

To have an idea  
is to have a  
responsibility.

**OUR PROBLEMS** — Mireia Sallarès



## WHAT GODMILOW TAUGHT

In 2012, US filmmaker Jill Godmilow wrote to Mireia Sallarès, moved by the film she had made in Mexico, *Las muertes chiquitas* (*The Little Deaths*), about women's orgasms. For Jill Godmilow, who offered to help distribute the film in the United States, *Las muertes chiquitas* is not a documentary about a problem affecting Mexican women. It is a film about orgasms as a political problem, one that is both common and lived in the first person, and raised the question of who can take responsibility for it by speaking out. How to take responsibility for our problems, how to take charge of them, was the concern that had led Godmilow to engage years earlier with Harun Farocki's documentary *The Inextinguishable Fire* (*Nicht löschesbares Feuer*), which showed how the assembly line process of napalm production during the Vietnam War effectively exempted its makers from any responsibility for it. No one was responsible because no one was aware of having produced it. Farocki, a German filmmaker, made a film in order to take on the responsibility that no one was willing to assume. The fact that Farocki's film about napalm had not been seen in the United States and that the problem it talked about had not gone away, Jill Godmilow decided to do a re-enactment of it in the 1990s: she reshot the film, frame by frame, to involve herself in the problem and put it back into circulation. As a statement about what it means today to be an author and take account of this complexity, she titled her replica *What Farocki Taught*.

The present exhibition, which opens with an interview with Jill Godmilow and gave rise to the project *Joan/Jill Godmilow. What Godmilow Taught* (USA, 2014), is committed to this artistic practice in which having an idea means having a responsibility and probably also having a problem that has to be accompanied in its transmission.

## JILL'S BREASTS

While listening to Bob Dylan on the radio in 1967 Jill Godmilow started sewing by hand a pair of breasts in the manner of a Tom Wesselmann paintings. This was her first copy. She copied the style with which the Pop art of the 1960s identified mass culture and consumerism with women's naked bodies: breasts surrounded by televisions and cigarette packets, breasts that share the stage with the new market for beauty products. And, in the background, sex as a big market and women as its subject.

But in Jill Godmilow's copy the Wesselmann breasts are no longer associated with the consumer society. In her interview with Mireia Sallarès, Godmilow talks about her own breastless body after successive cancers as a non-marketable body with which it is not possible to speculate or traffic. A body she thinks she will leave to science, as she has bequeathed her films to an archive. The world of references in which the exhibition situates Jill Godmilow draws another setting for these breasts, which now share a home with a barrel from the Dow Chemical Company, one of the manufacturers of napalm, with her film about Harun Farocki and a manifesto about how to rethink the political documentary.

## KILL THE DOCUMENTARY

In 2002 Jill Godmilow published the essay *Kill The Documentary, As We Know It*. This was a manifesto centred on ways of putting an end to the authority of the classic realist documentary. *Kill The Documentary* distanced itself from the prestige attached to reality by cinéma vérité and Dogma 95 with their very narrow conception of reality. Godmilow championed speculative fiction in cinema and the fiction essay as a form of critique. She championed films that did politics without making History with a capital H, and authors who made documentaries when they had things to say and not just things to show; who dared to embrace their authorship, to talk about those that suffer without making pornography of the real, without exploiting the exploited.

This is a manifesto for useful cinema signed by the filmmaker who made the movie about Antonia Brico, the first female orchestra conductor in the United States, a biography of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas as a couple, and a documentary which is both profoundly committed to the *Solidarność* movement yet post-realist and filmed a long way away from Poland.

## THE ARTIST IS A THIEF

When Jill Godmilow filmed *What Farocki Taught* in 1998 as a replica of the film Harun Farocki had shown on German TV in 1969, *The Inextinguishable Fire*, she denounced the absence of collective responsibility in the production of napalm, which was manufactured in successive stages on different assembly lines in the United States during the Vietnam War. Godmilow's copy began with the same concern as Farocki's film: how to show the faces burned and the bodies devastated by napalm without making people close their eyes to the images and thus to the reality behind them? Farocki's answer was to show, rather than the tragedy, the coldness of America's production of napalm: the factory, corporate industry, capitalism. In addition, Godmilow opened up the question of authorship: who was the author of *What Farocki Taught*, and who taught what? Godmilow took responsibility for what Farocki's film denounced, broadening and politicising the chain of authorship.

This is the commitment that, years later, led her to copy the political films of the South African artist William Kentridge without authorisation. Since 2013, faced with her gallery's refusal to distribute the films in DVD format so as to preserve the status of a limited edition work of art, Godmilow has been illegally distributing them for free, and making sure the author knows this. For Godmilow, the artist is a thief, and what she steals, like the ideas she puts into circulation, is her responsibility.



Orgasms,  
like the earth,  
belong to those  
who work them.

OUR PROBLEMS — Mireia Sallarès

WATER



## LITTLE DEATHS

When on 12 December 2009, the day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mireia Sallarès showed *Las muertes chiquitas* (*Little Deaths*) (Mexico, 2006-2009) in the abandoned Cine Ópera in Mexico City, she was premiering her film about orgasms in a cinema where, enormously popular, and powerful love fictions had been watched for decades. Due to the state of the building, the permit for the screening had not yet been confirmed and she imagined premiering her film in one of the city's porn cinemas, through which *Las muertes chiquitas* would challenge the great collective fictions about women's pleasure and ways of desiring. The screening in the Cine Ópera ended up being an act of historic justice, in the words of Doña Chelo, one of the women who speaks in the five-hour film that is the centrepiece of this project. Because women's pleasure is far too fundamental in sustaining the patriarchy and because it is one of the great battlegrounds of our contemporary acts of violence, when women speak in the film they do not perpetuate the condition of victim. They talk of rapes forgotten without being consented to and prostitution chosen, of sexually transmitted diseases that emancipate and of armed struggle as a form of inner revolt, of maternity without orgasms and of mothers who accompany their children in their dying; they are indigenous activists for the right to a home, Catholics in support of free abortion, psychoanalysts who confess having faked orgasms because the other's pleasure is always more important, anthropologists who suffer from economic or sexual dependencies, or transsexuals who experience pleasure somewhere in between genders and identities.

Probably because the research that underpinned *Las muertes chiquitas* placed the orgasm in circulation among intimacy, self-knowledge, politics and the common world, the artist wanted to meet with the Board of Good Governance of the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities, perhaps the only governmental bodies in the world that have asked what an orgasm is and why it is so important for a women.

## IT IS SO HARD TO DESIRE THAT IT IS ALMOST EASIER TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

This observation by the philosopher Maite Larrauri seeks to clarify the complexity of desire posited by Gilles Deleuze, who wrote that getting what is difficult is not getting what we desire; rather, what is difficult is to desire. For Deleuze, we never only desire one person or one thing. We always want the world in which those we love are immersed or even trapped. We do not make love to people, but rather to their landscapes, and our unconscious does not lose itself in our little family stories but in races, continents, history and geography. Similarly, when the women in *Las muertes chiquitas* talk about orgasms they are talking about colonialism and private property, money, democracy, electoral fraud and ecological disaster.

The artist wanted this observation about the difficulty of a desire that is not essentially free and manages not to objectify to be read through the gaps of a huge *papel picado*. This difficult and precarious desire can be read on tissue paper, fragile and ephemeral, perforated by hammer blows, a Mexican craft which is part of the symbolic popular decoration that accompanies rites of passage, shrines to the dead, weddings and graduations. This craft within everyone's reach weaves the warp and weft and the complex ramifications of desire, as well as its connection to death and the *petite mort*, like a grinning skull.

## FOR EVERYONE, EVERYTHING; NOTHING FOR US

Tables covered with documentation are often at the centre of Mireia Sallarès's exhibitions, maintaining the memory of the books, phrases, photographs and other work materials such as slides and transparencies that have accompanied her in her prolonged researches. These tables are a narrative collage of the overflowings of the projects themselves. So it is that in this exhibition, as well as being able to read about the different editions of the book *Las muertes chiquitas* we find, among others, these words of welcome from a Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipality, "For everyone, everything; nothing for us"; the poster of a Catholic association for the right to choose, "Mary was asked to be the mother of God. Choosing is every woman's right"; a comment from María, interviewed in *Las muertes chiquitas*, "If I don't desire my own pleasure I'm dead, and many women don't want their own pleasure"; and the triptych of photographs by Diane Arbus, *Albino Sword Swallower*, *Headless Woman* and *Feminist in Her Hotel Room*.

## IS PLEASURE SO INTIMATE AND SO PRIVATE?

Because pleasure is neither as intimate nor as private as we think, a neon sign with the words *Las muertes chiquitas* guided the artist through the vast territory and the public spaces of the Mexican Republic. She had it made to fashion the portraits of the many women who agreed to talk to her about orgasms, violence and death. In a series that sought to emulate and problematize the advertising image, but derailing and subverting it, the photographs documented the emergence into the public space of women who had given their testimony in private spaces. They were the ones to choose the place. Just as they were the ones to speak in the film, not because the artist had allowed them to do so by giving them authorization to be listened and to listen to themselves, but because they shared a need that Mireia Sallarès had only begun to untangle abroad, breaking the poor circle of silence and speaking, of the self and others.

The intense luminosity of the neon sign irradiated both the high voltage of feminine pleasure and the strength of all that is fragile and can be broken. The neon that appears in this series of photographs, which also produced audio stories narrating the many things that happened during the production of the images, got broken in the course of its many travels, but was always repaired. This metaphor of resilience and the emancipation that comes after crisis pervades each and every one of these portraits. The artist's, too.



Uncritical love  
is the seed  
of fascism.

OUR PROBLEMS — Mireia Sallares



## LOVE IS AN ACT OF TRANSLATION

While the artist was undertaking this research into love in Belgrade, she unexpectedly found herself helping as a volunteer in an old railway depot that had been occupied by refugees who didn't want to go to the official camps. What was most unexpected of all, however, was the way in which the refugees' experience effected a shift in this project about love in a foreign country to truly working with the condition of the foreigner as a problem of love. This led to the compiling of basic dictionaries to and from Pashto/Urdu/Dari/Arabic and English/Spanish/Serbian, with vital phrases and questions, which were duly handed out to refugees, volunteers, police and local people.

The *Basic Dictionaries for Refugees* were complemented with the *Survival Alphabet*, which reprinted some texts written by citizens of Sarajevo during the siege, and the *Detelinara ABC*, compiled in conjunction with people from this dilapidated neighbourhood of Novi Sad. Over and above the urgency of communication, the metaphor communicated by these dictionaries, alphabets and ABCs was that, just as translation can be understood as an act of love, the experience of love always involves an act of translation.

## LIKE A LITTLE WATER IN THE PALM OF THE HAND

In 2011 Mireia Sallarès began her *Trilogy of Trash Concepts*, long investigations into life revolving around concepts such as love, truth and work. Made in the former Yugoslavia, *Kao malo vode na dlanu (Like a Little Water in the Palm of the Hand. A project about love in Serbia)* (2014-2018), the film at the centre of this project, posits a speculative fiction which, in the artist's interrogation by a putative Serbian police officer and herself, addresses the question of the recyclable or unusable condition of love. Is love a passion of domination or of emancipation? Can it be a productive force and not just a reproductive one? What is the amorous thought that we have incorporated, and who profits from it? What inequalities does it engender and what lack of recognition does it bring with it?

Pervaded by the experience of the war, of communist ownership and the capitalist transition, by feminist anthropology, the condition of the foreigner and the refugee, love begins to emerge as trash to be recycled. It is perhaps for this reason that we see, in a project about love, hands holding rubble, plastic bags, crumpled photocopies and objects of little value. It is perhaps for this reason that the film tells us the story of how former workers from one of the old collectively owned factories made a formal denunciation of its privatisation to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague as a war crime involving human trafficking and new forms of slavery. And why love today has become like a little water in the palm of the hand, as hard to grasp as all those other precious, precarious things.

## TRASH LOVE

By way of a series of portrait photographs of people holding up rubbish or objects with no apparent value, the concept of trash love asks about everything we must recycle in our thinking about love so as to be capable of loving: love as property and love of self; romantic fiction; monogamous love; love without economics, without politics and without world. The philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote of the immense forest of prohibitions and discriminations we must find a way out of if we are to stop separating love from other forms of affect such as friendship and charity. This project lives in this immense forest.

Etymologically linked to the Latin verb *cadere*, the Catalan word *deixalla* (meaning "waste, rubbish, trash") also reminds us of all that falls, is dropped, thrown away or neglected. Every thing and every one. All those whom we collectively drop, as the devastating dictionary definition of trash as a person of no value. The love story that this film narrates finds a connection here with the stories of so many other collectives and individuals: from the volunteers at No Name Kitchen, the former workers of the association of The Ignorant Schoolmaster and His Committees and the Women in Black to a young anarchist or an old partisan. If our neoliberal societies restrict the experience of love to the individual sphere and the privileges of choice, perhaps today love allows us to reveal and denounce the powerful fictions of the individual and individuality.

## LOVE FOR WHAT? CHANGING LOVE TO CHANGE EVERYTHING?

The phrase above is the title of the seminar held in 2020 in the framework of the showing of this project at the Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Fabra i Coats. Mireia Sallarès's life projects live only briefly in the exhibition space and are always accompanied by the conversations started during her long investigations and stays abroad, which end up spilling into her exhibitions with talks and film screenings. The seminar unpacked the questions we have to collectively ask ourselves if we are to stop reproducing the direct relation between love and the injustices and inequalities of patriarchal order.

In conversation with anthropologists and feminists, translators and writers, philosophers and documentalists, lawyers and activists, artists and curators, cooperativists and ecofeminists, this set of dialogues asked about the responsibilities we are willing to assume to love, what happens to art when it is permeated by an amatory practice, and what happens to love when it is 'estranged' – when we stand back from it in order to question it, by way of love as possession, revolutionary love, free love, the pain of love, committed loves and polyamories.



The truth is  
nomadic and has  
to be loved.



## SHE GOT AWAY NAKED

*She Got Away Naked. A project about truth* (Venezuela, 2011-2012), made in Caracas and the first part of the *Trilogy of Trash Concepts*, perhaps comes down to us today as at once the artist's strangest and her most necessary project. Why did the truth initiate a reflection on trash and why did it do so after her project *Las muertas chiquitas*, which had been received as the authentic testimony of Mexican women who, looking straight at the camera, spoke truly and in so just a fashion about violence and pleasure? Mireia Sallarès went to the Venezuelan capital with the help of the NGO-Nelson Garrido Organization in search of something she had not found out about the truth. Something that was not confused with certainties or with sincerity. In the 2010s, when the critiques of a scorched-earth postmodernity had laid waste those great absolute truths that for centuries had been synonymous with freedom, when the first outlines of the world that would manufacture post-truth and fake news were just emerging, the artist interviewed taxi drivers, poets and guerrillas, artists, historians and priests, activists, philosophers and therapists, to ask them if they thought that truth existed. They all replied that truth existed but that it had to be made. Even though the truth slips through our fingers, even though it gets away naked, as the title of the project suggests, if it has to be made it is because it is very difficult to live without truth. Because, without truth, it is even harder to relate to reality and become human. Like Simone Weil, Mireia Sallarès proclaims herself a thinker of a single truth, even on the condition of not knowing it.

In a world in which we increasingly know who benefits from the absence of electoral truths and where the evidence of violence and the denial of liberties circulating on social networks cannot uphold any truth before any court, this research puts at the centre the situated truths and the political landscapes of those who support them. For this reason, the Venezuelan politics of Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian revolution become this opaque labyrinth that the artist uses to undo the illusion of revolutions and the truths that can only be read properly from a distance. Because what this project seeks to develop is a situated form of truth as a commitment to reality.

## THIS REVOLUTION WILL HAVE TO BE IN OUR LIKENESS

Because we are the ones that are making it. This is how a revolutionary ex-guerrilla replied to Mireia Sallarès when they spoke of truth and revolution: making revolutions and making truths in our likeness because, if not, others will make them for us. Perhaps that is why the twelve marble plaques that the artist placed in different neighbourhoods of the city of Caracas were twelve parts of the same monument to a single fragmented and dynamic truth that had to be traversed through a situated geography, of which she herself drew up the map, to which she ended up giving the form of diary. As if the map were that space without which no information, no news and no truth could be imagined, as this quote by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which can be read in the *map of truth*, reminds us: "Run lines, never plot a point! [...] Don't bring out the General in you! ... Make maps, not photos or drawings." And as if this way out into the public space of truth, passing through neighbourhoods, ideology and social classes, were a way to wresting the monopoly of truth from monumentality and commemoration.

Mireia Sallarès has often spoken of her artistic practice and of this project in particular as a way of going to find what she had not lost. This paradox is by no means an incoherence. It is the paradox that serves to think affirmatively how we can ask ourselves the questions we are told are not necessary, are not ours, where nothing seems to have been lost. That is why this project makes it clear that making a truth in our likeness involves challenging what people tell us we are not lacking.

## WHAT CAN BE AFFIRMED

When in 2010, on the occasion of the centenary of the Mexican revolution, Mireia Sallarès went to Ciudad Juárez to present her research on orgasms, in an exhibition with hundreds of photographic documents on the revolution, she saw an apparently innocuous image which fascinated her: in the middle of the street a man was talking to a priest with a soldier looking on. However, the caption scratched into the emulsion of photograph explained that the man was making his confession before he was shot by the soldier on that exact spot five minutes later. Only the words told us that this was not a quaintly exotic local scene but a photograph that spoke of the future. These words, which situate and redimension the image, inspired the photo series of the project on truth linked together with recordings of twelve long conversations about truth as a problem.

Between direct documentary as a way of talking about orgasms in *Las muertas chiquitas* (*Little Deaths*) and the speculative fiction that Mireia Sallarès found to 'estrangle' love, to hold it at a distance, in *Kao malo vode na dlanu* (*Like a Little Water in the Palm of the Hand*), the recordings that accompany the photographs in this investigation into truth are situated as a form of critique of the image as the paradigm of the most veridical documentation of the real. And, at the same time, it recovers it where it can be affirmed.



The lives lived  
are the heritage  
of all humanity.

OUR PROBLEMS — Mireia Sallarès



## ZAHĪA'S TRUCK

In the Place de Montalivet in Valence in the winter of 2001/02 Mireia Sallarès met Zahĭa, the owner of a mobile food truck who was about to lose her permit to park on the street, due to a new municipal bylaw for a gentrification project. From the long counter of her truck, open to all and sundry, on the long evenings on which one never knew when or how a conversation might end, Zahĭa was exposed every night in an increasingly hostile public space. But the hostility had started long before: she had suffered violence from her partner, the first owner of the pizza truck who also exploited the fruits of her labour. In time, Zahĭa made up her mind and managed to get away from him. She also made up her mind and managed to buy the truck. So now the truck was no longer a sign of what had happened to her: it no longer spoke of domestic violence, work exploitation and social precariousness, but rather of what she had made with what had happened to her.

This truck that had become different was the setting in which Zahĭa, an Algerian woman in France, was filmed at night, among conversations with the unemployed, smokers, pensioners, young French people and the occasional gypsy, in the midst of work, music and the time lived. *Zahĭa's Truck. Conversations after paradise lost* (France, 2001-2005) was the first project in which the artist began to make a theme of lives lived as the place from which we can relate to those big problems, so close and yet so far away, because they seem to pierce us without us being able to transform them: violence, gentrification, vulnerability and work, love without happiness and happiness with no guarantees, out in the open. As if the life lived was the precarious yet luminous place from which we might do what has not been given to us and which remains to be done. Like that light box that read "*Savoir que j'existais, voilà!*", which Mireia Sallarès placed on a truck that travelled to different endangered spaces and is the basis of a future project through which the lives lived may be declared the heritage of all humanity by UNESCO.

## KNOWING THAT I EXISTED, THAT'S ALL!

This was Zahĭa's answer to Mireia's question about what her truck meant to her, a single woman, Muslim, not so young, in an irregular work situation who wanted to keep on working on the streets. When a neon sign with this phrase on it was created, what it lit up was a way of understanding the life lived from the consciousness of existence. Because survival is not just about keeping ourselves alive according to what we have been given. If contemporary feminists have placed life at the centre of their discourse, denouncing war against life as one of the great struggles of our neoliberal societies, or demanding the equality of all lives, which are not valued equally for reasons of gender, class and race, signalling that our lives are becoming unliveable, Mireia Sallarès's concept of lived lives recognises what those that do not have liveable lives do with theirs.

While the battles are being fought for rights and equalities, for recognition and to ensure that everyone's lives be liveable, lived lives turn what was assigned to them upside down. Perhaps because of this, in the film we see Zahĭa's joy when she dances in her truck with the customers she converses with, and how she's able to see is someone is sad though they say they're just tired. Just as we knew, in *Las siete cabronas invisibles de Tepito* (*The seven invisible bitches of Tepito*), that all the kids of the poor neighbourhood of Tepito – where lives are pierced by insecurity, violence and inequality – were welcome to bathe in Doña Chelo's courtyard.



# ELS NOSTRES PROBLEMES

— Mireia Sallarès

— Febrer - Maig 2021

— Casal Solleric, Palma





Al llarg dels últims vint anys, els projectes de Mireia Sallarès han anat elaborant reflexions, pràctiques i experiències que vinculen les vides viscudes amb la propietat i la gentrificació, el plaer de les dones amb la política, la violència i el treball, o l'amor, els orgasmes i el concepte de veritat. Perquè amb el temps, els projectes que van néixer com a investigacions monogràfiques han anat dibuixant una manera d'estar en el món que els feminismes del s. XX han posat al centre com els nous problemes a pensar i des dels quals fer política. Les cinc frases que contenen aquests pòsters com a publicació de l'exposició

**ELS NOSTRES PROBLEMES** fan parlar en present les preguntes que plantegen els cinc projectes de l'exposició. Sense tancar-les ni fer-ne història, perquè no són passat. Sense sentir-les només com a contemporànies perquè encara avui són preguntes difícils que sovint hem de formular a destemps.

A lo largo de los últimos veinte años, los proyectos de Mireia Sallarès han ido elaborando reflexiones, prácticas y experiencias que vinculan las vidas vividas con la propiedad y la gentrificaci3n, el placer de las mujeres con la política, la violencia y el trabajo, o el amor, los orgasmos y el concepto de verdad. Porque con el tiempo, los proyectos que nacieron como investigaciones monogràficas han ido dibujando una manera de estar en el mundo que los feminismos del s. XX han situado en el centro como los nuevos problemas a pensar y desde los cuales hacer política. Las cinco frases que contienen estos p3sters como publicaci3n de la exposici3n **NUESTROS PROBLEMAS** hacen hablar en presente a las preguntas que plantean los cinco proyectos de la exposici3n. Sin cerrarlas ni hacer historia, porque no son pasado. Sin sentirlas solo como contemporàneas porque todavía hoy son preguntas difíciles que a menudo debemos formular a destiempo.

During the last twenty years, Mireia Sallarès's projects have developed reflections, practices and experiences linking lived lives with property and gentrification, women's pleasure with politics, violence and work, and connecting love, orgasms and the concept of truth. Over time, what started out as single-issue research projects have sketched out a way of being in the world that twentieth-century feminisms have made central to the thinking through of the new problems from which to do politics. The five phrases on these posters, as a publication of the exhibition **OUR PROBLEMS**, oblige us to voice in the present the questions posed by the five projects in the exhibition. Without closing or making history of them, because they are not in the past; and without embracing them as merely contemporary, because these are questions that are difficult even today, and must often be formulated outside of time.