



Exhibition «The European Savage»  
17/02/2004 - 23/05/2004

## **Beneath the stigma**

In a society with such an abundance of media, cultural dignity should not permit the use of exhibitions in vain. The exhibition, as with every medium, is justified when it really is the best medium to express what it wants to say. If this is not the case, it becomes sheer trivialisation and only serves to increase the cultural babble, converted into flesh for consumption. The CCCB has recently scheduled a series of exhibitions with a core idea: to look for a view of otherness, to invert the gaze, to appeal to that point of view represented by the excluded, the unworthy or the despised. In *Fantasies of the Harem* we looked afresh, through women's eyes, at an institution which the West had trivialised from a viewpoint as sexist as it was simplistic, in order to bring out the strength of a different power, that of Sheherazade. In *Trash Culture* we plumbed the depths of the production of an imaginary rejected by political and cultural correctness in order to explain that this viewpoint also helps us to see and understand the world. *The European Savage* inverts the gaze onto a culture—Western—which has often seen a lack of civility in the eye of the other but has been incapable of seeing savagery in its own.

The exhibition is based on works by Roger Bartra, a Mexican anthropologist from a Catalan family. He explored, with an outsider's gaze, the invention of the figure of the savage in European culture. Afterwards, he was joined by Pilar Pedraza, who has worked on these figures of otherness, of marginalisation and madness, whose words are rejected as non-codified in the contemporary imaginary. They both established a dialectical relationship, which, if I may say so, is in a category which has become undervalued today and has found its expression in this exhibition. A Mexican with Catalan roots—brought up close to the traditions which Europeans scorned or pointed to as barbaric—, a woman from Toledo—who knew the stigmas with which the Europeans pointed out particular women who were carriers of all kinds of dangers.

The exhibition has been put together from this kind of imaginary which runs through European culture from the medieval period to the present day. Held in the mysterious terrain of the basement of an old hospice: a place of exclusion, a place assigned to the uncontrolled, the suspect, the dangerous, to people marked by the stigma of a birth in darkness.

Civilised Europeans look the other way when they walk past a savage. They don't want to accept that the savage still exists in this world which is so clean and aseptic on the outside, and so cruel and harsh on the inside; or that, as always, this savage has been an invention, an exclusion, a condemnation by civilisation itself, whose proud citizens pretend not to see or understand him. In the past, the savage was far away, forgotten in the vastness of the forest; he is now an increasingly invisible figure who wanders the city's streets and squares. Only from time to time does he make his voice heard, and his presence felt in the society which excludes him. This often happens when death and an excess of power turn him into unexpected entertainment. When we look at the savage men tilling the land in a medieval tapestry, we can understand some of the things happening in our fruit fields or in our streets: the permanent procedures of production of a stigmatised people on the margins of civilisation. It seems as if we are going along the street with our eyes closed. What is really happening is that there are none so blind as those who will not see.