

White under Black

Works from the imperceptible / 1

Blanca Casas Brullet

Make Say

28.01–02.03.2014

BLANCA
CASAS
BRULLET

SANTAMÒNICA

White under Black

Works from the imperceptible

The blank page has been one of the great themes of the androcentric discourse of creation, nourishing the Romantic imaginary and artistic modernity. Under the threat of nothingness and the void, the blank white sheet was a metaphor both of sterility and of creative autonomy. As such, it led modern subjectivity to the desire to conquer: to put black on white, to exploit visuality as the very core of the original artistic action.

The work of a number of women artists, having shifted away from this imaginary of creation, has investigated other images of white. They neither make it the complement of black nor reverse the terms –white and black, white *on* black – but make a symbolic invention of great political potential: white under black.

This was suggested by the curator Catherine de Zegher when, in 1996, she gave the title 'The Blank in the Page' to one of the four sections in which she articulated the exhibition *Inside the*

Visible. An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine.

The blank deployed by de Zegher, through works and creative processes that incorporate the ellipsis, margins, silences, voids, error, doubt, indecision, stammering, interjection, discontinuities, absences... showed that there is a way to read the artistic practice of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that has no need to confront contradictions in order to exist.

Forms of this blank are outlined in the photographs-cum-performances of Helena Almeida, in which the artist situates herself *behind* the pictorial support; in Gego's three-dimensional network structures, or in the performances of Lili Dujourie in the seventies, in which we saw the artist naked on the white sheets of a bed in female postures recalling famous paintings of art history. Other artists have also sought ways to make us feel this blank that often remains imperceptible, inaudible, as in the drawing/performance on paper that Elena del Rivero transformed into dishcloths of large proportions, or the schema underlying all of Agnes Martin's paintings.

Patricia Bickers, referring to Avis Newman's painting installations of the eighties, wrote: 'In fact, the canvas is not empty, nor the page blank: there is no virgin territory. It is the awareness of

all that the canvas itself represents that holds the artist back.'

In this light, Marina Garcés, evoking Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, goes beyond thinking of the blank page as the paradigm of the project of modern autonomy to place the revolutionary space there: the space at once of birth and of politics; a space where Annarosa Butarelli writes about the *tabula rasa* in terms of a cut, a radical political movement that serves to 'make absence profitable'.

It is this creative space of creation and politics that this series of exhibitions and conferences wants to explore, starting from the revealing title of a Blanca Casas Brullet catalogue, *White under Black*. Works such as those by Blanca Casas Brullet, Mar Arza, Freya Powell, Antònia del Rio, Isabel Banal and Mireia Sallarès sketch out new spaces for thinking, as Alejandra Riera said, without guarantees, an expansion of the available fields of vision and of doing.

Assumpta Bassas i Joana Masó



Blanca Casas Brullet (Mataró, 1973), lives and works in Paris. She has degrees in Fine Arts from the Universitat de Barcelona (1996) and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1999), and has shown in numerous group and solo exhibitions: *L'apparition des images* (Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris, 2013), *Déballage* (Maison d'art Bernard Anthonioz, Nogent-sur-Marne, 2012), *Blanc sota negre* (Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades, 2012), *Esborralls* (Galerie Française Paviot, Paris, 2011), *Digital Hand* (National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, 2010), *elles@centrepompidou.fr* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2009), *Les Peintres de la Vie Moderne* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2006–2007), *Blanca Casas + David Bestué* (Sala Montcada, Barcelona, 2006) and, among others, *Argument* (SPIN Gallery, Toronto, 2011).

Blanca Casas Brullet

In her work she explores images inscribed in everyday language, the polysemy and the poetic power latent in the interstices and the passages from one tongue to another.

She has recently been investigating the process of making images and her own working process, fully understood as places where we try to 'make sense'. The studio, the work tables and the photographic exploration displace the exhibition space as such from the plinth, the vitrine or wall. Through the elaboration of pieces that refer to the unfinished or essay form, from the test to the ball of crumpled paper, she makes tangible the emergence of the image.

The image is always an unstable form, not only in its nascent but also in its prototypical state, in the sense that Briony Fer gave to the studioworks of Eva Hesse, forms not arrested at the time of production nor in the desire to produce the original piece: prototypes in the sense of something

uncertain but initial from which there will – perhaps – emerge other things ‘whose prototypical nature is revealed only as time’.

The temporality of pinhole photography is part of the signifying chain that is organized around the studio. Superimposed on the processual form of the crumpled papers that the artist makes using the folding technique of origami, the exposure time of the pinhole image produces effects both experimental and passive, both expected and deliberately uncontrolled, which desert the space of calculation and resolution.

They are pieces that speak metonymically of the work of making art from the open question of their consistency, changing the face of authorship. In this light, Blanca Casas speaks of the failed without being a failure, much as the artist Alejandra Riera described her works-in-progress as works-on-strike, and her projects as models-without-quality.

From this attentive listening to forms that are poor, discarded or imperceptibly significant, a new differential economy appears, not only of artistic practice but also of any other production of world.

Joana Masó

Blanca Casas Brullet: Make Say

The large photographs of *Espacespages* (2009) work to transform the creative space of the blank page toward the enabled space of openness to the world. The image gives prominence to the emptiness of the room, almost a cell, in which an action takes place, dimly illuminated by a pair of windows that makes me think of two eyes that attentively contemplate the interior of a process of creation.

But what is the real and previously non-existent space to which the image opens us? The action recorded in the sequence of photographs shows the female body in intimate relationship with a page that has grown to accompany what appear to be the steps of a dance.

This bodily engagement with the support of artistic creation is a recurring scene in the work of other artists, as for example in the photographs of Francesca Woodman, in which the female body creates confluences with objects, angles and the textures of peeling walls. This is not simply a fictional space but a space that the image makes possible in what had seemed sealed.

In the search for meaning, the work of Blanca Casas Brullet appears to celebrate those signs from everyday life that have passively resisted the violence of the discourse of utilitarian communication. If we look, for example, at the photographs from the series *Mues [Changes]* (1999-2001), we see the world of insignificant objects, things aban-

done on the asphalt of the street, no longer part of the rhythms of urban life.

The artist seems to breathe new air into those discarded vestiges and rescue the last breath of life that still trembles in them, in the same way that the words used and tossed away in the impoverished language of utilitarian relationships reborn when we rescue them by uttering or writing them in living language.

If the insignificant is a worthless scrap in the chain of discourse, that which is crumpled and spurned is a vestige of what it has failed to become. Both notions are blanks or gaps that leave something hanging, in suspension. And, as we know from certain Italian female philosophers, particularly Luisa Muraro through and her reading of the figure of the beggar Penia in Plato's *Symposium*, only from a lack or deficiency is it possible to make a place for the other.

In this light, margins, crumpled rejects, accidents and so on are notions that seem to belong to a family of beggars whom the artist invites to the stage/feast of creation.

Indeed, in the book *Scénario [Script]* (2008) and the papers that make up the series *Esdeveniments [Events]* (2006-2009), Blanca Casas's drawing makes the schema spongy, and the line and the blank emerge together to form an aired network.

In *Debe Haber [Debit Credit]* (2012), too, the porosity is embodied in the line that the wash leaches. The drawing that is then created appears to emerge, in this case, literally from *under* the sheet, as if there had been a silent leakage of water, and when we see it we are made aware of the subterranean life that takes place inside walls. There is a kind of drawing, or better yet, there is a singular notion of drawing that makes the blank a space which guards meaning.

Curiously, this notion has been investigated by many artists from very different poetics, where the notion of the blank/void on the page is not always literal but signals a notion of subjectivity that shifts off the axis of the modern self. An embodied experience of being that is open to being thought in other terms more closely related to the female experience. And this is a notion that is also suggested in the readings of French women thinkers of difference, where the common stammering of so many of us is converted into figurative space, open to *the coming to writing*.

Assumpta Bassas

Repriser, to darn or mend, the domestic practice aimed at preserving the life of everyday clothes in order to save money, is now a little bit out of fashion – or actually obsolete – in a market economy centred on buying/throwing away. *La reprise* – recovery, accounting sequel or return to growth after a recession – has become the charming and predictive formula of the precursors, prophets and politicians of the economy.

In Reprises économiques (2008-2011) and *Llibre de comptes (2009)*, Blanca Casas Brullet displays the fragility of paper and the strength of thread. She orchestrates a functional displacement of the thread that holds together the pages – the spine of the book – to the thread that maintains the page, the darning that deforms and continues the lines of the grid.

Jean-Marie Baldner

Researcher at the EHESS and historian of photography. He has published studies on monetary theory, contemporary art and the digital image, and been a member of the *Dons, Monnaies, Prélèvements* team at the EHESS.



Espacespages (2009), 170 x 110 cm

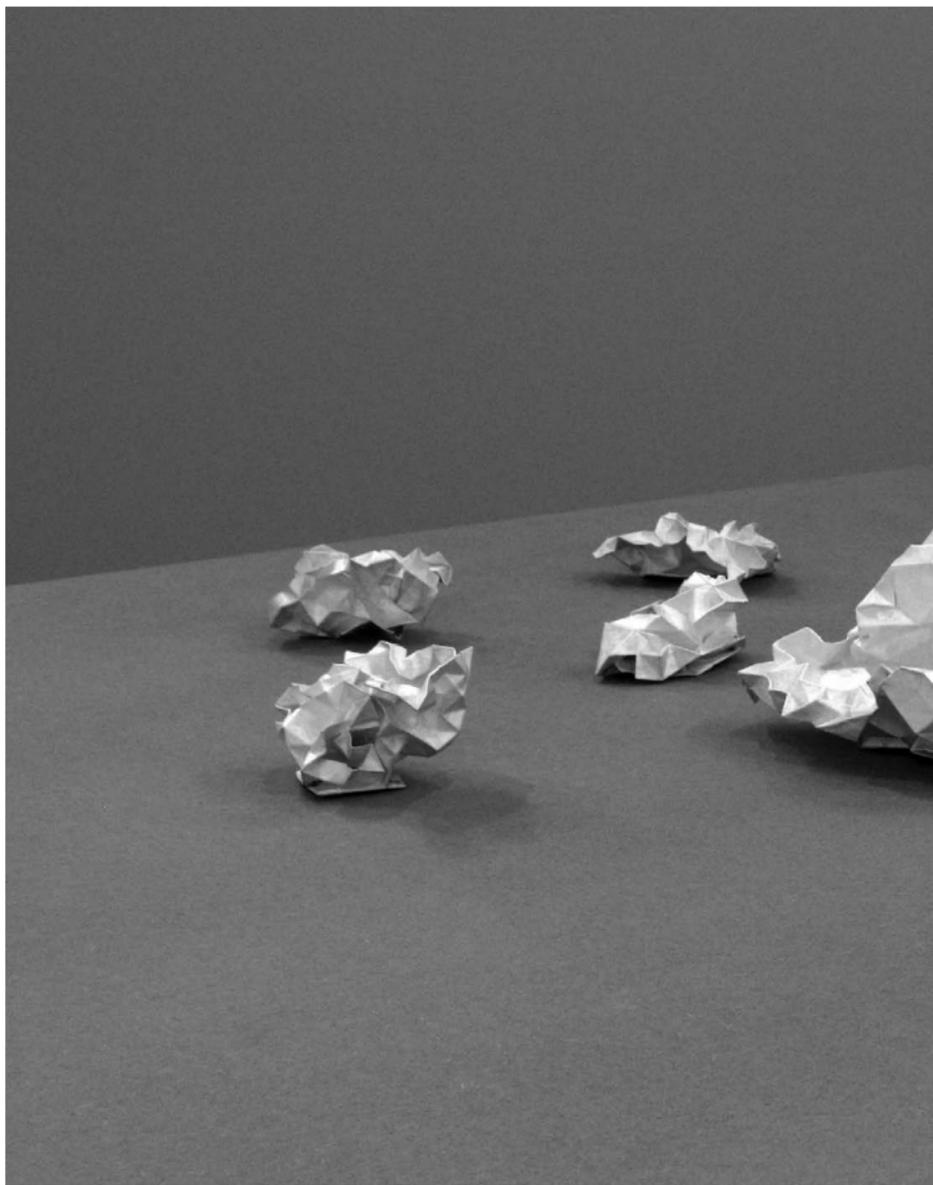




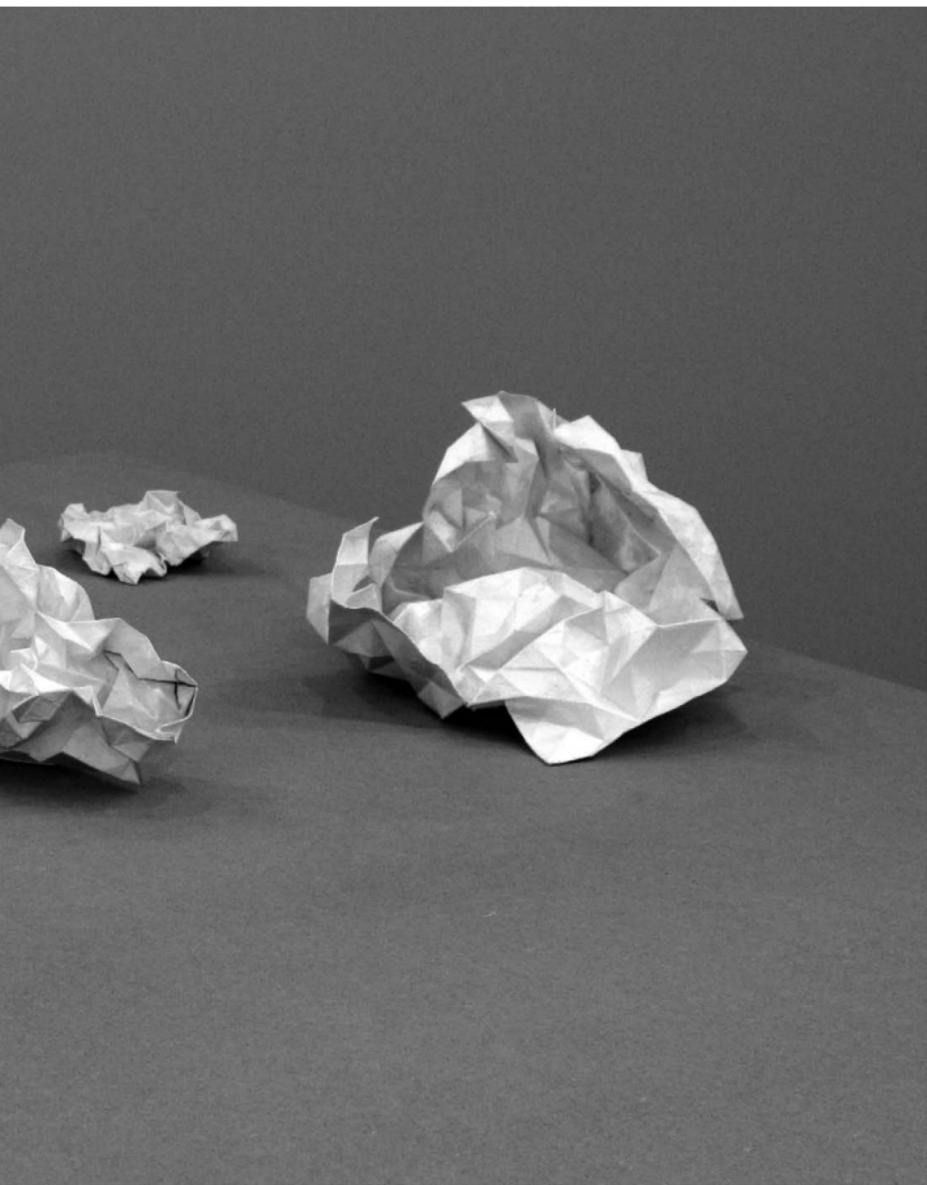
Blanc sous noir (Tableatelier) [White under Black (Tablestudio)]
(2012), 137 x 345 x 218 cm



Table sensible [Sensitive Table] (2013), 75 x 100 x 200 cm



Esborralls [Crumpled Papers] (2009-2011), variable dimensions





Raté au millimetre près, colour photograph (2013), 40 x 30 cm



Mues [Changes] (1999-2001), variable dimensions

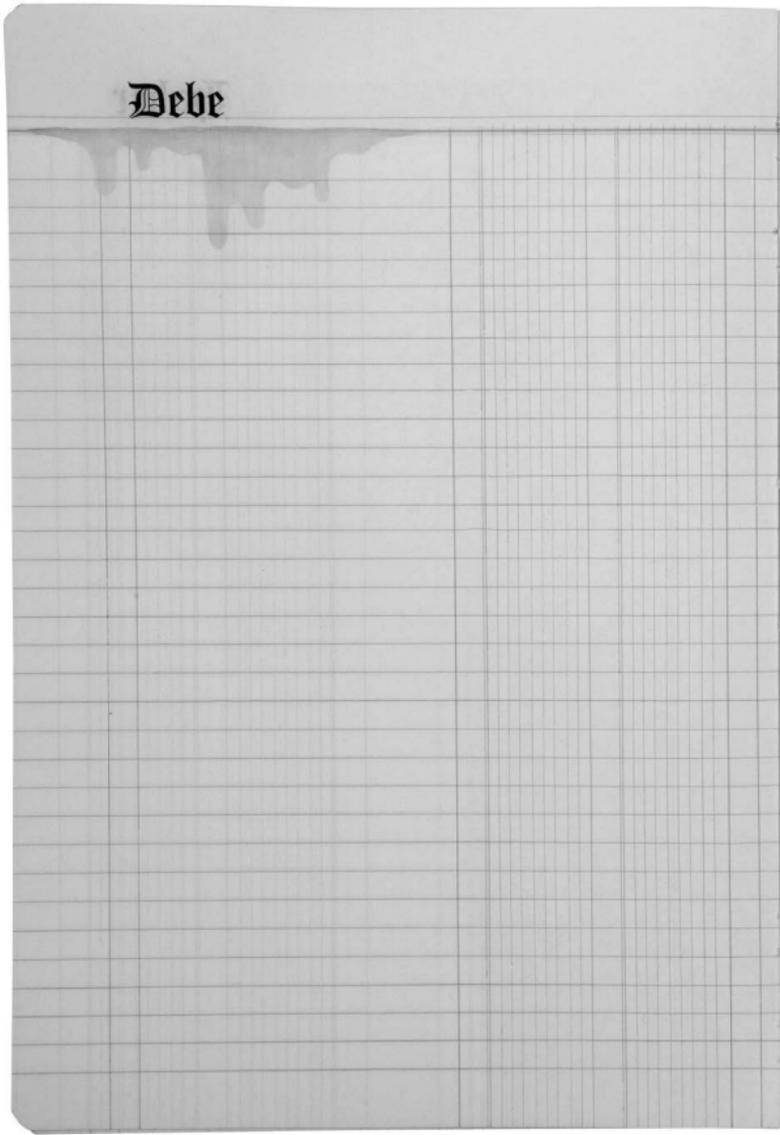


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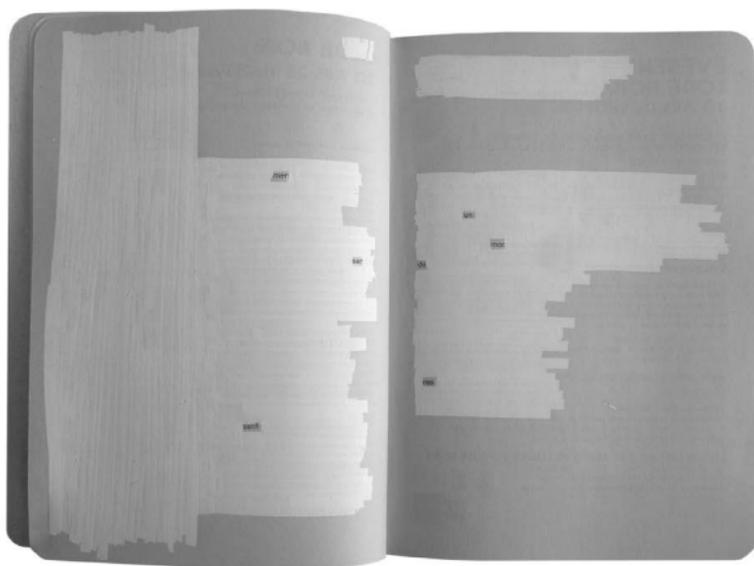
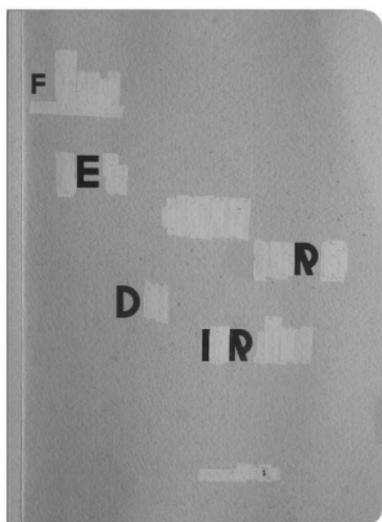
Reprises économiques (2008-2011), 9 x 15 cm

Dates	OPÉRATIONS	Dépenses ou DEBIT	Recettes ou CREDIT	SOLDES		
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Debe

The image shows a blank ledger page. At the top, there is a header section with the word "Debe" written in a black, gothic-style font. Below the header is a large grid area. The grid consists of a wide left column, followed by a narrow column, and then several columns of varying widths. The grid lines are thin and light gray. There is a faint, dark smudge or shadow near the top edge of the grid area.

Debe Haber [Debit Credit] (2013), 31 x 42 cm



Fer dir [Make Say] (2013-2014), 21 x 15 cm

**Excerpt from the conversations with
Blanca Casas Brullet**

When and where did the title White under Black come from?

Blanc sota negre/Blanc sous noir is the title of a piece and also the title of the catalogue of my exhibition *Déballage* at the Maison d'art Bernard Anthonioz in Nogent-sur-Marne in 2012.

The *white* would be both the support and the gesture of 'setting oneself to'. It is both *blank* (void) and *white*. But very often what we regard as a blank page already has a form, a kind of printed grid. Like any material support, it has its constraints, its guidelines or parameters... The white blank is therefore not so blank, it is not a starting from scratch and above all it is not virgin.

If the white blank is the existing support, the 'black' has more to do with the idea of gesture or transformation. For me, the space of transformation (blackening, disturbing) of the blank white into something else would be the studio space. I don't so much mean a traditional studio space as the 'idea of the studio'.

White under Black is thus a support understood in this way, a tablestudio. The table as metonymy of creation that unfolds to represent schematically the different planes of the studio space (floor, tables, wall), and that accommodates and observes this process. I try each time to deploy a new arrangement that speaks of the work of transformation.

You also work from and with photography. It seems to me that one of the areas you are interested in exploring is precisely the process of the birth of the visual image and, paradoxically, its relation to the (im)perceptible. You have written that you are interested in 'this behind-the-scenes space of the image'. Could you talk a little about the works you are presenting in this exhibition, and what they have to do with photography understood in this way?

First of all there are the *Brouillons argentiques*. They are pinhole photographs in which the objects photographed are preparatory studies for the *Esborralls [Crumpled Papers]*: in other words, some of the preparatory papers for the silver crumpled papers.

Both in these images and in the objects I call *Esborralls* I was interested in methodically reformulating the motif of the crumpled paper that ends up in the bin; what doesn't turn out right, the mistake. The crumpled papers conjugate a contradictory action: the rapid frenetic gesture of crumpling up and rejecting, and the methodical gesture of folding, or, in the case of the *brouillons argentiques*, the very slow exposure time. And, in both proposals, the idea of discarding the motif represented contrasted with the use of a noble material.

The objects that make up the *Esborralls* pieces are of silver-coated paper, silver on paper, and thus like photographic paper. This being so, they are also photosensitive. The white *Esborralls* gradually become darker, the black ones have been oxidized using various chemicals, and developed like a photograph. As a result, they are not the support for any image, they are images.

Second, there are the *Imatges per defecte* [*Images by Default*]. This is literally a series of images of defects and accidental compositions. The quality of the images themselves isn't very high; they barely reach the status of photographic objects, they still don't say very much. It's really about documentation for the work. Accidents, errors, defects to be reformulated plastically.

At another level, this notion of 'work table' links up with the freedom to work at a very unhurried pace and with 'obsolete' technology, as you have said. Would you be talking about a certain attitude of resistance to the rhythms of the models of production and life that require us always to position ourselves so utilitarian both in our own lives and in our relations with others? Would you be talking, then, about an attitude that is not only creative but also about a political creativity that emerges in this way of working without guarantees, in an attitude of attuned receptivity?

I think the latent time of experimentation imposes itself on the artwork. Taking things out of the place that in the first instance corresponds to them and letting various accidents occur in them can produce an initial anxiety over the unforeseen or disappointment at an unexpected result. But letting things be and allowing space and time for mistakes, for dead ends or for going the long way round is also what can make visible a resistance that may be material or poetic.

In the pieces in which I thematize the arrival of the image – the attempts to *make say* something – I try to find a balance between the controlled and the fortuitous, in a kind of *domestication* of the accident or the mistake, of incompleteness. I try to do this by reformulating it in a kind of *reenactment* of the defective and unsuccessful gesture. To produce a satisfactory defective gesture I need much time in order to execute it with precision and that entails a lot of mistakes.

Related Activities

Tuesday, 28 January,
7.00 p.m.

Opening

Saturday, 22 February,
10.00 a.m.

Guided tour with the artist

Saturday, 22 February,
10.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.

Entremestres workshop with the artist

This get-together is in the form of a seminar-workshop. After a presentation of the lines of work and a screening of the work of Blanca Casas Brullet, the artist will carry out a creative exercise to get us to think with our hands.

Free registration from 28 January to 22 February by email to cdona@ub.edu

Limited number of places: group of 25 people

Wednesday, 26 February,
7.00 p.m.

A talk by Evelyne Grossman on the work of Marguerite Duras

Evelyne Grossman will speak about how the author explored the black screen and the darkroom as matricial spaces of interiority linked to non-representative writing.

The series of talks and workshops will take place in the main hall at Arts Santa Mònica, La Rambla 7, 08002 Barcelona.

There will be simultaneous translation of the talks.

Course: Els Juliols de la UB

White under Black.
Unfolding the political significance of the blank in female creation.

Course registration from 19 May at www.ub.edu/juliols

White under Black. Works from the imperceptible

is a programme of exhibitions and talks directed by Assumpta Bassas and Joana Masó.

In conjunction with Maria José González and Montse Romani.

Corrent altern / Alternate **Current** is a series of get-togethers, resonances and overflows related to the exhibitions which will be announced over the course of the programme.

The sessions in the programme **Entremestres: Women visual artists and teachers workshops** will be run by the participating artists especially for women teachers.

With the support of:

Centre dona i literatura

UNESCO Chair in Women, Development and Cultures at the Universitat de Barcelona

DUODA – Centre de recerca de dones de la Universitat de Barcelona

IFB – Institut Francès de Barcelona

Xarxa de Biblioteques de la Generalitat de Catalunya Catalan libraries

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Els Juliols, UB

La Bonne – Centre de cultura de dones Francesca Bonnemaison

With the participation of:

+R Galeria (Barcelona)

Galerie Françoise Paviot (Paris)

Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades

Arrugat pastries kindly provided by the craft biscuitmakers El Rosal.

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Free admission

Tuesday to Saturday from 11 h to 21 h

Sunday and holidays from 11 h to 17 h

Closed Mondays

1714/2014



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