



Frac Centre-Val de Loire presenting

**VIOLATED TERRITORIES**  
How the future can change the past

# VIOLATED TERRITORIES

## How the future can change the past

*"Women's resolve for emancipation took place in the realm of religion long before they could conceive of political solutions to their situation."<sup>1</sup>*

The research we present at the Biennale d'Art et d'Architecture in Vierzon assumes the creative challenge of the real and imaginary reconstruction of literary and archaeological places and territories that were inhabited and organised by women in the desert at the beginning of primitive Christianity. As the feminist historian Gerda Lerner states, these women belong to one of the groups that precede the creation of feminist consciousness throughout history.

The main sources of visual inspiration have been the archaeological landscapes of the Kellia and Scetis deserts in Egypt, once inhabited by the *ammas* or Desert Mothers, the Karakum or black sands, the desert of Turkmenistan, as well as the medieval cells and the cave hermitages.

The different denominations of the hermitages reveal the array of constructions dedicated to worship and how widespread cave life was: place names of Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Roman (or Neo-Latin), Paleo-Slavic, Arabic, German origin appear in the repertoires of cave churches. This variety can also be seen in the epigraphy of the hermitages and in the language spoken by the original communities (Greek, Coptic, Latin, Armenian, Slavic).

As part of our research, we travelled to the hermitage of Valdecanales, near the town of Rus in Jaén, Spain. We walked through the territory and made drawings with different graphic techniques. This hermitage is the only known example from the Visigoth period in the south of the Iberian Peninsula.

The visual written documentation taken from different readings that describe the anchorite life of women in the heart of medieval cities has also been a source of inspiration. In this case, we found examples of minimal architecture, or cells in the walls of medieval churches; that were inhabited by "recluses" or "immured" women who decided to voluntarily seclude themselves seeking an alternative to patriarchy.

*Ammas* of the desert, hermits, recluses or immured; are all accompanied by "a story of insurrection that subverts the religious and pious text that fills the centre of the pages..."<sup>2</sup> of the books of written (male) History.

The re-construction of these habitats and territories through drawings, collages, plaster sculptures and photomontages have questioned our imagery and our thought processes. A complex form of approach to the contemporary thought and the History of women who precede us in the construction of feminist consciousness.

With the latest archaeological discoveries, made known in March 2021, the thesis that we share and has been defended by numerous female historians and theologians from around the world has confirmed once again —that the vast majority of women leaders, anchorites and the communities of primitive Christianity have been silenced by the interest of the ecclesiastical institutions and by the patriarchal culture of those who govern them—.

According to the archaeologists<sup>3</sup> *"These excavations reveal a different image of early monasticism than the one offered by the official texts of the Church. It shows that those texts were produced with a political agenda in mind, trying to create a certain vision of monasticism that was centred on those founding figures. But that was Church propaganda,"* says Ghica. *"We do not dispute that these figures were founders of the monastic movement, but that other groups existed",* he points out, and *"the site shows that early monasticism was richer than we are told in literary sources."*



no truth in the past  
limited truth in the present  
whole truth in the future  
for all  
whole freedom in the future  
limited freedom in the present  
no freedom in the past.

Who? are? you? medieval? free? woman?  
Who? are? we? contemporary? free? woman?  
Who? are? you? future? free? woman?

FREEDOM = RIGHT                      RIGHTS = POLITICS  
free WOMAN = WOMAN with rights      WOMAN with rights = WOMEN in politics  
FEMINISM

hidden                      tolerated                      cherished  
feminists of the past      feminists of the present      feminists of the future  
oppression                      condonance                      valued

Florela Gibaja Gómez, Giulia Pedlarco, Maria Wagner







## Violated territories

What kind of violence is a violation?

It is a violence of maximum intensity, a feature of the patriarchal culture.

Violation is not a sexual act; it is related to the desire for power.

It is about taking control of an object/subject, territory/body in a literal or symbolic way. Within what we define as symbolic violation, invisible crimes should be included, which affect the "construction of being" in different ways, as in the case of the exclusion of the History of women in the construction of the narrative of historical events and, the exclusion of the History of women from the narrative of the spiritual facts of humanity.

To violate history is to ignore the History of more than half of the planet's population.

Gerda Lerner explains:

*"...women had a very different relationship with History and with historical processes than men. It is useful to distinguish between history — the events of the past — and History that has been written — the events of the past as interpreted by later generations of historians —. The second is a cultural product, by which the events of the past have been selected, ordered and interpreted. It is precisely in this History that has been written where women have been overshadowed or marginalized."*

It should be stressed that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Catholic Church<sup>4</sup>, works to reaffirm the patriarchal ideology, and it does so with the first account of creation (written in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC) where it is stated that — woman was created for man (1 Cor II, 8-9); and from the male body—.<sup>5</sup>

It is only recently, when feminist theology has seen the need to rewrite the history of the first Christian communities in the desert; to manifest that the spiritual life of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries began with equality of power between women and men.

*Ammas*<sup>6</sup> like Sarah, Synclitica and Theodora are paradigmatic examples of lives lived without intermediaries. In some writings of the time the egalitarian character of their way of life is affirmed.

We are made aware of the many names and deeds of these women through *The Lausiatic History* written in 418-420 by Palladius of Galatia, when he was Bishop of Helenopolis, a city in Asia Minor. Some of the thoughts of the Desert Mothers were collected in a short and direct form called Apothegms:

*Amma Synclitica said: "If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another."*

*"It is said about Amma Sarah that another time two old men, great anchorites from Pelusio came to see her. As they travelled, they said to each other: 'Let's humiliate this old woman.' They said to her: 'Be careful not to become conceited thinking to yourself: Look how anchorites are coming to see me, a mere woman.' But Amma Sarah said to them, 'According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts.'"*

People have been fighting for their rights for decades trying to find a solution for improving their life quality

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In the past, during the Middle Ages, some of them made even a choice to **abandon** their previous abundance and lead an ascetic and frugal life instead. The decision about keeping away from the **society** may have derived from a spiritual desire to

i s  
o l a  
t e

we exist in the society  
we do not live together  
we are lacking in empathy  
we suffer from lack of sensitivity in an approach to living in a society  
we are blind

Julia Kudla





## How the future can change the past

Re-creating, re-defining, re-interpreting written (male) History is a work in progress that, although it is changing society, is a formula that is not within the reach of all women. Do not forget it requires solid training and much determination.

However, we can find more opportunities to study History, creatively rethink historical places and habitats, and from all that intense and unique process, we can write and communicate our theories; either with words, with works or with images.

Although abstract thought enjoys prestige, it is with our hands that we delve into the complexity of concepts.

The culture of women, their knowledge and personal growth is characteristic of *The Thinking Hand* which, as the title of the architect J. Pallasmaa explains, is an existential and embodied wisdom.

Part of the research has consisted in reading History from the observation of images of historical territories or architectures of the past. *The Thinking Hand* illuminates certainties that have encouraged both research and imagination.

The discovery of an aerial image of the Kellia<sup>7</sup> desert during the work process confirmed that the phenomenon of hermitism reached a dimension little known today and far removed from the widespread image of the of the solitary monk sitting on a rock in the desert.



In the photo, as far as the eye can see, we perceive the traces of some settlements partially covered with sand: grouped cells, which were inhabited by semi-anchorites from the 4<sup>th</sup> century of our era, until the 9<sup>th</sup>. It contains approximately 1.500 structures, in a surface of 125 square kilometres. "In Egypt, at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century there were more than 66,000 *abbas* (fathers) and more than 20,000 *ammās*"<sup>8</sup>.

With the hands that create, and that link the intelligible with the sensitive perception of bodies, we have become aware that women have built History. We can create life and also illuminate historical events.

The work that we have entitled *The Table of the Women of the Desert*, redefines the question about History, while responding to how the future can change the past.

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### How the future can change the past

## #3 Biennale Artchitecture

FRAC CENTRE-VAL DE LOIRE

Infinite Freedom, a World for a Feminist Democracy

Vierzon/Orléans

From 16 September 2022 to 1 January 2023

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#fraccentre



Direction régionale  
des affaires culturelles



FRAC Centre-Val de Loire is a public  
institution of cultural cooperation  
created by the Region Centre-Val de  
Loire, the State and the City of Orléans



1- Lerner, G. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness. From the Middle Ages to 1870*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.

2- Hustvedt, S. *Mothers, Fathers, and Others: new essays*. London, Sceptre, 2021.

3- Español, M. "Una misión arqueológica descubre el monasterio cristiano más antiguo de Egipto," *El País*, 14 March 2021.

4- It is currently called the Dicastero for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is the successor of the old Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition (1542). It is a collegiate body of the Holy See to guard the correct doctrine of the Church.

5- Forcades T., in *Fleitas Morales*, M.B. 2021 "Desde el desierto una propuesta feminista despierta y comprometida," *El Retorno de lo Sagrado*. Madrid. Ed. Dykinson, 2021.

6- Amma or Mother of the desert is a neologism, coined in feminist theology by a analogy with Fathers of the desert. Amma is primarily used for Christian ascetic women who lived in the desert of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

7- Antoine Guillaumont (L'Arbrele, 1915 - Paris, 2000) was a scholar of Eastern Christianity, Coptic, Syriac and ancient monasticism, who discovered, in 1964, the Kellia, a set of cells inhabited by anchorites from the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

8- Espinar Jiménez, M. and Espinar Moreno, M., "Vida espiritual y material en el siglo IV: anacoretas y eremitas de Egipto. Notas sobre comida y vestido," *Estudios sobre patrimonio, cultura y ciencias medievales*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2017.

Front cover: Collaborators and students in the seminar "Art, architecture and urban context" of the UPV, Interior appearance, Ahmad, 2022. [It does not only refer to not acting violently, but also not wanting to] Mould excavated and poured into plaster, 29.5 x 21 cm

From left to right: Karolina Doniec, *Fragment of the facade with horseshoe arches cut out of the rocks*, 2022. [Hermitage of Valdecanales]. Drawing, mixed media, acrylic paint and markers on paper, 42 x 29.5 cm

Image 2: Karolina Doniec, *Wall with holes. Recreation of a fragment in situ*, 2022. [Hermitage of Valdecanales]. Drawing, mixed media, acrylic paint and markers on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm

Image 3: Ecem Bengisu Üncü, *Karakum cells*, 2022. Photocollage, 42 x 29.5 cm

On the left: *Aerial view of the Kellia desert*. All rights reserved

Main Image: Collaborators and students in the seminar "Art, architecture and urban context" of the UPV.

*The Table of the Women of the Desert*, 2022. A set of plaster pieces, 360 x 240 cm





**The first amulets, not found in the New Testament**  
Moses' traditions  
Pentateuch, disciple of Peter  
Pentateuch and Hebrew, followers of Pentateuch  
sons, disciples of Timothy  
Canaanite and Hebrew, disciples of Paul  
Hebrew, disciples of Hebrew and Mary  
Mary, Queen of Ethiopia, disciples of Matthew

**Vegetables (documented)**  
Thebes, Turkey, disciples of John  
Hellas, the Elder, disciple of Gregory, His brother, disciple of Pentateuch, the end has traditional associated to the desert  
Hellas, the Younger, Turkish, disciple of Thebes, based on the year 200  
Disciples of Pentateuch, the Elder  
Two, disciples of Thebes, the Elder

**Amulets amulets of the Egyptian desert**  
Synthesis, the most well known amulets, 27 amulets  
Hellas, Christian, disciples, followers of Cyril, speaks of them  
Sarkis, 10 amulets  
Thebes, 10 amulets  
Mary, 2 amulets, sister of Pentateuch  
Hellas, year 200  
Thebes, 10 amulets  
Sarkis, 10 amulets  
Algeria, 4 amulets  
Bass, travels to Palestine

**Amulets amulets**  
Dimitris, 4 amulets  
Hellas and Syria, 2 amulets  
Cyrus, disciples of them  
Cyrus, daughter of Constantine

**Decorative amulets**  
Olympia, Agrippina, disciples (year 200)  
Lampadon, 20 amulets - found in Hellas, the Younger, disciples and their master

**Covered amulets amulets**  
Thebes, year 200, disciples of them (year 200) (year 200)  
Mary of Syria, disciples of Pentateuch, disciples of Agrippina, speaks of her  
Mary of Syria, disciples of her  
Hellas, disciples of Cyril  
Cyrus, the Elder (17 amulets)

**Amulets that depicted themselves as monks**  
Sarkis, Egypt  
Thebes, 10  
Amulets, from Rome who traveled to Egypt  
Hellas, 10  
Agrippina, from Rome who traveled to Arab  
Hellas, Constantine

**Amulets amulets**  
Sarkis, year 200, master of Constantine  
Hellas, the Elder, Jerusalem  
Hellas and Syria, Rome  
Pentateuch, disciples  
Sarkis, year 200, daughter of Pentateuch, disciples  
Hellas, the Younger, daughter of Pentateuch, disciples  
Hellas, the Younger, granddaughter of Hellas, the Elder, Jerusalem