any kind of projector – slide projectors, film projectors, video projectors. They speak of the image as something that is projected from a specific point (from our interiors, I would venture to say) and that depends on certain dimensions and that has a specific duration. When I project an image I keep in mind the spectator's spatial situation, the time needed to apprehend and take in the entire



Eulalia Valldosera. *The fall. Out of the frying pan into the fire*, 1996. Kunsthal Rotterdam (Manifesta I). Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

site...Some of my pieces depend so much on spatial conditions that they might almost be called *environmental works*. In the sense that they incorporate space into the projected image, or the spectators into their shadows. The time the spectator invests in my work is extremely important for me; I want to submerge the spectators in a time more like their bodies than like their heads. I want them to intervene without noticing.

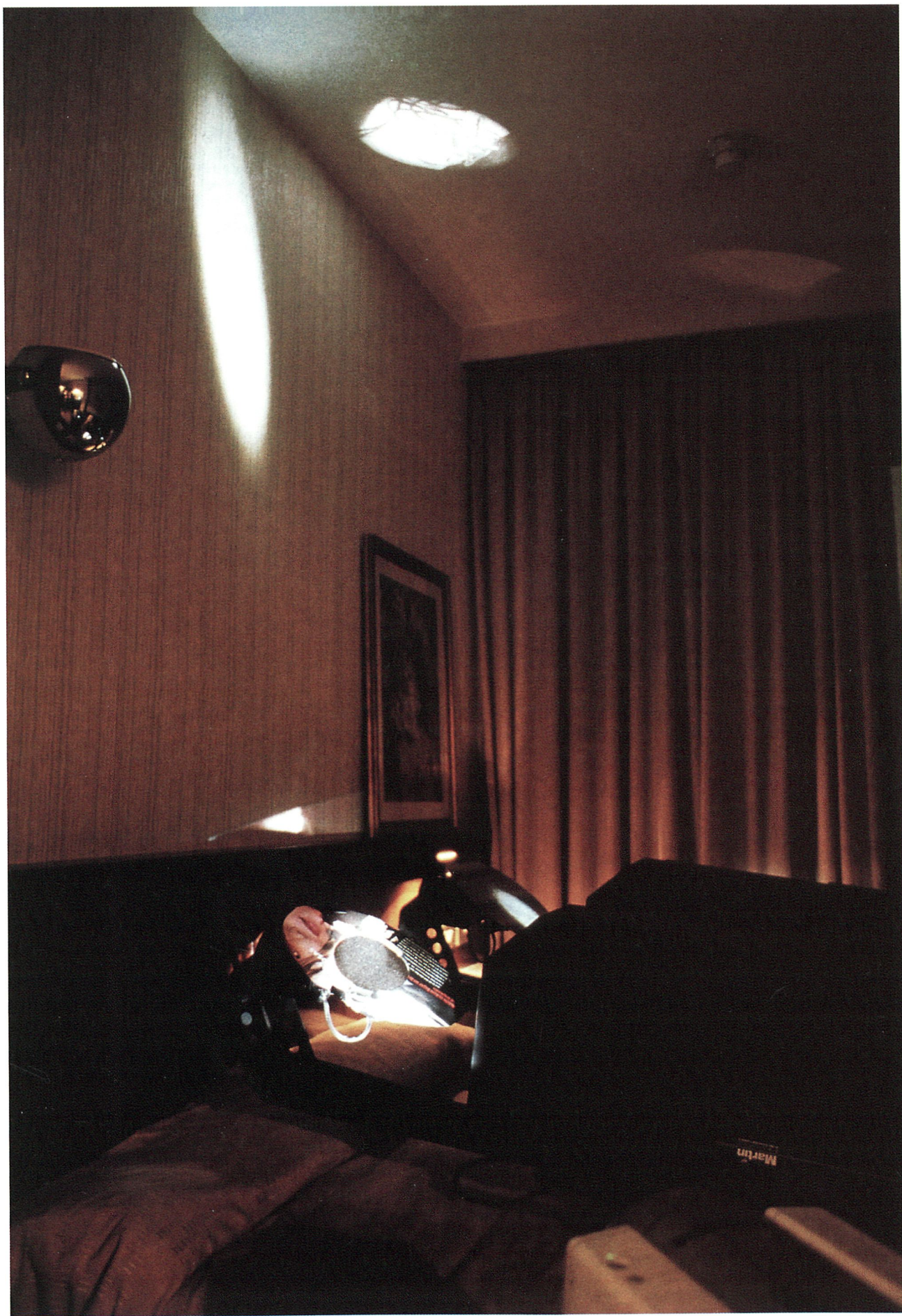
R.M.: How do you evaluate the situation

of the art world in Spain? What are the structural deficiencies that fail to help Spanish artists participate in international circuits?

E.V.: In formal terms, I have always felt the lack of a gaze more attentive to our own visual tradition, in order to avoid our imitation of Anglo-Saxon issues. But to explain this to you would involve, for example, an analysis of why our

historical negation of our Islamic roots has persisted so long. Or why art has been *depoliticized so quickly for the sake of jumping on board the economic train led by Central Europe*.

Our democracy is still young, and the cultural potential is still too heavily directed by politics and located in too few centers. This lack of clear information about how funds are spent. For artists and cultural administrators to be able to work, what are needed are resources that might provide individual initiatives with



Eulalia Valldosera. *Conversation*, 1997. New Art. Galería Joan Prats, Barcelona. Courtesy Helga de Alvear.



Eulalia Valldosera. Exhibition view. *Room*, 1998. Galería Helga de Alvear. Madrid.
Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

direct and independent support. The young artists – we young artists – have very few opportunities to produce for, or just to experiment with, the public before entering the professional realm.

R.M.: How have official institutions contributed to your career? What assistance have you received from the Culture Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and the Generalitat?

E.V.: In order to be able to participate in some international exhibitions I have often requested assistance from the Foreign Ministry – and also from the Culture Ministry and from the Generalitat. Only the ministries – especially the Foreign Ministry – have supported some of these initiatives. But to produce exhibitions does not signify producing work. In order to produce work what is needed are grants, such as

was granted to me by the Generalitat in order to make a video (after I had submitted a script). However, the



Eulalia Valldosera. Exhibition view. *Room*, 1998. Galería Helga de Alvear. Madrid.
Courtesy Helga de Alvear.

subsidies that were key in allowing me to begin (when I had nothing to my credit except my academic work) and to produce the majority of my work have come from the government of Holland, where I went to test my luck. In fact, I had to leave my own country in order to begin my career. And I still depend on grants to develop my work. In 1999 I will move to Berlin with a grant awarded by the DAAD. This is one of the most prestigious grants internationally, and one of the best endowed, but yet again I will have to leave my own country and my beloved things. There are very few things of this sort in Spain. I have received grants from Banesto and from the Generalitat for studies abroad. The problem is that once they have been awarded, it can take up to two years before the money arrives, which is not very effective for an artist who is just starting out.