

Anna Belsa

Her gallery, El Quadern Robot, celebrates five years with an exhibition

“I rescue artists from margins with unique and personal voices”

● She opened an art space in the middle of the crisis. I knew it would not be easy. But also that from that moment on she could do everything with her criteria and sensitivity. And she has not failed



Belsa, with a work by Jordi Lafon from the exhibition 'Five years in the trenches' (until September 28) ■ J. RAMOS

Maria Palau
BARCELONA

What are your first memories related to the world of galleries?

My father, Joaquim Belsa, introduced me when I was 13 or 14 years old. We went to the inaugurations because he knew many artists. He was a furniture designer and decorator. He worked with the most renowned architects, especially with Bohigas. He was very committed to the art of the moment and believed that people had to live surrounded by works, and suggested their customers to buy art. But if you ask me for a specific memory, rather than for an exhibition, it is for one person: Lluís Maria Riera.

Well, remember him.

When I first met him, at the opening of the Joan Prats gallery, I told my father: “I already know what I want to be when I grow up: I want to be like Lluís Maria Riera.” When Muga Sr. decided to set up a gallery, he asked Tàpies if he knew some-

one to direct it, and he said: “Riera is the ideal person”. And, look, a strong memory that I have, the day of an inauguration, is of Miró sitting chatting with people. I did not dare to say anything to him. Riera took an invitation and invited him to dedicate it to me. And so he did.

But what exactly did the teenager Anna Belsa mean by “I want to be like Lluís Maria Riera when I grow up?”

He made you see things that you did not see in art. He always struggled to make people understand that art is something else than a luxury object to hang on a wall. Unfortunately, we are still fighting against this idea. Many people only look at the firm and enter the world of art through the door of snobbery. All the activity in my gallery is destined to spread art as a sample of infinite ways of seeing and explaining the world.

And the fact is that you ended up working, in the Prats.

When I finished my art history career, I was linked to the uni-

versity for four years. Until I realized I had to take another way, and accepted Riera’s proposal to work with them. It was 1987.

The golden age of the galleries.

It was an strange time. People bought a lot of art works because this friend and the other friend bought. “I have been told that I have to have a Ràfols.” Everyone wanted to have what was fashionable. I remember a man from Madrid who called and told me that he would make a transfer and that I myself choose a few Guinovart paintings and send them to him. “But you do not want to see them, at least in photography?” “No, it doesn’t matter, I trust you.” And he did not know me at all! I felt like quitting because that was like El Corte Inglés but selling something else. For me, all this had nothing to do with the values of art, which I was trying, and I’m still trying to spread.

And then you began to haunt the idea of opening your gallery?

No. I had never had the idea of

setting up a gallery. My last day at the Prats – I went away because in recent times I felt drowned, I had lost the ability to program, I did not identify myself with some exhibitions ...– It was January 21, 2014 and I did not know where I would throw. It was Carles [her husband] who encouraged me to continue doing what made me happy but now alone, in order to do what I wanted to do. We found this space [on Còrrega Street, 267] the next day!

And it’s been five years. ‘Five years in the trenches’, according to the title of the exhibition celebrating this anniversary. The good years that we talked about before are over.

It was suicidal to open the gallery in full crisis, yes. Since we opened we have been fighting for survival. The galleries of Barcelona are suffering from a situation of extreme difficulty.

Do not have reverse gear? What are we waiting for, a new generation of collectors who will believe in art again? Because,

those of the eighties...

... they are dead or ruined. We do not know, what will happen. But I do not want to be defeatist and I think it’s a cycle, like others that have been, the difference is that it lasts longer. It is not true that people have no interest in art. Here comes very young people who are excited. The problem is that those who would like to buy have not enough money. Even 200 euros are too much money for them. When the economy will improve, that although what they say has not improved at all, people will buy art again naturally. There must also be another more positive mood.

I can’t think of another gallery representing so many catalan artists.

There is this an unfortunate tendency not to value what we have, to follow the central currents. And I, on the other hand, like to look in the margins to rescue very good artists who have many things to say with a unique and personal voice.

