

Lizz Williams y sus máscaras (serie Violencia mujer seriea/series), 1975-1976



The solo exhibition of Marisa González at Azkuna Zentroa is the first major retrospective of the artist in a Basque institution. This project brings her back to the city where she was born, a city with which she has never ceased to engage in dialogue through her works.

Generative, not replicative: that has always been the way of Marisa González (Bilbao, 1943). From the start of her career, therefore, the artist shunned the conventional media and the established disciplinary structures, setting herself apart by using machines—color photocopiers, thermofaxes, and other devices that were then cutting-edge technology—as artistic tools. This choice, however, was not the result of a fascination with technicalities but of a desire to explore the creative possibilities of these media, always working through trial, immediacy, and the acceptance of chance and error. Throughout her career, González has made machinery and technology a means for thinking the present critically. With every piece of technology, the artist has found alternative ways to narrate and represent reality, generating images and processes that surpass the uses foreseen for each tool.

In 1971, González went to the United States in search of the contemporary artistic education she was then unable to find in a Spain still under the yoke of Franco's dictatorship. In Chicago, she enrolled in the postgraduate Generative Systems: Art, Science, and Technology course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a pioneering program that offered scope for open experimentation with the technologies of image processing and reproduction. Equipped with her own method, the artist guided her works through multiple rounds of reproduction and alteration, combining transparencies, manipulated paper, and various utensils—thermal presses, welding punches, irons, and even waffle makers—that enabled her to obtain new textures, colors, and visual effects.

González's penchant for experimentation and rupture, closely linked to the context of political repression from which she came, proved decisive in forming the critical and committed sensibility that pervades all her subsequent work.



Diptych from the series *Burnt*, 1972–1973. Private collection.
Photograph: courtesy of the artist

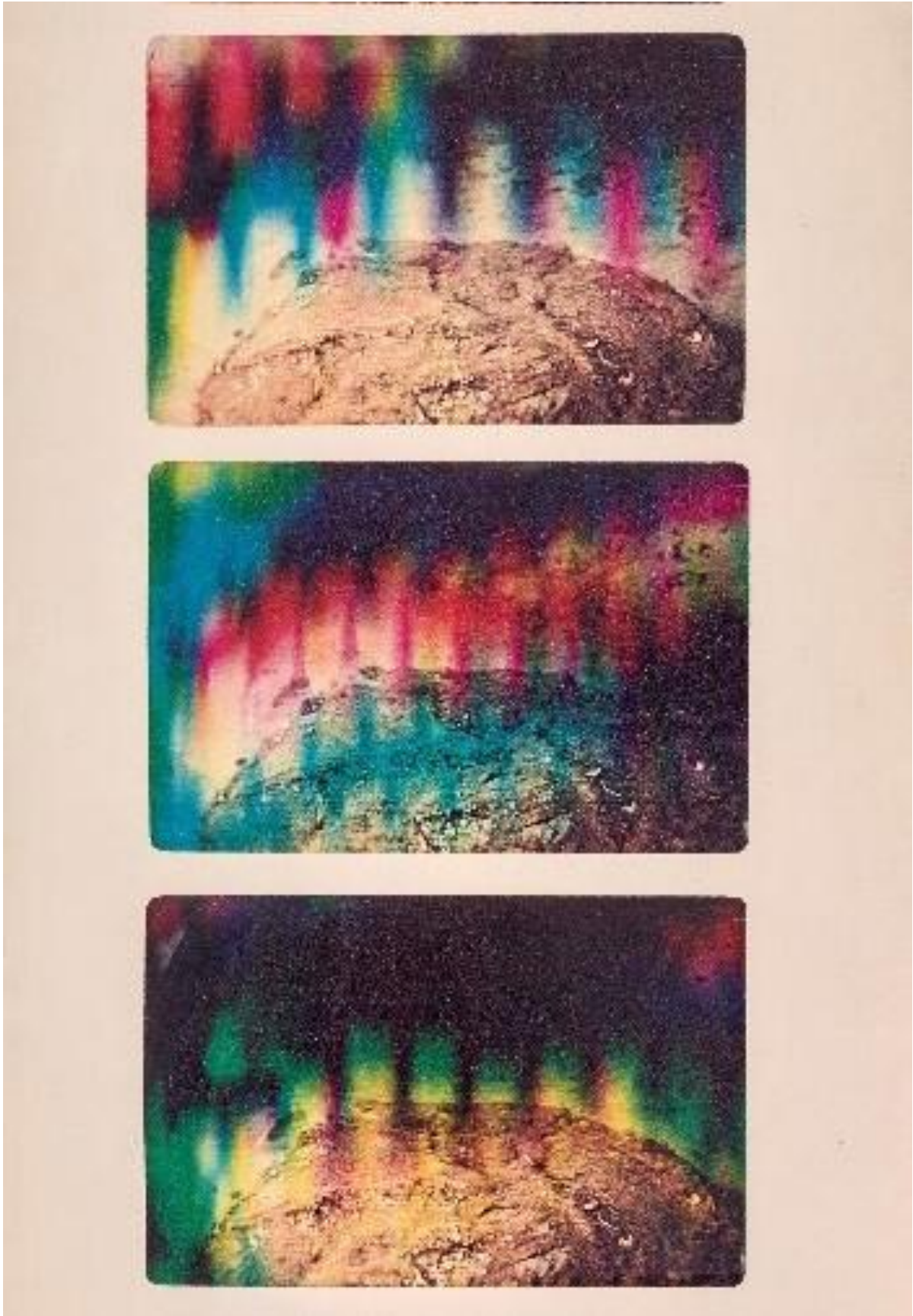
In the United States, González came into contact not only with new technologies but also with the feminist, pacifist, and civil rights movements that marked the country's social and cultural scene in the 1960s and 1970s. After her spell in Chicago, followed by a brief pause in Madrid to give birth to her first daughter, the artist returned to the United States to continue her work and artistic training. In 1974, in Washington, DC, she was drawn fully into the feminist movement by Mary Beth Edelson, her tutor at the Corcoran School for the Arts and Design and a key figure in feminist art at that time. Edelson's face also became one of those portrayed in *La descarga* (The discharge; 1975–1977), one of González's most significant works made during this period, which she worked on with her fellow students. She photographed them making gestures expressing their reaction to the repression of women jailed by the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile. She then passed this photographic record through a thermofax copier on high-contrast acetate.

In the 1990s, González added a new tool to her repertoire, the Color Bubble Jet 145 photocopier, which allowed her to print in a much larger format (DIN A1). At the same time, she reviewed materials she had compiled in the 1970s and regenerated them in two emblematic series: *Vértigos de identidad* (Vertigos of identity; 1992–1993), dealing with the demands made on women in the different phases of their lives; and *La violación* (The rape; 1972–1993), which evokes the reification that is often triggered in male desire.



La descarga (The discharge), from the series *Violencia mujer* (Woman violence), 1975–1977 [In the image, Karen Somerville]. Private collection. Photograph: Joaquín Cortés/Román Lores.

This toing and froing in her creative process, the continual retrieving and recycling, reflects González's ability to reinvent her archive of objects and images as contemporary tools offer new options. Even today, nearly all the materials, generally found objects, that have fed into the artist's works since the 1970s can still be found in her studio. For example, the material González refers to indistinctly as lint or guata illustrates this constant return to objects and images of the past. In 1981, she worked on photographs of lints taken in 1977, processing them as "light paintings," so that the lightness of the lint makes way for the levity of light itself as the center of the creative process.



Guatas emergiendo (Lints emerging), from the series *Presencias* (Presences), 1981. Private collection. Photograph: Joaquín Cortés / Román Lores.

At the end of the 1970s, González returned to Madrid, where the artistic panorama was dominated by the resurgence of neoexpressionist painting and free figuration, displacing those who explored conceptual or technological languages. In this context, González decided to fuse her academic training in painting and classical music with her technological research, creating works in which painting on traditional supports engages in dialogue with photocopies of manipulated scores and with techniques learned in the Generative Systems course. Until then, her practice had focused on technological and visual processes, but her *Grafías musicales* (Musical notations; 1989–1990) introduced the aural component implicit in the scores of musicians like Javier Darías and Llorenç Barber. Here, the rhythm and cadence of the visual composition derive from the movement of the paper and the controlled variation of the light intake, leading once more to the creation of authentic “light paintings.”



El sonido de la nota gota a gota (The sound of the note drop by drop) and *El sonido de la nota elongada* (The sound of the note elongated), from the series *Grafías musicales* (Musical notations) (Javier Darías), 1989–1990. Private collection. Photographs: Joaquín Cortés / Román Lores.

In the 1980s, as Spain sought to project an image of modernity and integration in global commerce, foundations were laid for the newly democratic nation’s cultural policies. As one part of this effort, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía was inaugurated in 1986 with three exhibitions, including *Processes: Culture and New Technologies*. As one of the curators, González issued an invitation to her mentor, Sonia Sheridan, and together they installed the first Lumena computer station in Spain. The digital palette of the Lumena graphic system, patented a few years earlier, permitted images captured directly to be processed creatively. Even so, in one of her characteristic procedural twists, the artist ended up giving her Lumenas physical form by taking analog photographs of the screen. The corpus of her series *Retratos Lumena* (Lumena portraits), conceived using this technique, forms a collective picture of her artistic milieu in Madrid that now stands as a testimony to a new era.



Portraits of Pedro Garhel and Menene Gras, from the series *Retratos Lumena* (Lumena portraits), 1993–1995. Private collection. Photographs: courtesy of the artist.

While she was experimenting with the Lumena computer, González also developed her *Transgénicos* (Transgenics) series. The concept of the transgenic in her work alludes not only to genetic manipulation but also to an alternative form of generation linked to desire, the organic, and the alteration of the preestablished. Although transgenics are also based on cloning, to which she dedicated another of her series, *Clónicos* (Cloned; since 1993), it also introduces the possibility of mutations and distortions, highlighting unexpectedness and imperfection.

In 1992, González organized one of the Contemporary Art Workshops at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Circle of Fine Arts) in Madrid. Entitled “The Poetics of Technology,” one of the instruments it worked with was the fax, taking advantage of its capacity for global communication in real time. Working with fax cut out the official artistic circuits and encouraged a less competitive and more horizontal sense of community in relations among artists at a time when information was starting to circulate in new ways, as the World Wide Web and its applications, while still rudimentary, were now making their appearance. The results of the workshop gave rise months later to *Estación fax / Fax Station*, an installation within the group exhibition *Esto no es una crisis* (This is not a crisis) held at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in 1993. The exhibition reflected a state of disenchantment at Spain’s economic difficulties; it questioned the supposed stability of things while warning that the scale of the crisis surpassed the economic sphere, since it also had an ideological and cultural dimension.

From the 2000s onward, González focused her interest on photography as a means of questioning political and social reality and addressing issues related to industrial restructuring, the ecological crisis, and social inequalities. *La fábrica* (The factory; 2000), for example, originated with the closure of the bread factory in Bilbao, one result of the economic reforms demanded of Spain before its entry into the European Economic Community.

These policies led to the closure or restructuring of numerous industries, to unemployment, and to the disappearance of traditional sectors that once shaped not only urban landscapes but entire regional identities.

Nuclear Lemóniz (Lemóniz nuclear power station; 2003–2004) is the title of the extensive photographic survey González carried out at the nuclear power station of Lemóniz in Bizkaia, controversial since the 1970s as a perceived environmental and health hazard that motivated the opposition of ecologists, politicians, and local residents. After numerous protests, acts of sabotage, and other violence, the power station was finally closed in 1989 without ever having become operational. Its ruins are now an uncomfortable and dissonant legacy that shows how the collective history and memory of a conflict are intertwined in the physical remains of a particular place.



Installation *Estación fax / Fax Station*, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 1993. Photograph: © Matías Costa, VEGAP, Madrid, 2025.



Photograph from the project *Ellas, filipinas* (Them, Filipino women), 2010–2013.
Private collection.

This retrospective in Bilbao underlines that, although the artist moved between Madrid and the United States, her work never ceased to converse with the Basque territory. Her practice during these years rewrites local histories, in Bilbao and Bizkaia, within global debates on labor, gender, technology, and memory.

In *Ellas, filipinas* (Them, Filipino women; 2010–2013), the artist presents numerous portraits of Filipino domestic laborers in Hong Kong taken during their only day of rest, evidencing the inhuman conditions they are subjected to, such as long working hours, low salaries, and frequent abuse. With this work, González also denounced the racism and discrimination faced by these women workers, as well as the debts forced on them by the recruiting agencies that keep them trapped in a cycle of exploitation exacerbated by a lack of effective legal protection.

Today, González continues to project herself into an uncertain future where the creative capacity of machines, which she approaches and envisages from the standpoint of intuition and spontaneity, contrasts with a range of technologies that reproduce control systems, molding our understanding of the world and manipulating our perceptive and social experiences.

Violeta Janeiro Alfageme

Exhibition curator