



PHOTOGRAPHY

On Rape: Laia Abril

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Laia Abril presents the second chapter of *A History of Misogyny*. On show at Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris, from 25th January to 22nd February 2020.



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If I had to put in a nutshell Laia Abril's approach to photography I would say she is able to build up complex visual narratives where the image is just one of the elements linked to each other. Thanks to her background in journalism and a 5-year experience at *Fabrica* and *Colors Magazine* as photographer and consultant photo editor, her projects result as the concretization of a long-term research combining photography, texts, video and sound. The way she puts everything together—that's the great thing. And we have learnt it looking at *On Abortion*, the first chapter of *A History of Misogyny*, which after the show at the *Rencontres d'Arles* in 2016 has been presented truly worldwide. The key to the success of *On Abortion* has been Laia's ability to balance the artistic and journalistic approach to such a controversial subject, shifting gently from past to present to show its current relevance.

This is also the case of *On Rape*, the new chapter of her *A History of Misogyny* presented at the Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris, from 25th January to 22nd February 2020. Consisting in a set of photographs, objects and testimonies, the exhibition is designed as an onsite installation and creates bridge between history, places and cultures to remind us the universality of sexual violence and miscarriages of justice.

We asked a few questions to Laia to learn more.

The new chapter of *A History of Misogyny* is *On Rape*.

Why did you decide to work on this topic?

I choose this topic the same way as the first chapter, *On Abortion*. I have been triggered by a local news that impressed me deeply. In 2018 the Spanish Court set free 5 man who gang-raped a 18-year-old with a sentence of abuse instead of rape, that would eventually call into question the Spanish legislative on rape. In full apotheosis of #MeToo movement, I wanted to understand why some institutional structures of justice, laws and policy were not only failing the rape victims, but actually encouraging violence through the preservation of power dynamics and social norms.

By looking back to history, I could identify gender-based stereotypes and myths, prejudices and misconceptions, that have prevailed and perpetuated the rape culture. Through a painstaking research on miscarriages of justice and victim-blaming attitudes, this work evokes how still today society blames victims of sexual assault and normalizes sexual violence, forcing them to second institutional rapes.

What are the similarities and the differences from *On Abortion*?

In *On Abortion*, the historical umbrella was meant to show how those problems were not only belong to the past, but also the present, and that they were pendular and connecting to politics and systems of fear.

In the case of *On Rape*, the historical aspect was used in order to find answers to questions. Why marital rape is still not criminalized in dozens of countries? Why people believe all these nonsense myths that even influenced judges decisions? I needed to find the origin of those in order to understand the present. However *On Abortion* was meant to be a logical conversation with people that no matter what their beliefs would take them to feel about it, they could face the reality and problematic of restricting access to it. In this case, *On Rape*, is not longer a documentation it's more like an essay, in which I decided to react visually to a series of pieces of non-fiction literature, which I selected based on what my emotions would handle and navigate two years of research.

In the previous chapter you decided to portrait the faces of victims, in this case we see only clothing and objects.

Why?

These are also for me portraits. But portraits of the institution that allowed the rape to happen: the Church, the military, the prison, the school... they are as well an universal representation of all those victims, since is a systemic pandemia, and being in front of them in the show you feel them present, as well as their collective pain.

How do you approach to a new project? What is the first thing you think about?

After the decision on the topic is made it's important to find the angle... Rape specially is a very vast issue, so I needed to start the research in order to understand my point of view, and my role as an artist with it. In a strange way this feels more personal, My evolution as an artist and as a person also have an impact on the construction of each chapter. In a rare way, even if they are extremely painful to make, I use them to find some peace in this

global chaos, to find some answers, and only when sharing with the others I become calmer. That's way the space, the show, which is s the platform I've choosen, for me has a healing aspect of consuming them as a viewer and to share them as an artist.

What is the hardest part in making projects about such controversial and painful issues?

With this one, very often, to lose faith in humanity. I focused on the institutional rape, because in a way this is fixable. I needed to be extremely optimistic to find a reason to do this. But was really consuming, and specially when having all inside my body and my mind. I have a massive respect for the people who dedicates its life to helps other in this kind of situations.

How do you conceive your role as photographer? What do you expect from this exhibition?

As an artist I always said often with my projects I would be the catalist the filter from which after years of research, I would create some digerible pieces of information for them to see. Someone told me getting in to one of my shows, was like getting a tour in my mind and thoughts. I think with On Rape, it's a tour on my most visceral feelings after I have reacted to all the information I exposed myself too.

What are you plans now? Are you already working on the next chapters of *A History of Misogyny*?

I'm now working on the book of this second chapter. And only starting the research for the genesis one on Mass Hysteria.

Laia Abril

A History of Misogyny - Chapter Two: On Rape

25th January - 22nd February 2020

Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris

EXHIBITION

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