

**ELS ULLS ATURATS
EYES UNDER ARREST
MANEL ESCLUSA**

**CURATORIAL STATEMENT FOR ELS ULLS ATURATS
INTRODUCTION TO EXHIBITION**

The Series Els Ulls Aturats and several of the titles of its images were named by the Catalan poet Joan Brossa who was among the founders of both the group and the publication known as Dau-al-Set (1948), and one of the leading early proponents of visual poetry in Catalan literature.

Els Ulls Aturats (1978-79) or "Eyes under Arrest" represents a significant turning point in Manel Esclusa's work. The series was originally conceived as a reflection about the symbolic meaning of a glance or sight. However, influenced by a long period of illness affecting Esclusa at the time, a metaphysical imprint is everywhere felt in the images which became a personal testament of principles. The settings and environments coupled with an almost unreal lighting created ominous atmospheres in a set of photographs whose distinct personality would later be imitated by several artists flirting with photography at the time.

In the series, Esclusa controlled each detail that might have been infused with symbolic charge. The blindfolded eyes repeated throughout various images have a double reading. On one hand (considered by religious symbolism) the loss of vision represents a pathway towards spirituality. On the other, it also implies an allusion to death (men who were convicted to execution were blindfolded). In fact, the series contains several references to political events which had a deep impact on Spanish society four years earlier. Clearly alluding to the execution of several activists who died a few months shy of the dictator General Franco's, own death. Esclusa like many of his peers, felt compelled to make a statement against fascist ideologies. Still beyond this urgency to condemn political events, the images underline an irrefutable need to express the latent presence of death...of Esclusa's own death. Something which Vilem Flusser states as "coding the photographer's own concept of the world by transforming it into images". Thus the intentional selection of symbols is not gratuitous if we consider the definition of the Indian philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: "Symbolism is the art of thinking in images."

-Text by Alejandro Castellote

**INTRODUCTION TO SLIDESHOW PROJECTION
MANEL ESCLUSA**

Born in 1952 in Vic (Catalonia) Spain.

"Manel Esclusa achieves with his unsettling photographs, images caught within a triangle of night, shadow and skin."
- Rafael Argullol

Lights and shadows have been consistently present in the artist's life from early on. Beginning as a child who often played with a lantern deciphering shadows in the stillness of nearby coves, and later as a boy watching the magic of images emerge from shadows as they were being developed by his father in his lab and darkroom. Unlike commonplace associations regarding darkness and shadows as eerie or negative, for Esclusa darkness is the symbol of life and synonymous of creation. For him the absence of light is deeply connected to our life and linked with emotions. Darkness is more than a recurrent theme in his work, it is the element that binds his physical and metaphysical being. It is the catalyst of his personal universe.

After learning the craft from his father who was a photographer, he went as a young man to l'Stage Internationaux de la Photographie d' Arles and perfected his technical skills under Ansel Adams, Neal White, Arthur Trees, Dens Briat, Ian Dieuzaide, Lucien Clergue and other masters. Back in Spain, his works were shown in Galeria Spectrum, a pioneering space for photographers during the late years of the Spanish dictatorship.

From this point on, his work was produced as series that together with their titles, would be the first key to decipher his images. For instance, the series "Git" was titled after the Catalán word for expulsion or vomit. This was a clear allegory describing the belligerent and subversive spirit of the photos. Gradually new symbols appeared throughout Esclusa's photographs creating a rich imagery where elements like a female nude worked as a visual metaphor for Mother Earth. His explorations and disregard for convention would soon be expressed in large scale mural images. Esclusa deliberately broke away at this point from the formal conventions established by an orthodox circle of photographers.

With each series that Esclusa created, his language matured and his explorations with the camera became more elaborate. In the words of Joan Bofill: "Night is the temporal setting for most of Manel Esclusa's work, a temporal night, tending toward abstraction, that calls forth and dismisses apparitions. Often it is a deserted urban night, illuminated, mobile and therefore changing, an almost liquid, ethereal night in which solid objects can still be recognised and a luminous or still shady apparition can be discerned. Above all, it is a night in which time becomes visible. "

The following selection of his series were developed chronologically since the late 70's until today:

- 1978-1979** **Els Ulls Aturats**
Eyes Under Arrest
First significant series named by the poet Joan Brossa. Highly symbolic content influenced by a long period of illness affecting Esclusa at the time. Images portray the latent presence of death.

- 1980** **Venezia**
Venice
The series is significant for its spontaneous character. The series incorporates many elements defining Esclusa's future universe in which boats, vessels, water, silence, the city and the night are essential.

- 1979-1980** **Silepsis**
Night photography becomes the means to address the relationship of man and the urban city. It is a autobiographical trace of his passage through Barcelona where his iconic silhouette and interventions with a flash serve to document his existence. Darkness is articulated as Esclusa's personal paradise. Images are rich in expressionistic gestures.

- 1983-1996** **Naus**
Epic series of ships docked in Barcelona in which movement is of paramount importance. Esclusa introduces oscillations and movement of his tripod to create vibrations together with artificial lights to confer a mythological and monstrous quality to each vessel he shot. Movement is symbolic of life, and Esclusa's blurred images represent the ephemeral character of our perception.

- 1995-2000** **Scantac**
Recovers elements from Esclusa's visual vernacular and revisits darkness to reproduce his interior landscape. Images are self-portraits of his head created with a computed tomography machine used for medical diagnosis.

- 2000** **Aquariana and Aiguallum**
Two series which represent a study of fluidity, weightlessness, a renovation of the world and a symbol of purification. Water is framed by an absolute night.

- 2006** **El Jordi d'humus**

- The Mull Garden**
As a reflection of the creative process, Esclusa uses the manipulation of the accident and transformation of a film's emulsion to produce colorful large format photographs evoking the mull found in a forest. Destruction is the basis for reconstruction.
- 2008** **L' Ombra del Paisatge**
The Landscape's Shadow
The series is an exploration of the lights and shadows found in landscapes. Shadows speaking of uncertainties, fear and danger. The photos are a consequence of human sensations and thoughts. Contrasting notions of permanence and mutation, light and shadow, science and poetry.
- 1980-2010** **Urbs de Nit**
Nocturnal Cities
Reflects on the concept of urban landscapes set against the night to explore the anonymous spaces and hidden objects that are perceived as symbols of a city.
- 1980-2010** **Barcelona, pell i ombra**
Barcelona: Skin and Shadows
Barcelona is portrayed as a nocturnal city of spectres existing among architectural forms. Caught within the triangle of night, shadow and skin. Ethereal, suspended and alive.
- 2013** **Societat Anònima**
Anonymous Society
Faceless, motionless and anonymous mannequins shot at night across Barcelona's boutique windows, become a metaphor of the current state of society. Individuals have been stripped of their personality and other physical traits. Fashion accessories such as clothes and hats are the only recognizable and superfluous elements defining the identity human beings.

The works of Manel Esclusa are included in the following selection of public and private collections:

Polaroid Collection, Massachusetts, USA

Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama, USA

Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain

Fundación Vilacabras, Barcelona, Spain

CCCB (Contemporary Art Museum), Barcelona, Spain

Rafael Tous Contemporary Art Foundation, Barcelona, Spain

ARCO Madrid Collection

Telefónica Madrid Foundation

Musée de la Photographie Charleroi, Belgium

Musée R'eatu, Arles, France

Gabinet des Estampes et Photographie, Bibliothèque National, Paris, France

Pierre Borhan Collection, Paris, France