



# Queens and Conquests

A SHOWCASE OF CREATIVE WORKS BY EVA FERNÁNDEZ 2023



Opening: 5–7pm, 12 April

Exhibition dates: 13 April to 11 May

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am  
to 4pm and by appointment

Curatorial floor talk: 12:30pm to 1:30pm, 26 April

Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

[www.evafernandez.com.au](http://www.evafernandez.com.au)



## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

A powerful synergy spans an impressive suite of artworks in Eva Fernandez', *Queens and Conquests*, a majestic conclave of both current and historic works showing in ECU's Gallery 25. Highlighting pivotal points of her exceptional career, this gathering of photographic, audio visual and installation works demonstrate the prodigious talent of an enduring artist held in the highest regard. Simultaneously arcane, breathtakingly profound and brimming with metaphoric alchemy, *Queens and Conquests* is a powerful cipher for our times and our history.

Sue Starcken, 2023.

QUEENS AND CONQUESTS:  
A TRILOGY OF STRENGTH, SUBVERSION AND SURVIVAL  
**PANIZZA ALLMARK**

Panizza Allmark is Professor of Visual and Cultural Studies  
at Edith Cowan University

The feminist counter aesthetic of the uncanny, is an indeterminate space that is unsettlingly. Freud, describes the uncanny as the returned of the repressed. In Eva Fernandez’s evocative and uncanny work, *Queens and Conquests*, the past is re-represented. Patriarchal lore and conditions are challenged. The restrictive reality of the past is resurrected and emerges into thought provoking subversive feminist visual encounters. Fernandez’s photo based artwork, eerily yet disturbingly beautifully haunts the present.

Eva Fernandez uses *photographie féminine* which is “drawn from the French Feminist notion of *écriture féminine*, writing the feminine (body)...it involves the inscription of that which is repressed within history and culture” (Allmark, 2022, p. 243). Moreover, it engages with self-reflexivity, a concern with power relationships and the nature of images. This includes the production of images that use irony as a political device (Allmark, 2009). Women’s history and the female body are central to Fernandez’s work. Fernandez’s oeuvre challenges and confronts the patriarchal structures of the past. Cultural theorist Roland Barthes distinguishes between the studium and punctum of a photograph. The studium provides a general interest of a subject, the punctum in contrast is something in the image that pierces, wounds, bruises and has the power to evoke an emotional response to times past, which in Fernandez’s oeuvre has a strong resonance in the present.

The photo based images, a collection of three bodies of work *Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman* (1861-1932), *Unos Cuantos Piquetitos*, and *Heresy to Heredity*, provide a feminist trilogy of strength, subversion and survival. It is related to postmemory.

Postmemory a term described by Marianne Hirsch (2012) relates to “memories of traumatic events [that] live on to mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them”.

Fernandez’s work retells histories that she has not experienced directly, but are part of her story, as a woman of the Spanish diaspora and her Australian citizenship.

Here self-reflexivity, the gender politics of what it is being a woman in Spain and in Australia is called upon. Fernandez’s collection, which is superbly rich in symbolism draws on the struggles for gender equality and political participation.

The series *Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman* (1861-1932) highlights the Australian social reformer and politician who worked towards improving the status of women in Australia. Cowan was instrumental in the enactment of legislation that granted women the right to vote and stand for election in Western Australia. Fernandez’s marking the centenary of Cowan as the first woman elected to Australian government, superbly captures the essence of what Cowan’s life would have been like at the time, and what she represents, being the only woman in an all male parliament. The work produced here, as part of Fernandez’s 2021 Western Australian Parliament House Artist Residency resonates with motifs of strength and resilience, evidenced for example in the works ‘Engaged’ and ‘Tough nut to crack’. It’s not surprising that the work symbolising Cowan’s gender-based struggles and achievement are in high demand to hang on the walls of Australian Parliament House (Curtis, 2023). Cowan’s aura serves as an uncanny reminder of the strength and resilience of women in the political sphere.

Similar threads of strength are in the series, *Unos Cuantos Piquetitos*, a few small nips. Here there is the creative use of archival early 20th Century photographs from around the time women in Spain were granted suffrage, prior to the Spanish Civil War, produced around the time of Cowan’s election to Parliament. Fernandez tactile nature of this work enacts an *écriture féminine* by sewing on red thread over the female portraits. By this Fernandez is sewing the connection of how Spanish women’s social roles of the early 1930s were based on their abilities with a needle and thread. The hand stitching, occasionally loose and fractured signals the chaos and disruption of women’s lives during the Spanish civil war. The title translated to *A few small nips* also plays homage to Frida Kahlo’s 1935 iconic painting in which a woman’s wounded bloodied and bare body lies on a bed, in the background a knife wielding man stands nonchalantly. However, the goriness of the

blood in Fernandez’s work is replaced with red stitching. Rather than the face of patriarchy in the background, Fernandez pierces the portraits as an uncanny reminder of blood and survival. It can be read as taking control back through a ‘feminine’ act of sewing, rather than the brutality of bludgeoning.

In terms of taking control, the work *Heresy to Heredity* is also a confronting series that richly engages with Spanish history and the role of women and cultural motifs. In particular, Fernandez’s self portraits depicting herself as historical Spanish figures provide a revisionist portrayal of Spanish women. Strength, resilience and survival in this powerful work conveys a trans generational haunting. It, like the other series is uncannily about the return of the repressed, a dalliance with the trauma of violence. With a *photographie féminine* approach it brilliantly uses self reflexivity, a concern with images and irony as a political device. Her use of chiaroscuro, with strong tonal contrasts between light and dark beautifully convey the disturbing and frightening gendered elements of Spanish history. In the hauntingly rich images, she is making the ‘ghosts’ visible and is “ultimately engaged in acts of decolonisation” (Starcken, 2016).

*Queens and Conquests* is a powerful, personal and political feminist journey about identity and the State. Cultural motifs relating to gendered histories are foregrounded. The enigmatic exquisite detail in the series harbours the pain and struggles of women. Yet the spirit of strength and resilience resonates triumphantly through Fernandez’s highly sophisticated visual storytelling.

Allmark, P. (2022) ‘Framing a photographie féminine’ in Spencer, S. Visual Methods. Routledge

Allmark, P. (2009). ‘Traversing One’s Space: Photography and the feminine.’ In Backhaus, G and Murungi, J (Eds.), Symbolic Landscapes. Geographical Sensibilities in the Arts. Springer

Curtis, K. (2023, Wednesday, March 8). Edith’s art of politics. The West Australian, 18.

Starcken, S. (2016). Blood Bounty: Eva Fernández and the art of annihilation and exorcism in ‘Heresy to Heredity’. Exhibition Catalogue. ISBN 978-0-646-96469-0





*Fernandez's work retells histories that she has not experienced directly, but are part of her story, as a woman of the Spanish diaspora...*



A young girl with long, wavy brown hair and striking yellow eyes looks directly at the camera. She is wearing a green, sleeveless lace dress. She is holding the hand of an adult woman whose arm and dark, pleated dress are visible on the right side of the frame. The background is dark and textured.

# Edith Cowan: An Extraordinary Woman





Child Protection, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





A room of one's own – Colonade, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





A room of one's own – Staircase, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





Engaged, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





Tough nut to crack – leaves, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





Tough nut to crack – no leaves, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





Speak, 2021, Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper, 80 x 80 cm





Las Dos Españas





**A la derecha; A la izquierda, 2020**  
Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl  
120 x 80 cm each





**Queen Isabella of Castile; Teresa de Avila, 2020**  
Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl  
120 x 80 cm each





**Asta su Abuela (Even her Grandmother)** after Goya's Los Caprichos No.39;  
**Niña robada**, 2020  
 Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl  
 120 x 80 cm each





**Niños robados, 2020**  
Giclée FineArt Archival Print Ilford Galerie Pearl  
180 x 120 cm





Still life with Pomegranates; Still life with Potatoes;  
Still life with Lentils, 2016  
Giclée prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper  
120 x 80 cm each





Lentejas viudas (Widow lentils), 2023

Video

44 minutes 30 seconds





975 Days, 2023  
Installation  
Wooden table, silver coffee and tea set, lentils  
Dimensions variable









**Unos Cuantos Piquetitos 1-10, 2016 - 2023**  
 Giclée FineArt Print Hahnemühle photo rag,  
 with red silk thread and red glass beads  
 16 x 10 cm each





## EVA FERNANDEZ

Eva Fernandez (b. 1967) in Toronto, Canada and lives and works in Perth, Western Australia. Fernandez has a Masters (Creative Arts) and is currently completing a Doctorate in Creative Arts. She has been a practicing artist for over three decades, working across photography and various other mediums.

As an immigrant, Fernandez's practice is deeply informed by dislocation from her original culture as well as the negotiation of the space which she inhabits in context to its complex history and cultural legacy of colonialism. Her research examines her pluralistic identity in context to contemporary issues of global displacement.

Fernandez's practice includes complex installations of symbolically laden objects, creating contemporary still-life's and portraits in order to create interventions which critique ideologies of the past and present. Drawing on fragmented histories, her works embodies the traces and voices from the past that are blended and embedded in art and history to unearth narratives which evoke a shattered, emotional, and forgotten past.



