

**3 MONTHS,
3 WEEKS,
3 DAYS.**

Interview with
Francesc Ruiz

Caterina Almirall. Your project originated with a complex investigation you had been developing for some time now. Could you tell us how it started?

Francesc Ruiz. I've been living between Barcelona and Ripoll for five years, and the routes and landscapes the R3 railway line, and the C-17 motorway, have come to be integrated into my day-to-day life in a continuous travelling shot which displays the rural, the industrial, and the urban. By observing this landscape, I started to examine certain imaginaries and poetics emerging both from the industrial states, and from road transportation, which I link to an idea of rarefied logistics or queer logistics, something which modifies these spaces by transforming them into places where other ways of living are possible.

The space of logistics, like any system, tends towards opacity, but in the case of the transport of pigs by road, this opacity disappears and becomes something much more complicated. I remember one day being very surprised to see a truck from a "pig genetics" company. I never even knew that term existed, even less how important the selection of the different breeds is to the meat industry with the aim of increasing meat production. The infrastructure of the meat industry remains hidden in the regions of Osona, Ripollès, Moianès, Selva, and Bages, often under cryptic names and in impersonal spaces. You need to visit these industrial areas and search the web for the names that appear on the signs to realise their extent in the land, and the high specialisation of the entire pig sector. We know how important meat is to the national economy, but we also know, thanks to the activism of the Grup de Defensa del Ter¹, that the ecological impact they generate is irreversible. The pollution of groundwater, increased by drought, transforms a large section of the Plana de Vic into a sacrifice zone where extractivism and the accumulation of capital prevail over life.

C.A. You were explaining to me how during these travels you discovered all the pig infrastructure. Can you give us some examples?

F.R. In the Ripoll Industrial estate, a company with a mysterious name, 333, opened for business. Behind this name lies one of the most important specialised service websites in the pig industry world². A little further on, hidden in a building in the shape like an ocean liner, is a company processing artificial cellulose casing for the sausage industry. At the Sora Industrial estate, they manufacture and customise bodies for livestock transport lorries. In Orís, just past a brothel called Nederland, there is a smell like a patisserie, which seems to come from a company that recycles uneaten bread to make animal feed. Along the route of the C-17, from time to time and depending upon the wind direction, the stench of slurry is wafted from the hidden pig farms, becoming especially intense when they are used to fertilise the fields to grow rapeseed and sorghum used in the manufacture of animal feed.

One day, at the entrance to Gurb, I made a very inspiring discovery. At the intersection between the C-17 and the Eix Transversal (Transversal Arterial Road), just below an elevated section of the C-25, there is a roundabout where a whole community of rabbits lives, and you can see their burrows, and when they come out at dusk, they seem to be watching the trucks go by. Very close to this place, on the facade of a macro milk processing plant, we find the phrase "animal welfare" signposted. All of this generates a vision of what could be a kind of animal autarky which could have been established there. I think of this roundabout as a sanctuary, one of these shelters which welcomes animals who have been able to escape the chain of exploitation and meat production, and who can be free, or who may live in another way. Rabbits are still a pest, a sign of the ecosystem's disintegration, but it never ceases to amaze me that they are still there every time I pass by.

Along another route, I stumbled upon a meat industry complex, a macro slaughterhouse where several of the main meat processing and logistics companies in the territory are based, and where 30,000 pigs are slaughtered daily³. The trucks transporting pigs come and go continuously, and amidst all this movement, the slaughterhouse workers, who are mostly of a migrant population subjected to very harsh working conditions, arrive or leave work on scooters and bicycles, crossing paths with the trucks, according to reports from Càrnies en Lluita⁴.

1 The Grup de Defensa del Ter has been an important source of information for this research. The GDT is an ecological citizens' association, which was founded in 1989, with the aim of recovering the natural environment of the River Ter Basin. <https://www.gdter.org/>

2 <https://web.333corporate.com/>

3 A number similar to the number of inhabitants of the town of Vic, and which exceeds European regulations on animal exploitation.

4 Càrnies en Lluita is a support group for workers in struggle from the ESFOSA slaughterhouse in Vic, and also for meat industry workers in the Osona region. https://www.facebook.com/CarniesEnLluita/about_details?locale=es_ES

C.A. Why did you decide to present this research as an exhibition after ACVIC invited you?

F.R. When I received the invitation to exhibit at ACVIC, I already knew that I wanted to encompass this entire landscape which the pig industry defines, knowing that I could relate it to certain themes which I have pursued in my practice during the last few years. Firstable, I was curious about all the previously mentioned logistics of the production line of the meat industry, the poetics of distribution, in this case, animal distribution.

And secondly, it was a unique opportunity for me to work with alternative *hentai*, which is a type of pornographic cartoon which places no limits on the representation of bodies, and in which they mutate infinitely. Responding to some kind of alternative physics, they swell, they stretch, they dissolve, and they transform. They are trans-bodies in a broad sense. And its transitivity lets us explore new configurations of desire while defining new sexual mythologies in tune with BDSM fantasies of objectification and erasure. These are things I have been working on⁵, alone, and also along with various collectives.

In imagining the pig through the lens of *hentai*, the pig seemed like a pornographic animal to me, carrying a whole series of negative moral connotations which stigmatise it, associating it with filth and an exacerbated sexuality; a burden which has more to do with the alienating exploitation system in which the animal is registered than with its social behaviour in freedom.

Within the framework of BDSM gay subcultures, animalisation has been a continuous recourse when referring to certain fetishes, for example, bears, dogs, and pigs. When asking a critic friend for a book that linked pigs and logistics, he recommended Samuel R. Delany's pornographic novel *Hogg*⁶, which explores the subculture of pigs, organised by an abject, extreme and amoral sexuality, within a community of truck drivers.

C.A. The research you carried out is not only about journeying through the land, but is also a more formal investigation based upon a load of reading, embracing a diversity of fields and disciplines, and delving into the various themes which this project addresses.

F.R. From the opposite view, one of the most stimulating books which I read while preparing the project was *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990) by Carol J. Adams⁷. This essay draws a relationship between the exploitation of animals and that of women under patriarchy, in which based upon the term "absent referent", the author points out the processes of fragmentation and objectification which erase the reference to the living animal from the meat we eat, which has been slaughtered, allowing the system to be oppressive. She also speaks of "feminised protein" to refer to milk, eggs, and derivatives, which are products from the gestation of female animals. Also it delves into the cultural representations which animalise the body of women, and feminise the bodies of animals. Carol J. Adams introduces veganism and anti-speciesism as a radical feminist political practice⁸. Her text is key to understanding all of this, but on the other hand, it is highly interesting because it is still a work of literary criticism, in which she develops a theory that confronts the patriarchal meat texts, and the corpus of vegan texts, comprising contributions from pioneers of anti-speciesist and vegan feminism, in which classics such as Frankenstein⁹, the story of a vegan monster made of pieces of meat, have a place.

Thus, I connected *hentai* with the monstrosity of Carol J. Adams's flesh texts, and these connected themes, added ideas and inspirations to my initial intuition, and I had connected them both; although it should be noted that Carol J. Adams's anti-pornographic concept collides with that of alternative *hentai*. But I was interested in bringing them together, because I wanted to talk about representation. It wasn't as much a matter of dealing with these concepts, as of being captivated by them, and being emotionally touched by all these references.

C.A. You also mentioned some references within the field of comics.

F.R. A work which has helped me consider from another point of view is *Katz*, a comic by

5 Institut d'Estudis del Porno was a project created by Ona Bros, Lucía Egaña and Francesc Ruiz, emerging from a need to critically analyse and experience the explicit representation of sexuality. It operated from 2019 to 2023 as a laboratory for experimentation and learning, and a space for thought production.

6 Delany, Samuel R. (1995/2004) *Hogg*, Black Ice Books.

Samuel Ray Delany (New York, April 1st 1942) is an American science fiction writer. Most of his literary productions are sexually themed with an approach which not many other authors have developed. Some of his books are considered pornographic, as stated by the author himself. He has also written texts about, and has also written in his autobiography about, his own experience being a black, gay man.

7 Adams, Carol J. (1990/2016) *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Madrid: ochodoscuatro. Online: <https://ochodoscuatroediciones.org/libro/la-politica-sexual-la-carne/>

8 Carol J. Adams (New York, 1951) is a feminist writer and animal rights activist, author of several books which explore the relationship between the oppression of women in our society, and animal exploitation. Francesc Ruiz discovered her after he read a quote made by Paul B. Preciado in his book *Dysphoria Mundi* (2022).

9 Shelley, Mary (1818) *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*.

Ilan Manouach¹⁰ which deconstructs *Maus* by Art Spiegelman¹¹, a comic which tells the life of a Polish Jew who survived the Nazi holocaust, inspired by his father's life. In the original *Maus*, the mice are the Jews and the Nazis are cats; but in *Katz*, Ilan Manouach made a *détournement* where all the characters are cats¹². What he was saying was this: how was it possible that in denouncing the holocaust, he who was Jewish, fell into the trap of speciesism connoting mice as good, and cats as bad. The moment all the characters become of the same species, the reading ceases to be biased.

C.A. Can you tell me about the *SHMOOS*, the central character of your exhibition?

F.R During the process of conceptualising the exhibition, I began to wonder whether or not to represent the pigs, and also whether it was necessary to deal with the pigs in some other way. The cultural references are endless; the Disney representations of the three little pigs, underground comics, the illustrations used by Osona's meat industry, anti-totalitarian dystopian fables such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, or the use of pigs to represent the police in the *Black Panther Coloring Book*¹³

I immediately remembered a very particular comic book character, the *shmoo*¹⁴. It was created by Al Capp in the 1940s as part of a strip called *Li'l Abner*. It is an invented animal, which has a rounded, friendly shape, with two legs, that lives in a hidden valley until one day it is discovered and brought to civilisation. It is then discovered that this animal, which reproduces very quickly, offers eggs, milk, and butter¹⁵ in a spontaneous, generous and loving way. Not only that, but it slaughters itself so that it can be cooked and eaten. Fried, its meat tastes like chicken; grilled it tastes like beef. Nobody goes hungry with *shmoos*. This abundance clearly clashes with capitalist logic, so that, when warehouses and suppliers discover that no one is buying their products, even that no-one is working anymore, because no-one needs to work, a struggle begins at the state level to eliminate *shmoos*. It must be noted that the context in which this character was created, halfway between the 1940s and the 1950s, coincides with the beginning of the Cold War, and the communist threat was intended to be eradicated using all available propaganda tools.

This is how I finally chose to use the cute figure of the *shmoos* to talk about the pig, and to generate a strange and different space. It is a character with its own mythology, which does not suffer during its own exploitation. What I don't know is to what extent it represents a certain cynicism¹⁶, but it is undoubtedly another starting point from which to explore what is happening in a region in which there is animal exploitation. The *shmoo* occupies all the roles, that of pigs, and that of industrial workers, in a strange equalisation that speaks of animalising and humanising, of masters and slaves. We continually reinforce the *absent referent* with the *shmoo*, but generating another space for speculation, that of a possible food utopia with this animal which sacrifices itself out of love. This fact is closely related to the BDSM found in alternative *hentai*, in which there is an absolute surrender that is also loving, although it is associated with total erasure, annihilation, or extreme objectification.

C.A. How will you concretise all this research in the exhibition spaces of ACVIC?

F.R. When I came to visit the space, seeing the ACVIC's *terrazzo floor*, having completed all the research, it reminded me a slice of sausage, a white sausage, or a dry-cured sausage like the catalan *fuet*, these speckled stony meat-coloured or fat-coloured particles. Therefore the floor of the space itself continuously recapitulates what happens throughout the region. And once you realise that, you no longer see the speckled stone, but instead the speckled meat. Suddenly you are walking on a bed of meat. That's why I decided that this realisation should affect the result, and that the floor meat had to be raised up as a mural on the walls of the exhibition space. And, finally, this mural should reflect the different landscapes of meat --referring to the meat texts by Carol J. Adams again-- which ultimately constitute the landscape of the Plana de Vic and its area of influence, as I mentioned at the beginning of the interview. Therefore, ACVIC is the best place for this exhibition, precisely because of where it is located, and because of the floor it has.

When creating the mural, I wanted to identify places which I thought would explain the production cycle of meat in the Plana de Vic. In the first room I wanted to represent the

10 Ilan Manouach is a multi-disciplinary artist, concept comics artist, musician, and editor, with a special interest in comics and post-digital comics. He completed a PhD at Aalto University in comics epistemology, exploring the intersections between contemporary comics, art and poetry. His work claims the importance of comics as a self-reflexive material medium, unaffiliated with any general history of art.

<https://ilanmanouach.com/>

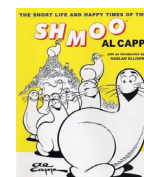
11 *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* is a graphic novel completed in 1991 by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman. It is an alternative comic published in instalments between 1980 and 1991 in *Raw* magazine.

12 *Katz* is an exact copy of the French version of *Maus*, where all the characters are cats. It was published in 2011 and was made public in the context of the Angoulême International Comics Festival in 2012, which Spiegelman then chaired. Flammarion, the publisher of the French version, denounced and eventually had *Katz*'s copies destroyed. Manouach, Ilan (2011) *Katz*, Belgium: La Cinqième couche. <https://ilanmanouach.com/work/katz/>

13 *Black Panther Coloring Book*, S_U_N Books & Editions, New York/LA, NY/CA, 2015. Online: <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/41763/>



14 Al Capp, *The Short Life and Happy Times of the Shmoo*



15 Drawing by Francesc Ruiz for the exhibition.



16 Adams, Carol J. (2020) *The Pornography of Meat*, Bloomsbury.

logistics landscape of the C-25 with the pig farms, the crops fertilised with slurry used to produce feed, the river Ter and the aquifers, and the possibility of an animal sanctuary. The second room shows the meat industry complex and the Gurb industrial estate, a meat processor, and a charcuterie.

C.A. Can you tell us about the title of the exhibition?

F.R. In the side room I have placed the piece that gives the exhibition its title. It is an illustrated calendar which only covers three months, three weeks, and three days. It refers to the company named 333 which, as I mentioned, is in Ripoll. When looking for the meaning of the three threes, I found out that it is something that comes from the world of livestock farmers, it is a way of counting the gestation period of a sow, which is equivalent to three months, three weeks, and three days.

The calendar shows an ultra-sexualised image of a skin-changing *shmoo*, a *hentai* image which epitomises the Pirelli-type nude girl posters and calendars of the 1970s, which, I discovered, once decorated the walls of the tanneries¹⁷.

C.A. From the outset, it was clear that the exhibition would have to be expanded outside the exhibition space and intervene in specific places throughout the town.

F.R. In the course of the investigation, obviously we approached other spaces within the town. One is the Tanneries, which are right in front of ACVIC, on the other side of the river Meder¹⁸, the river where all the waste from the tanneries went. Another such place was the MAP, the Museum of Leather Art, as, since we were discussing animal exploitation and the meat industry, we also had to discuss tanneries and the leather industry and their relationship with the region. In Vic, there used to be a very strong tradition of the tannery industry, which has all but disappeared, and which has been relocated to China. The leather industry collected the surplus from the food industry, the inedible skins, which were then used by the footwear industry, and also the clothing industry. Based upon these facts, the idea was to expand the art interventions to other places.

The Tanneries' building has been rehabilitated recently following a now generalised trend towards recovering technological and industrial heritage. In its architecture, we can still appreciate what the entire working process was like, from the basement, at the level of the river, which connects with the water, to the part of the drying process which was located in the upper floor which is more ventilated. The renovation has generated useful contemporary work spaces, two coworking areas.

The intervention in this location references the calendars with female nudes which were originally hung around the space, but with a *hentai* perspective upon the transformation and mutation of the *shmoos'* bodies. There are all of these *clichés* which refer to hard labour related to the skin, to the body, and to the flesh, such as working your fingers to the bone. At this point, I mean, bodies which are subjected to various temporal regimes, establishing a relationship between the exploitation time of the intensive farm, the working day at the tanneries, the length of time it takes to tan the skin, and the 24-hour work of the self-exploited contemporary worker.

C.A. Can you tell us about the intervention which you have prepared for the MAP?

F.R. Finally, there is the intervention at the MAP, Leather Art Museum¹⁹, which houses the collection of Andreu Colomer Munmany²⁰, who was a Vic industrialist who owned a leather company with offices around the world. He took advantage of business trips to acquire pieces of leather handicraft, and he eventually accumulated a collection of 2,000 pieces, which displayed in his co-private museum which, upon his death, was bequeathed to the city through the Diputació (Provincial Council).

This atypical museum is organised on the basis of the obsession of an industrialist for collecting, it has no specific arrangement, but is a mixture of ethnological museum, arts and crafts museum, and applied arts museum. It is a museum of objects, but it is also a very personal museum, which, at the same time, has a strange and fascinating museogra-

17 An image from the 1964 Pirelli calendar.



18 There are various references connecting the name of the river with the poor quality of the water, caused by the historic dumping of waste from the tannery industry. In Catalan "meder" sounds very similar to "merder" coming from "merda" that means "shit" or "trash". https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%ADo_M%C3%A9der
19 <http://www.museuartpellvic.cat/>
20 <http://www.museuartpellvic.cat/el-fundador/>

phy. It touches on many forgotten and ancestral techniques. We can connect the objects in this museum to ideas such as Cronenberg's "new flesh"²¹, by way of a consideration of how skin is used to make other things, and of how skin is associated with the objectification of bodies, so that a reading through the lens of *hentai* can be made of everything that happens there. It is full of prostheses such as riding saddles, which unite the human and the beast, prostheses for fighting, hunting or war, such as shields, or ammunition belts and holsters. There are in the museum, chairs and thrones as symbols of power, damasks and wrought leather that ostentatiously decorated the walls of churches and of the palaces of potentates. And we find many trunks, chests, boxes, which is what captivated me the most, because they represent a huge amount of logistical elements used for transport during the colonial period. Alice Thomas in *The birds of the air*²² imagines the story of an ancient banquet at which dead birds come to life again. This suggested to me this idea that all the objects in the museum could come back to life, embodying the soul of the skin of the animal with which they were made, moving frantically looking for the exit, and performing all the traits of the colonial matrix in which they belong.

Here the idea was to make a minimal intervention in the form of a cartoon-guide which can be read on a mobile device from a QR code²³. The cartoon-guide presents a scroll of 5 metres in which all these reflections are poured over the objects, which take on the *shmoo*'s morphology.

21 Fernández Gonzalo, Jorge (2019) Políticas de la Nueva Carne. Perversiones filosóficas en David Cronenberg. Madrid: Holobionte ediciones. (Politics of the New Flesh. Philosophical perversions in David Cronenberg) "Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg is the father, or at least one of the leading representatives, of an aesthetic and a line of thought called the 'New Flesh'. In his cinematic work, the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, the flesh and the mechanical, the sexual and the asexual, the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, are broken down in a catalogue of perverse intertwinings which push our conception of corporeality to the limit".» <https://edicionesholobionte.com/politicas-de-nueva-carne-jorge-fernandez-gonzalo-cronenberg/>

22 Alice Thomas, 1981. *The birds of the air*. New York: The Viking Press. Quoted by Carol J. Adams Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* (2020), p. 385.

23 <https://2010-2023.acvic.org/ca/proyectos-expositius/4207-3-mesos,-3-setmanes,-3-dies>



Opening Saturday 28th September 12.00 pm, ACVIC.

Visit with the artist to Les Adoberias interventions and to the Museu de l'Art de la Pell, Saturday 28 September at 5.00 pm.

ACVIC Centre d'Arts Contemporànies
San Francesc 1, Vic
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From Tuesday to Friday from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and from 5.00 p.m. 7.00 p.m.
Saturday from 11.00 a.m. 2.00 p.m. and from 5.00 p.m. 7.00 p.m.

Closed on public holidays.

Guided tours and educational activities at the exhibition: please book in advance by calling ACVIC.
Free service.

Adoberies
Carrer de les Adoberies, 8, Vic
Opening hours depend on visits.
Free entrance.

MAP. Museu de l'Art de la Pell
C. Arquebisbe Alemany, 5, Vic
Tel: 93 883 32 79 • www.museuartpellvic.cat

From Tuesday to Friday from 10.00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and from 4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.
Saturday from 11.00 a.m to 2.00 p.m. and from 4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. Sundays and holidays from 11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.

December 24th and 31st from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The Museum will be closed on Mondays, January 1st and 6th, Easter Monday, and December 25th and 26th.

Admission to the museum is free.



Ajuntament de Vic



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura



Associació per a les
Arts Contemporànies