

A HOUSE OF

**Nobody knows how many rebellions ferment in the masses
of life which people earth.**

Virginia Woolf

Eva Klabin, a fascinating, determined, and highly sensitive individual, had the temerity to secure time in her hands, building a safe haven for the precious artefacts she acquired throughout her life. For her, it was not enough just to collect artworks; she also wished to safeguard them within view in the place where she lived. She filled her home in Rio, overlooking the lagoon, with magnificent pieces from a range of civilizations and eras: “I am an aesthete, and everything that is artistic is of interest to me,” said this impassioned collector, who transformed her home into a museum, opening doors and windows to society.

Gaston Bachelard reminds us that “a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.” All the rooms have consistently dreamlike values, so we could argue that a house is one of the greatest forces of integration for our thoughts, memories, and dreams. It is body and it is soul. It is the place to which we take our domestic deities. And Eva Klabin was well aware of all these truths. While she may have lived intensely, she also needed a room of her own, a piece of world where her impenetrable individuality could exist. With this thought, she could be seen as engaging with questions brought up by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*, published in 1929, in which she analyzes the social conditions of women. At this time, Eva Klabin was 25 years old; she was rich, travelled, and had access to the finest the world could offer. At the same time, Woolf was giving university lectures in which she interrogated the effects wealth had on the human mind. She felt indignation as she researched the female figure, uncovering satire, reprobation, and anger.

How can we speak of art by women “if the society of the day prohibited them from thinking, studying, frequenting libraries, and eating the same as men?” asks Socorro Acioli. How can we address the image of *mental, moral, and physical inferiority attributed to the female sex* by scholars until then? For centuries, women served as “looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” Woolf stresses that the image in the mirror is of the utmost importance because it charges the vitality and stimulates the nervous system. The image of Eva Klabin, reflected in her precious mirrors, was one of confidence and determination shining forth from clear and transgressive thinking. It is precisely this image that women are still constructing, against the odds, in this 21st century.

Fourteen artists — women with very diverse poetics and discourses — were invited to take part in the exhibition A HOUSE OF ONE’S OWN and came up some intriguing proposals for how to intervene in the space of the Eva Klabin House Museum. One century has elapsed since Virginia Woolf raised the point that *women’s intellectual freedom depends upon material things*. Art is not unembodied or spiritual; it is rooted in material questions like health, wealth, and a place to live. But while the conversation goes on and questions keep coming, the setting has changed. The female has won its

voice, and it is a voice that is being heard. Invisibility has lost ground because there are so many crusaders defending causes and rousing debate. But has the contemporary world seen the birth of a society in which there is equality and balance between male and female?

The legacy of Eva and Virginia lives on in the deeds of each artist. It transcends time and ennobles values, inviting reflections on the different narratives.

On the principle facade of the house museum, visitors are welcomed by Eva Klabin in dialogue with Virginia Woolf. Maybe Eva is telling her about what's inside the house and how it translates the meaning of her life. More than likely, they are talking about financial independence, housing, and Virginia's surprise at the beauty of the place and the collection it holds. Neither of them needed to ask for permission to take their path, and both jealously guard the key to their own rooms.

The voices of these two emblematic figures are joined by other voices, contemporary voices, with new demands, desires, and grievances. As they occupy different spaces in the house, they speak of the importance of revering ancestry, affective memories, the sacred that inhabits the improbable. Tapestry, embroidery, sewing — all strongly associated with the female realm — invoke spiritual practices, remind us of beehives, resignifying processes and gestures. Photographs and books inserted in different rooms alert us to the potential emptying out of information and thus of forgetting. May the magic of observing the images fill the gaze of those who spend time there.

The looking-glass that reflects the aggrandized image of man — such a key point in Woolf's discourse — opens up important topics. Giving women back their real dimensions, overlaying images in a ritual transfer of power, and including the viewer in the work are a few of the devices successfully exploited here.

In each room, the artists found objects that touch on significant issues and speak to their own poetic language. Gowns, tapestry, paintings, and trinkets inspire works that speak of a time of plenty and of myths associated with the patriarchy, silencing, and abuse. Fragrances invite visitors to evoke Eva Klabin's nocturnal aura, her preferences and habits, enriching the exhibition with a sensory experience.

Women speaking of women, of vulnerabilities, control and lack of control, blood, sweat, milk, and tears. Exposing the body that catalyzes everyday violence, creating a space of tension, a place of repulsion, that works with the fear of being cut, the threat of physical injury.

Body is dwelling-place; it is ceiling and it is bedroom. It is a place *of one's own* of equilibrium and power, care and recognition. In this encounter of art with so many desires and conquests, we celebrate the figure of women who have dared to transgress, offering to life what they hold most intimate and sacred.

Isabel Sanson Portella

ONE'S OWN