



## **EWVA European Women's Video Art Interview with Marisa Gonzalez**

Interview by Dr Laura Leuzzi, March 2016

- LL: When did you first start using video? What equipment did you use in your first video artworks?
- MG: I started using video in 1975-76 when I was doing my BA at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC.  
I was using the School video camera, I think it was a U-matic camera.
- LL: Why was video as a medium particularly attractive for you at the time?
- MG: It was the perfect tool to record in real time the action of a performance, as in my video in 1975 *Violence on Women*.
- LL: Before using video, did you use either photography or film? If yes, how did these practices informed your video experimentation?
- MG: Yes, I was using photography at the time. I also used photocopies to make my serial artworks, since the photocopier was the first tool that we could use to obtain an image in real time.
- LL: Why did you decide to pursue an art education in the USA?
- MG: Having graduated in June 1971 from the School of Fine Arts in Madrid, during Franco's dictatorship, I entered The Art School of Chicago in order to gain new experiences and new knowledge in a contemporary art centre
- LL: At the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, you joined the Generative Systems program, which pioneered the investigation of art and technology and was led by theorist, Sonia Sheridan. How much did this experience influence your growth as an artist?
- MG: This experience changed my life and my concept about art. I found a new way of expression, new tools and new languages about art.
- LL: When did you start to exhibit your video artworks in your native country, Spain? What feedback did you receive there about your videos?
- MG: I started to show my videos in 1984, as video installations, in my solo exhibition in Madrid, Gijón, etc., but I did not get any feedback.
- LL: When you were based in the USA, were you in contact with Spanish video artists and critics in Spain and in Europe? Did you personally know at that time fellow women artists who were working with video in Spain?
- MG: Not at all. I was in contact with only one video artist, a male living in the USA.
- LL: In 1978 you moved to Madrid. How was the video community and network at the time there?

- MG: The video community in Madrid did not exist then. But thanks to the video festivals that we organized in the 1980's, we showed video installations, exhibitions and videotapes from the best video artists in Europe and the USA, we gave the young people the chance to see video art. We also organized video workshops and video screenings at the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid
- LL: Were there any feminist collective groups producing or promoting video in Spain or in Europe to your knowledge at the time?
- MG: Not one that I was aware of. There were only other women video artists living in Barcelona, Eugenia Balcells, and Paloma Navares in Madrid.
- LL: In 1984 and 1986 you promoted the 1st and 2nd International Video Festival in Madrid's Circle of Fine Art. How was this event developed? Beside yourself, were other women artists involved?
- MG: When the Socialist Party won the Spanish elections in 1982, Spain started a new era of change to modernize the cultural scene of the country. I was elected member of the Board of Directors of the Circulo de Bellas Artes, from 1983 until 1990. Thanks to the new wave intellectuals fighting against Franco's cultural dictatorship, this Board changed the mentality of that old fashioned great palace. In order to open up to the new international movements in art, we transformed this old monumental building to a multi-cultural art center. This is why, at that time, I promoted the organization of the video Festivals in the most relevant art center in Spain.  
The other artist involved was the feminist artist Paloma Navares, who was the Director of the 1984 and 1986 video Festivals in Madrid
- LL: Examining women artists' video artworks from the 1970s and 1980s a number of common themes and approaches emerge. These included issues of maternity, sexuality, the representation of the female body and the role of women in society by media, violence against women. The latter was central.  
Did you personally know other women artists and feminist artists who at the time were working with video in Europe and USA who were addressing similar issues in their video practice? Did you know or were you familiar with their video artworks?
- MG: Yes, my teacher at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC, the feminist New York artist Mary Beth Edelson.
- LL: Feminist issues such as maternity and family are central in both of your works *Escena domestica con gusano verde* [Familiar scene with green worm] and *Escena domestica en movimiento* [Familiar scene with movement] (1983).  
How and why did you start involving your family, and in particular your son in your artistic and video practice?
- MG: I bought my first video camera in 1982, the first Sony portable camera. With my new camera I was experimenting and recording everything and in all places, mainly at home and in many cases with my family around. We experimented together with the new tool. At that time I considered my videos experimental, this is why I did not show them in video Festivals. In my solo exhibition *Presencias* in Madrid and Gijon, I showed the video *Presencias Debussy* in a video installation in 1984 and 1985.

- LL: In 1986 you were invited to show your work at *Processes Culture and New Technologies* at Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Did you show any video artworks in that occasion?
- MG: In 1986, in the first exhibition organized by the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (today Museo), the three main curators asked the artists working with new technologies at that time, to organize the multimedia exhibition because there were not curators specialized in those themes at that time. This is why we organized different sections. I organized a review of the first computer generated art works in Spain at the end of the 1960s and 1970s, I invited Sonia Sheridan to do a live show-demo every day during the exhibition and also an international Electrographic Exhibition, where I showed my electrographic work. Paloma Navares also organized the video area with international artists such as the Belgian Marie-Jo Lafontaine.
- LL: Did you collaborate with any TV broadcaster in Spain in the late 1970s and 1980s?
- MG: I was interviewed during the 1980s in a TV cultural program.
- LL: How did you show, distribute and promote your videos in the 1970s and 1980s, especially when you moved back to Spain?
- MG: I did not have any distribution. The only way to promote our videos were in the video Festivals and in the art scene in video-installations, as part of the exhibition with other art works.
- LL: Do you know of and did you participate in any other festival or event specifically dedicated to women's film and video in the 1970s and 1980s in Spain or in Europe?
- MG: Not at all, I did not know of any festival dedicated to women in Europe at that time.
- LL: The Guerrilla Girls pointed out the marginalisation of women artists' work in 1989, quote: "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female". Can you recall if and how this inequality of treatment affected your career when you started using video?
- MG: I agree absolutely with the GG, this is why in 2009 we created the intersectoral association MAV Mujeres en las Artes Visuales (Women in the Visual Arts) to empower women artists, critics, curators, teachers...  
My approach to video at that time was mainly experimental and 'domestic'.
- LL: How were your videos received by the critics and audiences at the time?
- MG: The art critics did not care about my videos in my exhibitions.
- LL: Due to the obsolescence of the early video formats (open reels, U-matic), many video artworks from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are lost today. How and when did you recover your tapes? Have you lost any of your videos from that period? Do you still preserve the original masters and where are they kept today?
- MG: I recovered part of my Betamax tapes a few years ago in my studio. This is why I could rescue some of my videos from the 1980s. But now, I am trying again to convert all of them but the company told me that the videotapes were very old and damaged.  
When I moved back to Madrid in 1977, I lost my first video from 1975, because I left it at the 'Washington Projects for the Arts'. I asked them a few years ago and they told me that all the

material from that time were in boxes and they could not locate it as they did not keep any record.

LL: When did you make your last video?

MG: I keep doing video all the time. I am editing now and still have many tapes to edit from recent projects.



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