



Image: Eva Fernandez, 2020, *Queen Isabella of Castile* (detail) from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl. Edition of 8.

Queens and Conquests|2023

Queens and Conquests|2023 showcases the creative works of **Eva FERNANDEZ**
Gallery25

Curated by **Sue STARCKEN**

Exhibition dates: 13 April to 11 May

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am to 4pm and by appointment

Curatorial floor talk: 12:30pm to 1:30pm, 26 April

Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

ECU Galleries



Sue STARCKEN
Curatorial Statement

Through a consequential and enduring arts practice, Eva Fernandez has long created artworks of power and distinction. Haunting, arcane and deeply considered, the body of work identified for Queens and Conquests frames the impetus of a practice that is informed by a gracious sensibility. Eva's prodigious repertoire of applied and conceptual skills allows her to hone her aptitude for incisive narrative keenly informing a discursive dialogue with a proclivity for feminism and cultural theory. The works in this exhibition channel powerful truths and historical moments with a visionary twist, all through the fierce eye of an astute observer. They represent points of pause in an ongoing dialogue between the artist and the world.

The feminist counter aesthetic of the uncanny, is an indeterminate space that is unsettlingly. Sigmund Freud describes the uncanny as the returned of the repressed. In Eva Fernandez's evocative and uncanny work, *Queens and Conquests*, the past is re-represented. Patriarchal lore and conditions are challenged. The restrictive reality of the past is resurrected and emerges into thought provoking subversive feminist visual encounters. Fernandez's photo-based artwork, eerily yet disturbingly, beautifully haunts the present.

Eva Fernandez uses *photographie féminine* which is drawn from the French Feminist notion of *écriture féminine*, writing the feminine (body)...it involves the inscription of that which is repressed within history and culture" (Allmark, 2022, p. 243). Moreover, it engages with self-reflexivity, a concern with power relationships and the nature of images. This includes the production of images that use irony as a political device (Allmark, 2009). Women's history and the female body are central to Fernandez's work. Fernandez's oeuvre challenges and confronts the patriarchal structures of the past. Cultural theorist Roland Barthes distinguishes between the studium and punctum of a photograph. The studium provides a general interest of a subject, the punctum in contrast is something in the image that pierces, wounds, bruises and has the power to evoke an emotional response to times past, which in Fernandez's oeuvre has a strong resonance in the present.

The photo-based images, a collection of three bodies of work: *Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman (1861-1932)*, *Unos Cuantos Piquetitos*, and *Heresy to Heredity*, provide a feminist trilogy of strength, subversion, and survival. It is related to postmemory. Postmemory a term described by Marianne Hirsch (2012) relates to "memories of traumatic events [that] live on to mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them". Fernandez's work retells histories that she has not experienced directly, but are part of her story, as a woman of the Spanish diaspora and her Australian citizenship. Here self-reflexivity, the gender politics of what it is being a woman in Spain and in Australia is called upon. Fernandez's collection, which is superbly rich in symbolism draws on the struggles for gender equality and political participation.

The series *Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman (1861-1932)* highlights the Australian social reformer and politician who worked towards improving the status of women in Australia. Cowan was instrumental in the enactment of legislation that granted women the right to vote and stand for election in Western Australia. Fernandez's marking the centenary of Cowan as the first woman

elected to Australian government, superbly captures the essence of what Cowan's life would have been like at the time, and what she represents, being the only woman in an all-male parliament. The work produced here, as part of Fernandez's 2021 Western Australian Parliament House Artist Residency resonates with motifs of strength and resilience, evidenced for example in the works 'Engaged' and 'Tough nut to crack'. It is not surprising that the work symbolising Cowan's gender-based struggles and achievement are in high demand to hang on the walls of Australian Parliament House (Curtis, 2023). Cowan's aura serves as an uncanny reminder of the strength and resilience of women in the political sphere.

Similar threads of strength are in the series, *Unos Cuantos Piquetitos*, a few small nips. Here there is the creative use of archival early 20th Century photographs from around the time women in Spain were granted suffrage, prior to the Spanish Civil War, produced around the time of Cowan's election to Parliament. Fernandez tactile nature of this work enacts an *écriture féminine* by sewing on red thread over the female portraits. By this Fernandez is sewing the connection of how Spanish women's social roles of the early 1930s were based on their abilities with a needle and thread. The hand stitching, occasionally loose and fractured signals the chaos and disruption of women's lives during the Spanish civil war. The title translated to A few small nips also plays homage to Frida Kahlo's 1935 iconic painting in which a woman's wounded bloodied and bare body lies on a bed, in the background a knife wielding man stands nonchalantly. However, the goriness of the blood in Fernandez's work is replaced with red stitching. Rather than the face of patriarchy in the background, Fernandez pierces the portraits as an uncanny reminder of blood and survival. It can be read as taking control back through a 'feminine' act of sewing, rather than the brutality of bludgeoning.

In terms of taking control, *Heresy to Heredity* is also a confronting series that richly engages with Spanish history and the role of women and cultural motifs. In particular, Fernandez's self-portraits depicting herself as historical Spanish figures provide a revisionist portrayal of Spanish women. Strength, resilience, and survival in this powerful work conveys a trans generational haunting. It, like the other series is uncannily about the return of the repressed, a dalliance with the trauma of violence. With a *photographie féminine* approach it brilliantly uses self-reflexivity, a concern with images and irony as a political device. Her use of *chiaroscuro*, with strong tonal contrasts between light and dark beautifully convey the disturbing and frightening gendered elements of Spanish history. In the hauntingly rich images, she is making the 'ghosts' visible and is "ultimately engaged in acts of decolonisation" (Starcken, 2016).

Queens and Conquests is a powerful, personal, and political feminist journey about identity and the State. Cultural motifs relating to gendered histories are foregrounded. The enigmatic exquisite detail in the series harbours the pain and struggles of women. Yet the spirit of strength and resilience resonates triumphantly through Fernandez's highly sophisticated visual storytelling.

Panizza Allmark

(Professor of Visual and Cultural Studies)

Edith Cowan University

References

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Allmark, P. (2009). *'Traversing One's Space: Photography and the feminine.'* In Backhaus, G and Murungi, J (Eds.), Symbolic Landscapes. Geographical Sensibilities in the Arts. Springer

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Starcken, S. (2016). *Blood Bounty: Eva Fernández and the art of annihilation and exorcism in 'Heresy to Heredity'*. Exhibition Catalogue. ISBN 978-0-646-96469-0

Eva Fernandez

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Biography

Eva Fernandez (b. 1967) in Toronto, Canada and lives and works in Perth, Western Australia. Fernandez has a Masters (Creative Arts) and has been a practicing artist for over three decades, working across photography and various other mediums.

As an immigrant, Fernandez's practice is deeply informed by dislocation from her original culture as well as the negotiation of the space which she inhabits in context to its complex history and cultural legacy of colonialism. Her research examines her pluralistic identity in context to contemporary issues of global displacement.

Fernandez's practice includes complex installations of symbolically laden objects, creating contemporary still life and portraits to create interventions which critique ideologies of the past and present. Drawing on fragmented histories, her works embodies the traces and voices from the past that are blended and embedded in art and history to unearth narratives which evoke a shattered, emotional, and forgotten past.

Artist Statement

Queens and Conquests presents the artwork of Eva Fernández from several series, spanning the years of her continued exploration of her complex pluralistic cultural identity to the negotiation of the space which she inhabits, it's history and cultural legacy.

Coming from a diasporic post-Spanish Civil war immigrant family, starting often from her biography and family history, Fernandez explores how culture shapes individuals, specifically in relation to womanhood. Fernandez's art is deeply informed by her dislocation from her parental culture as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War.

The works from her recent residency at Parliament House of Western Australia, *Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman*, are tied together with the more autobiographical works as they are informed by feminist cultural studies theory, exploring the notion of womanhood in their differing contexts from the Spanish Civil War period to the event of the first female parliamentarian to be elected in Australia, Edith Cowan.

Artworks



Engaged, 2021, from *Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman*, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



Child protection, 2021, from *Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman*, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



A room of one's own – Colonade, 2021, from Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



*A room of one's own – Staircase, 2021, from Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.*



Tough nut to crack – leaves, 2021, from *Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman*, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



Tough nut to crack – no leaves, 2021, from *Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman*, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



Speak, 2021, from *Edith Cowan- An Extraordinary Woman*, 80cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 6.



Still life with Pomegranates, 2016, from *Heresy to Heredity*,
150cm x 100cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 8.



Still life with Potatoes, 2016, from *Heresy to Heredity*,
150cm x 100cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 8.



Still life with Lentils, 2016, from *Heresy to Heredity*, 150cm x 100cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 8.



Queen Isabella of Castile, 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



Teresa de Avila, 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



A la izquierda, 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



A la derecha, 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



Asta su Abuela (Even her Grandmother) after Goya's Los Caprichos No.39, 2020, from Las dos Españas, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



Niña robada , 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 80cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



Niños robados, 2020, from *Las dos Españas*, 120cm x 180cm.
Photograph on Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl.
Edition of 8.



Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, 2022, 80cm x 80cm.
Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag.
Edition of 8.



Unos Cuantos Piquetitos 1-10, 2016-2023, 16cm x 10cm.
Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag, with red sewing thread.
Edition 1 of 12.



Lentejas viudas (Widow Lentils), 2023.
Video, 44 minutes 30 seconds.



975 Days, 2023, Installation,
Wooden table, silver coffee and tea set, lentils, Dimensions variable.

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