

**“Writing Challenges: At the Frontiers of the Body,” Celebrating Every Voice  
Diana Almeida**

ULICES (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies)/  
FCT (Portuguese Foundation for Research and Technology)

Abstract

The exhibition “She Is a Femme Fatale” (Berardo Museum Collection, Nov 30 2009/Jan 31 2010) was conceived from a revisionist perspective, reinterpreting the artistic canon in a feminist light since the early 20th century till the contemporary context. It included works not only from the Berardo’s but also from other art collections, in a plurality of medium, by women artists from several countries, and proposed a challenging dialogue between languages and individual artistic practices. Having been invited to implement a project of creative writing throughout the exhibition, I had the opportunity to work with the general public during 45 hours, developing exercises based upon seven photographs from different artists, which I connected with poetical excerpts from Elizabeth Bishop and Luíza Neto Jorge. Hundreds of Portuguese and international visitors (approached in four different languages) joined the activities and negotiated the meanings of the cultural texts on display and their own agency in the institutional space of the museum.

I aim to share the methods and results of my experience as a museum practitioner with an academic background in literary and cultural studies, currently developing the collaborative project “Writing Challenges: At the Frontiers of the Body,” which thematizes the politics of corporeal identity through a creative engagement with visual and verbal texts. I will present the particular strategies I used to engage the audience to write a personal piece in dialogue with poetical passages connected with the works of Francesca Woodman, Hannah Villeger, Nan Goldin, and Margarida Correia, considering issues of the bodily identity and i) spatial surroundings, ii) inherited artifacts, iii) alterity as a fluid frontier, and iv) creative interaction with one’s material shape. To conclude I will consider to what extent Clifford’s notion of the museum as contact zone is productive to my approach, with its emphasis on the interactive and improvisational dimensions of work in the museological sphere. Foremost, my objective in this project of cultural performance is to empower and celebrate every voice, providing a series of encounters that translate and recreate identities and meanings.