

LINA ROMAY AND THE UNFOLDED BODY BETWEEN PLAISIR À TROIS AND GEMIDOS DE PLACER

ÁLEX MENDÍBIL

In Spanish fringe cinema and international cult films, Lina Romay stands out as a prominent figure for her long association with the director Jess Franco. Her career, inseparably linked to Franco's filmography, positioned her as a constant and significant presence in his work not only as an actress but also as a co-creator of a cinematic style that operated outside the conventional codes of both mainstream cinema and the B film industry. Her performances in Franco's films are characterised by the exposure of her body and by an attitude that contributed to the creation of a cinematic imaginary defined by formal and thematic transgression and the expression of a personal aesthetic that eschewed the hegemonic models of representation.

Lina Romay (born Rosa María Almirall in 1954 in Barcelona and passing away in 2012 in Málaga) began her acting career in Catalan amateur

theatre at a time when Spain was beginning to embrace a modernity that would gradually undermine the Franco dictatorship. It was during this period in the early 1970s that she met Jess Franco, with whom she would share a prolific filmography spanning over a hundred films, as well as a life-long creative and personal partnership. In titles such as *Female Vampire* (*La comtesse noire*, 1973), Lina cemented her status as one of the faces of the erotic cinema of the era, achieving international prominence and prefiguring Spain's *cine de destape* movement.

Her iconic assertion that "I only wear clothes when the script requires it" (Valencia, 1999, p. 101), frequently recalled in interviews, encapsulates her dedication to acting and her understanding of cinema as a space for freedom. Unlike other figures of the *cine de destape* who cultivated their public image as an extension of their suc-

cess on screen, Lina kept her personal life private, with a discretion that clearly marked a boundary between her acting work and her identity off-camera. This contrast, far from diminishing her impact, reinforced her on-screen appeal, where every gesture seemed to contain an innate and essentially cinematic force. Romay was not merely a muse, as has often been asserted, or an icon at the service of Jess Franco's gaze; she was the central axis of the stories he told and the discourse he constructed.

Jess Franco's films are sites of female pleasure, offering enjoyment to the female spectator as much as to the male spectator, and the fluidity and oscillations of his narrative opens space for the exploration of the fundamental instability of identifications along lines of gender, sex, and sexual preference. Thus, Jess Franco prefigures contemporary feminist reworking of "the assumption that the sexes are what they seem; that screen males represent the Male and screen females the Female". (Pavlovic, 2003: 119)

It can be argued that Lina Romay embodied the fluidity described by Pavlovic with a singular naturalness and physicality. Her body simultaneously exhibited, narrated and vindicated identities that escaped the most reductive gazes. Her work, marked by irony, ambiguity and an unusual freedom, charted a shift in the female body's relationship with power and desire capable of deconstructing and reinventing both the classical male gaze and the concepts of nudity and nakedness developed by John Berger, who distinguishes between the body displayed in its authenticity and the body transformed into an object by the gaze of the Other: "Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display" (Berger, 1977: 54). Through her body, Lina Romay succeeded in revealing herself, transcending the classical exhibitionism subservient to the fetishistic male gaze to establish herself as the owner and agent of her nakedness, making it an indissoluble part of her performative identity.

BODIES, LONG TAKES AND LAYERS

This article explores how Lina Romay embodies the idea of an "unfolded body", inspired by a concept initially developed by Rebecca Schneider in her analysis of feminist performers. Schneider coined the term "explicit body" to describe the ways these artists use their gestures and bodies to construct a stage presence that accumulates layers of meaning and makes visible historical issues of gender, race, class, age or sexuality. This idea is applied here to examine what Lina Romay represents in Jess Franco's work, given that her presence also marked a decisive shift in his filmography in parallel with transformations taking place in both the cinema of his time and the social and political landscape of the country.

Interestingly, the words "explicit" and "explicate" stem from the Latin *explicare*, which means "to unfold". Unfolding the body, as if pulling back velvet curtains to expose a stage [...]. Peeling at signification, bringing ghosts to visibility, they are interested to expose not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves. (Schneider, 1997: 14)

For Schneider, "ghosts" are sociocultural elements, bodiless historical signifiers that need to possess a body to become visible so that they can be confronted and questioned. Linda Williams asserts that escapist forms of entertainment seem to distract audiences from these social or political problems, yet to do so effectively, they must bring to the surface those layers charged with the audience's real concerns and experiences. She uses the example of pornographic cinema, which reveals the ghosts of sexual differences more directly than any other form of mass entertainment. Williams refers to this as a utopian function of entertainment that "only plays with those fires that the dominant power structure—capitalism (and patriarchy)—can put out. And so the problems that mass entertainment tends to avoid are usually

LINA ROMAY DOESN'T JUST INHABIT THESE IMAGES; SHE STRUCTURES THEM THROUGH HER PHYSICALITY, BECOMING A KIND OF INTERFACE CONNECTING VISUAL, TEMPORAL AND NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

those most stubborn and fundamental problems of class, sex and race" (Williams, 1989: 155).

This study takes up the idea of the *unfolding* body pointed out by Schneider, rather than the merely *explicit* body, because of its conceptual connection to one of the most characteristic strategies of Jess Franco's cinematic discourse: long takes or sequence shots. Deleuze related the sequence shot technique to the idea of *unfolding* a fabric, "as in a weaving process producing an infinitely long tapestry" (Deleuze, 2001b: 200). The spectator is thus positioned in front of a fabric of relationships upon which a mental image seamlessly unfolds. Deleuze argues that meaning in the narrative stems primarily from the relationships revealed by the camera movements and the characters' movements towards the camera, rather than from their individual actions, perceptions or emotions. The "unfolded body" is therefore discussed here as an expansion of Schneider's "explicit body" to include this technical question of representation, as the bearer of the mental image pointed to by Deleuze.

In contrast to a body that conceals folds and layers beneath its surface, Romay's body is presented as open terrain, a continuous expanse that aims for no inner revelations but instead transforms its exteriority into the axis of action and enunciation. In Franco's films, the use of long takes or sequence shots reinforces this unfolding, avoiding the fetishistic fragmentation of traditional editing and crafting a narrative that flows in correspondence with the body on screen. As a result, Lina Romay doesn't just inhabit these ima-

ges; she structures them through her physicality, liberated from the male gaze to take possession of both her body and the enunciation. Her body, unfolded in the action and in the framing, thus becomes a canvas where new female subjectivities emerge.

To understand how Jess Franco deploys the sequence shot in alignment with Lina Romay's body, it is useful to consider his work in dialogue with Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948). With this film, Hitchcock sought to achieve the illusion of the temporal continuity of the theatre through shots of long duration, replacing the classical rules of editing with a dynamic reframing that keeps the spectator immersed in a constant flow of tension and action. As Jacques Aumont notes, this camera movement conditions the freedom of choice that Bazin originally attributed to the sequence shot. Aumont observes that this freedom is limited when the sequence shot is in constant motion. The spectator "is taken by the hand, made to see the elements of the action one by one, and in most cases, accompanied by a touch of expressiveness (especially speed)" (Aumont, 2020: 54-55).

An analysis of the first major sequence shot in *Rope* can shed light on what Jess Franco attempts with his uninterrupted takes, which are obviously more precariously executed but filled with equally powerful mental images. In the sequence, two libertine characters with clear Sadean leanings (crime as a libidinal impulse reserved for the privileged) reveal through their gestures and glances invisible and unspeakable relationships that the choreography of the camera brings to the surface. Coursodon (2004) argues that fetishism in *Rope* thus relies not on the figure of Hitchcock's traditional blonde heroine but on the masterful movement of the camera. It is a technical fetishism that becomes the true object of desire. The sequence shot as fetish also generates a tension similar to sexual desire: the concentration and anticipation elicited by long takes produce a prolonged excitation, similar to the way the masochist delays ple-

asure in order to intensify it, as Deleuze explains in his book on Sacher-Masoch (2001a: 74). This reveals how the sequence shot facilitates a fetishism that is no longer merely technical but becomes a form of desire expressed through the control of the camera and the duration of the shot, shaping the spectator's mental image.

This article focuses on *Plaisir à trois* [Pleasure for Three] (1973) and *Gemidos de placer* [Cries of Pleasure] (1982) for their importance in the filmographies of both Lina Romay and Jess Franco and the examples they offer of the use of the sequence shot as a central device in Franco's work. Moreover, the gap of nearly ten years between the two films makes them useful to illustrate Romay's evolution as both an actress and a character over a time when her professional and personal relationship with Franco was being consolidated, while also reflecting the sociopolitical changes that Spain underwent during its transition to democracy. *Plaisir à trois*, rejected by producer José María Forqué for its explicit content and filmed exclusively with foreign financing and participation, demonstrates the reality of a type of cinema that had to operate outside the borders of the

Image 1. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)



Franco regime to explore themes forbidden by the censors. In contrast, *Gemidos de placer*, considered a remake of *Plaisir à trois* ten years later, received an "S" classification,¹ the popular category established after the end of censorship in Spain. This classification not only replaced censorship bans but also effectively promoted films capable of shocking viewers, confronting them with images until then inconceivable on the country's screens. While *Plaisir à trois* reflects a moment of repression and creative exile, *Gemidos de placer* signals the introduction of filmmaking without restrictions, where the sensory and emotional assault on the viewer becomes not merely a means but an end.

PLAISIR À TROIS AND THE INITIATION OF LINA ROMAY

Martine de Bressac (Alice Arno) returns to her mansion after spending months in a psychiatric hospital for castrating a lover. She is reunited there with her husband, Charles Bressac (Robert Woods), with whom she shares a morbid fascination with torture and murder, turning their victims' bodies into wax figures and storing them in their basement. The couple soon sets their sights on Cecilia (Tania Busselier), an innocent young woman who is the daughter of a diplomat. As Cecilia is drawn into their erotic games, Martine's plans take an unexpected turn: Charles, in collusion with Cecilia and the servant Adele (Lina Romay), betrays his wife, paralysing her with poison and turning her into another wax figure. The film concludes with Charles, Cecilia and Adele leaving the mansion to begin a new life as a trio.

Plaisir à trois marks Lina Romay's first significant role after brief appearances in other Jess Franco productions. Although she plays only a supporting

role as a mute, intellectually disabled servant, the context of her selection for the part is significant. Jess Franco had recently lost Soledad Miranda, whose tragic death left a void that was hard to fill in his films. Miranda, an emerging star and a regular fixture on the covers of celebrity magazines of the time, achieved iconic status thanks to her performance in *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), one of the director's most celebrated films. Franco needed a replacement capable of taking up that legacy and adapting it to a rapidly evolving cinematic universe.

The scene of Lina Romay dancing with a mannequin in *Plaisir à trois* thus stands out as a moment loaded with symbolism [IMAGE 1]. This segment, where Romay's body begins to unfold timidly in an intimate, delirious choreography, intentionally echoes the emblematic scene of Soledad Miranda dancing with a mannequin in *Vampyros Lesbos*. While Miranda's dance represented an affirmation of desire and mystery, Romay's attempt is clumsy and fearful, in keeping with the inexperienced young character she plays. However, it is also a performance layered with connections between the actress's body, her character, and the director's gaze as he has her try out the dance that made her predecessor famous. This ghostly echo, as Schneider might call it, establishes a link between Miranda and Romay and initiates the transition towards a new stage in Franco's filmography, where Lina would define her own identity.

Jess Franco spoke of this connection with Lina Romay: "She's a bit of a reincarnation of Soledad Miranda, and I mean that seriously. A bit of a reincarnation, though not entirely, because she has gradually acquired a completely different personality, becoming independent as an actress" (Aguilar, 1991: 50). In *Plaisir à trois*, Romay's character has the quality of a figure still under construction:



Image 2. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)

a promising young woman invited to a casting call to determine whether she could replace Soledad Miranda. Lina seems to be trying out her power to seduce, lacking the star magnetism that defined Miranda but offering instead a rawer and more vulnerable presence. Her amateur performance still represents that objectified and conventionalised nudity, the costume display described by Berger (1977: 54). This small role of a mute and submissive maid in *Plaisir à trois* is a curious foreshadowing of what some authors call the *vulgarisation* of Jess Franco's filmography, pointing to Lina Romay's body as the direct cause.

In Jess Franco's films, the long camera takes are understood to be primarily a matter of budget, a way to extract an abundance of footage out of a single prepared scene. The same applies to his frequent use of the zoom: "if I use it so much, it's because I can't afford a dolly or don't have time to perfect a camera move. So I zoom like a madman" (Petit, 2015: 212). While they cannot be equated with the stylistic virtuosity evident in *Rope*, Franco's long, imperfect takes function as a mechanism of narrative and visual tension that should be considered in relation to Coursodon's and De-

leuze's notions of suspension and the dilation of time. These devices are thus essential elements of Franco's cinematic discourse. Ultimately, it is language that triggers and drives desire, as Barthes said of Sade: "The only Sadean universe is the universe of discourse" (1997: 48). In *Plaisir à trois*, the suspension of time reflects the dynamics of voyeurism and submission that dominate the plot, where the camera's insistence on not cutting evokes both the object of desire and the agent who delays its gratification.

Lina Romay's role in this sequence depicting the Bressacs' voyeurism is doubly peculiar [IMAGE 2]. On the one hand, she plays the typical Sadean scapegoat (Barthes, 1997: 36), the innocent victim at the service of the libertines. However, Jess Franco positions her as an observer of the sadistic voyeurs watching their victim. Lina is the one who watches the watchers, effectively identifying her with the audience. It is no accident that when the camera moves between Romay and the voyeurs there is always a mirror mediating the scene: first reflecting the voyeurs and later, when the shot is repeated, reflecting Romay unsuccessfully trying to apply lipstick like her mistress [IMAGE 3]. This game of mirrors between narrators and narratee is characteristic of Jess Franco's filmography, serving as a vehicle for humour, irony and even self-criticism in his work, such as when the voyeuristic murderess (Alice Arno) disparages and insults her victim merely for masturbating in the privacy of her bedroom and later whips Romay as a reward for her service. With these absurdities, Franco delights in parodying the double standards of the censors and the repressed, like the character he himself played in *El sádico de Notre Dame* [The Sadist of Notre Dame] (1979).

Barely 18 or 19 years of age when *Plaisir à trois* was filmed, Romay's youth imbues her performance with caricaturesque and exaggerated gestures, her body seeming not so much to act as to expose her inexperience with desire and sexuality. The

silence of her character further accentuates this quality, unfolding her body as her primary means of expression. Every nervous gesture, every glance, seems to betray an unsettling unawareness of her surroundings, reflecting the vulnerability of a society in transition. "In my first film, *Relax Baby*, as we were saying earlier, I was already naked on the second day of shooting, and I didn't do it before that because I wasn't 18 yet, and in those days it would have been a bit too much" (Valencia, 1999: 101). This unfolded body of the naive young woman and the long camera takes exposing her clumsiness and insecurity resonate with some of the "ghosts" of 1970s Spain, which still clung to the image of the young woman trapped between the weight of traditional morality and the promise of freedom. Romay herself had to marry her then-boyfriend, Ramón Ardid, to be able to travel with him before turning 21, the age of majority at the time (Collins and Greaves, 1996: 37).

But this role was about to change. By the end of *Plaisir à trois*, we find the young servant colluding in the betrayal of her mistress by her husband and his victim. She does not seem to fully comprehend what she has done, but her fascinated gaze at the lifeless body of her oppressor finds an echo by her character's actions in *Gemidos de placer*, which involves a similar betrayal, albeit from a different position as a character and as an actress, and in a completely new sociopolitical environment.

GEMIDOS DE PLACER: LINA ROMAY TAKES CENTRE STAGE

Antonio (Antonio Mayans) invites Julia (Lina Romay) to spend the weekend at his coastal villa. The place is managed by Marta (Elisa Vela), a young woman of African descent, and Fenouil (Juan Soler), a dim-witted servant fond of playing the guitar. Antonio plots with Julia to get rid of his wife, Martina, who has just been discharged from a psychiatric clinic. However, Marta beco-

mes the first victim of the couple's criminal instincts. Eventually, a conspiracy hatched in the clinic between Julia and Martina against Antonio is revealed, culminating in the women strangling him and throwing his lifeless body into the pool.

After a decade of creative exile across France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, Jess Franco and Lina Romay returned to Spain in the late 1970s with the momentum of two artists who had forged a distinctive style entirely on their own terms. Between 1973 and 1982, Franco and Romay had made nearly 50 films, maintaining a frenetic pace that allowed them to develop a unique aesthetic and methodology while surviving in circuits constrained by fast, low-budget production. During this period, Lina transitioned from fledgling actress to the cornerstone of Franco's work, imprinting her presence on a new, more explicit and carnal stage in his filmography. Their return to Spain during the country's transition to

democracy marked a turning point for both, as they found in the new cultural openness and the end of censorship a space to continue exploring and pushing boundaries.

"There is no doubt that *Gemidos de placer* would have horrified Spanish and French censors of the 60s-70s. The movie is a testament to the evident societal evolution of morals in early eighties Spain" (Petit, 2015: 326). A decade or more ahead of Spain's *cine de destape*, Jess Franco and Lina Romay were already eschewing the stereotypes and banalities that characterised much Spanish cinema of the time. Their films approached sexual liberation from a perspective free of prejudices, rejecting sexist or patriarchal attitudes. This approach lent their work a maturity that transcended the provocative or purely commercial tendencies that most S-rated films got bogged down in.

Gemidos de placer fits into this period as one of the most unusual productions backed by Golden

Image 3. *Plaisir à trois* (Jess Franco, 1973)





Image 4. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

Films. This studio, which thrived during the S-film boom, offered Franco complete creative freedom as long as his productions kept within extremely tight budgets and could be distributed immediately. To meet these demands, the director revived old plots, adapting them to a shifting sociopolitical context. The film is loosely based on *Plaisir à trois*, adjusting the story to a more familiar and relatable situation in line with a libertinism that could be described as provincial: a weekend away on the Alicante coast. The aristocrats are replaced with a middle-class couple, and the conflicts between them are now related to issues of migration, misogyny, classism, institutional power and family economics—a perfectly tailored portrait of contemporary society. However, Franco took his mise-en-scène to more radical terrain, inspired by *Rope*, as he tried to shoot the film with the fewest possible sequence shots.

Lina Romay later recalled that *Gemidos* “only has 14 shots, 16 at most. That means we had to rehearse a lot before filming. The action was supposed to take place over 18 hours, and we shot it in just three days” (quoted in Valencia, 1999: 104). Juan Soler, the cinematographer and a regular on Franco’s crew at the time, adds that, lacking

Hitchcock’s production resources, the planning wasn’t all that different: “I don’t remember it being difficult. After all, we followed a work rhythm and filming method very similar to many other films, despite the longer takes” (Mendibil, 2018: 478).

In the sequence of *Gemidos de placer* equivalent to the one in *Plaisir à trois* discussed above, Lina Romay, a background figure in the earlier film, now dominates the foreground [IMAGE 4]. Her body unfolds, now the real epicentre of Franco’s discourse, openly and unapologetically stripped of the mystery and allure of her predecessor, Soledad Miranda. Lina is Julia, a casual lover who doesn’t even bring elegant clothes to attend a dinner. When the servant brings her a Manila shawl with a flamenco look, Julia exclaims: “Olé!” [IMAGE 5]. Marta remarks that she looks like a gypsy (Miranda had Romani heritage), to which Julia responds cheekily: “The hard part isn’t putting it on, but making sure it doesn’t fall off.” Marta leaves the scene, and the camera lingers on Julia, who looks to the right just as Antonio enters. The two kiss voraciously in a medium shot that shifts to a wide shot as they sit on a couch. Practically outside the frame, Julia performs fellatio on An-

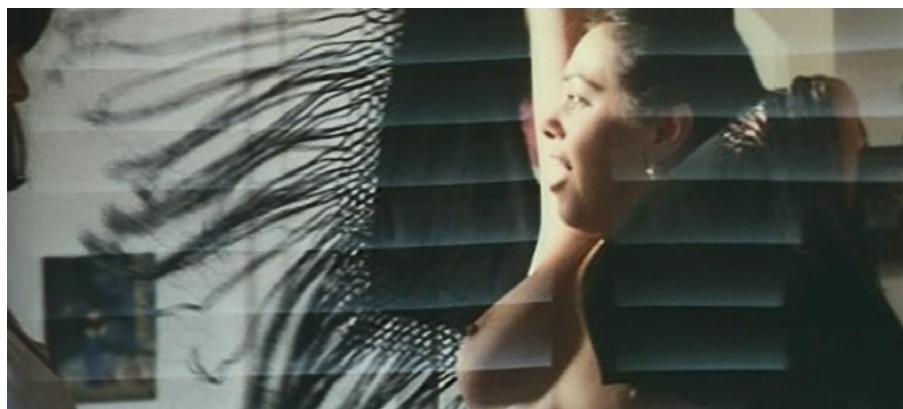


Image 5. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

tonio, and the camera zooms slowly to a close-up on their faces as they begin discussing the murder of his wife. The camera alternates between blurs and zooms that underscore an ecstasy that culminates in multiple orgasms. "You'll be my wife; we'll live in her house in France," Antonio promises her, staring blankly with an expression that combines ambition and delusion. After a short pause, during which Julia looks directly at the camera, Antonio stands up and exits the frame to the right. Julia follows him with her gaze and opens her legs towards the camera [IMAGE 6].

Just as Aumont described, the speed and the camera movements guide the spectator through a six-minute visual frenzy with no cuts, directing our gaze wherever the zoom or focus sharpness takes us. There is no possibility of choice or escape, as Julia's direct address to the camera exposes the spectator-voyeur (or even accomplice). But what distinguishes this sequence shot from the one in *Plaisir* is the transformation of Lina Romay's unfolded body, both as a character and as an actress. From her first appearance in the film, Lina/Julia is an ordinary everyday woman far from any fetishistic or even exotic idealisation.

Although the flash-forward in the prologue echoes Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), with the corpse in the pool and Fenouil's voice-over (dubbed by Franco himself), Lina Romay's arrival breaks away from this cinephilic apparatus, rejecting a whole tradition of femmes fatales and larger-than-life divas. Surrounded by a Berber servant who identifies as a sexual slave and a wife who has been institutionalised for nymphomania, Lina/Julia is a straightforward character, liberated from any male gaze that might transform her into an unattainable object of desire. Marta's joke that Julia "looks like a gypsy" renders visible a normalised aesthetic far from the exotic or even taboo image often associated with Soledad Miranda. Her wardrobe, movements and look all represent a down-to-earth, carnal, tangible presence that unapologetically defies the expectations of a spectator accustomed to cinematic glamour.

Lina Romay is too brazenly bawdy to be erotic. She is precisely the antithesis of Soledad Miranda, no matter how much Franco insists otherwise. The special eroticism that distinguished and almost distinguished and practically articulated Jess Fran-



Image 6. *Gemidos de placer* (Jess Franco, 1982)

co's filmography thus degenerates into vulgarity. (Aguilar, 2011: 226)

The critic Carlos Aguilar, who worked with Franco in the 1980s, suggests it is fitting to "metaphorise" the tension between eroticism and vulgarity in actresses. He thus distinguishes between a stage in Franco's career with actresses whose voluptuousness produces an "intoxicating charm", including Soledad Miranda (and nearly all the actresses he worked with), and a later, coarser, cruder stage with Lina Romay. Aguilar's reflection on Romay offers a revealing framework for exploring the aesthetic and discursive transformation to Jess Franco's filmmaking, particularly in relation to Linda Williams's ideas about pornographic cinema. Aguilar associates Soledad Miranda's body with a mythical idealisation he compares to "glorious cases" such as Josef von Sternberg/Marlene Dietrich (2011: 169), while Lina Romay's "vulgarity" is located at the opposite extreme. This dichotomy suggests a shift in the representation of the female body, where the change from one actress to the other articulates a shift from iconic fetishism towards a form of corporeality that is fully unfolded, rawer and more explicit, and where the actress herself controls her own body.

For Williams, this shift can be understood as an oscillation between two types of fetishism (1989: 42-43): on one hand, the fetishism Mulvey exposes in Sternberg's work with Dietrich, where the woman becomes an idealised object, an implausible visual icon meant to satisfy the male gaze (Mulvey, 2001: 373); and on the other hand, a more credible fetishism that Williams associates with pornographic cinema and which, far from traditional erotic art, is related to Muybridge's photographic studies of nudes, where the female body is stripped of any glamour that would obscure hidden truths. Williams's dichotomy also ties in with Berger's distinction between nudity and nakedness: while Soledad Miranda embodies the nude, with its aura of mystery and elevated eroticism, Lina Romay seems closer to nakedness,

ROMAY REPRESENTS A DOWN-TO-EARTH, CARNAL, TANGIBLE PRESENCE THAT UNAPOLOGETICALLY DEFIES THE EXPECTATIONS OF A SPECTATOR ACCUSTOMED TO CINEMATIC GLAMOUR

which is stripped of the intoxicating veil that characterises the classical fetish. This paradigm shift was already initiated by other Spanish actresses, beginning with the *cuerpo erótico* or *Mujer-Deseo* identified with Sara Montiel (Carmona, 2022: 230), who was often compared to Dietrich.

I found all that quite amusing, because before the death of Franco (the Caudillo, of course), I had spent a few years living in France, where the dual versions that couldn't be seen here [in Spain] were released, so I was tired of watching all those naked actresses who then during the transition to democracy would only undress if the script required it. What hypocrites! (Romay, quoted in Valencia, 1999: 102)

Romay's description of this new context suggests an unfolding in two senses, not only in terms of stripping off her clothes but also in the broader sense of stripping away the masks of her peers. Romay's Julia, with her brazenness and lack of refinement, effectively declares the end of an era in which women like her were relegated to the shadows or hidden away, while the women who attracted the spotlight were forced to conform to the dictates of the traditional male gaze, which idealised them as myths rather than portraying them with all their dimensions and contradictions.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of Lina Romay's unfolded body has provided an opportunity to explore the narrative discourse of Jess Franco's filmography, avoiding simplistic judgments shaped either by the feti-

shistic male gaze or by its denial, which, as Linda Williams points out, is not clearly demonstrated in more explicit or pornographic works. In Franco's work, Romay's body is not merely a spectacle or an idealisation but a realistic physical presence laden with meanings addressing basic social concerns related to power, class, sex and race.

The combination of Romay's physical language with Franco's editing techniques, shots of long duration and fluid camera movements enhances the capacity of cinematic language to create mental images that not only question but often contradict recurring tropes in the representation of sex and desire. This dialogue between body and cinematic technique invites us to rethink how film can transform the classical gaze on the woman, even in productions commonly associated with ideas of exploitation and objectification, laying the foundations for exploring the complexity of female subjectivities.

From this perspective, Lina Romay's unfolded body can be considered a turning point in the representation of eroticism in Spanish cinema, open to a critical cultural and political reading. Drawing on Schneider, the explicit body that certain performers unfold is valuable not only for its visibility but also for its ability to question the cultural norms that have historically determined which bodies should be shown and how they should be displayed. In this sense, Romay's unfolding, her ordinary or even vulgar nakedness, does not submit to the commercial codes of porn or erotic cinema, but instead subverts their rules from within. As revealed in the practices of the "post-porn" actress and performer Annie Sprinkle analysed by Schneider, the female body is reclaimed to bring about the collapse of the heteronormative imaginary: the idealised, inaccessible, unreal image of the woman's body as an object of male desire. By unfolding her body with radical honesty and physicality, Lina Romay operates in a similar way: her intention is not to hide her imperfections or conform to canons of glamour or sophistication, but

rather to confront the spectator with a physical presence that destabilises the narrative and the mercantilist function of erotic or pornographic cinema.

As Williams (1989: 43) notes in her refutation of Mulvey, women's power is not entirely taken away by the cinematic apparatus. To accept this would be to succumb to what Foucault calls "perverse implantation" (1987: 48), assuming that the gaze upon these bodies is inscribed in the subjects themselves rather than in the discourses of institutionalised power. Ultimately, the transition from Soledad Miranda to Lina Romay represented not just a replacement of one actress with another but also a transformation in how Jess Franco's films depicted the female body: from a mythicised symbol to an enunciative surface.

The concept of Lina Romay's "unfolded body" could therefore be understood as an extension and a critical inflection of the archetypes of the *cuerpo-hogar* (home-body), *cuerpo místico* (mystic body) *cuerpo-espéctáculo* (show-body) or *cuerpo erótico* (erotic body) that identified how female desire was inscribed in actresses in Francoist cinema (Bou and Pérez, 2022). In the years of Spain's transition to democracy, Romay introduced a new configuration that transcended the old models through an explicit corporeality that left behind the expressive containment and codes inherited from classical cinema. Romay's body, associated with the sequence shot and the representation of sex without euphemisms, subverts the logic of the archetype itself. Her frontal visibility, her unsublimated physicality and her positioning as a performative subject of desire point to a new era in which the body no longer passively symbolises but instead directly interpellates the spectator and the ideological devices that shape it. ■

NOTES

1 The “S classification” was established by the Spanish Ministry of Culture as a film rating category in 1978, to identify productions containing scenes with explicit sex, full nudity or violence, intended exclusively for adult audiences. Although its original purpose was to restrict access to these films and protect viewer “sensitivity”, it became a powerful marketing tool for promoting provocative titles that in many cases offered little more than sensationalist and crude erotica, although there were also some that were boldly experimental. The category was officially discontinued in 1984.

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LINA ROMAY AND THE UNFOLDED BODY BETWEEN PLAISIR À TROIS AND GEMIDOS DE PLACER

Abstract

This article analyses how the actress Lina Romay intervened in and reconfigured Jess Franco's filmmaking through a physical presence described here as an unfolding or explicit body. Through two films that are highly significant in her career, *Plaisir à trois* (1973) and *Gemidos de placer* (1982), it examines how Romay's body operates as a narrative axis that challenges the conventions of traditional erotic cinema and Spain's *cine de destape* genre. By stripping away idealisations and rejecting the classical fetishistic male gaze, Romay represents a shift in the cinematic representation of desire and sexuality, aligning with the sociopolitical context of Spain's transition to democracy. The analysis explores her gestures, wardrobe and performance in conjunction with the use of sequence shots and moving cameras to amplify the narrative discourse, questioning prejudices and stereotypes about eroticism and the female body. Lina Romay's work with Jess Franco emerges as a form of fringe cinema that destabilises dominant narratives of sex and desire, opening cracks in the political and aesthetic space and allowing the emergence of new female subjectivities.

Key words

Lina Romay; Jess Franco; explicit body; sequence shot; eroticism; pornography; male gaze.

Author

Álex Mendibíl Blanco holds a PhD in Audiovisual Communication from Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He is a researcher, screenwriter and lecturer in the degree program in film at Universidad Camilo José Cela. His lines of research include genre cinema, cult cinema, B films and narrative analysis. He is the author of various articles published in scholarly journals, including *Fotocinema*, *Comparative Cinema* and *Con A de Animación*. He has also published the books *¡Larga vida al trash!* (Dos bigotes, 2023) and *España en serie* (Aguilar, 2013) and he works at Spain's national film library (Filmoteca Española) in programming for *Sala:B*. Contact: amendibil@ucjc.edu.

Article reference

Mendibíl Blanco, A. (2025). Lina Romay and the Unfolded Body Between *Plaisir à trois* and *Gemidos de placer*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 51-64. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1245>

LINA ROMAY Y EL CUERPO DESPLEGADO ENTRE PLAISIR À TROIS Y GEMIDOS DE PLACER

Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo la actriz Lina Romay intervino y reconfiguró el cine de Jess Franco con una presencia física que se describe como cuerpo desplegado o explícito. A través de dos películas tan significativas para su carrera como *Plaisir à trois* (1973) y *Gemidos de placer* (1982), se observa cómo el cuerpo de Romay opera como un eje narrativo que desafía las convenciones del cine erótico tradicional y del destape español. Al despajarse de idealizaciones y rechazar la clásica mirada masculina fetichista, Romay supone un cambio en la representación cinematográfica del deseo y la sexualidad que sintoniza con el escenario sociopolítico de la Transición. El análisis aborda su gestualidad, vestuario y actuación en conjunción con el uso de planos secuencia y la cámara en movimiento, para amplificar el discurso narrativo, cuestionando los prejuicios y estereotipos sobre el cuerpo femenino y el erotismo. El trabajo de Lina Romay con Jess Franco se revela como un cine que, desde los márgenes, desestabiliza las narrativas dominantes sobre el sexo y el deseo, abriendo grietas en el espacio político y estético y permitiendo la entrada de nuevas subjetividades femeninas.

Palabras clave

Lina Romay; Jess Franco; cuerpo explícito; plano secuencia; erotismo; pornografía; mirada masculina.

Autor/a

Álex Mendibíl Blanco (Gijón, 1973) es doctor en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, investigador, guionista y profesor del Grado de Cine de la Universidad Camilo José Cela. Sus áreas de interés son el cine de género, el cine de culto, la Serie B y el análisis narrativo. Es autor de diversos artículos en revistas científicas como *Fotocinema*, *Comparative Cinema* y *Con A de Animación*. Ha publicado los libros *¡Larga vida al trash!* (Dos bigotes, 2023), *España en serie* (Aguilar, 2013) y trabaja con Filmoteca Española en la programación de «Sala: B». Contacto: amendibil@ucjc.edu.

Referencia de este artículo

Mendibíl Blanco, A. (2025). Lina Romay y el cuerpo desplegado entre *Plaisir à trois* y *Gemidos de placer*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 51-64. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1245>

recibido/received: 30.11.2024 | aceptado/accepted: 09.06.2025

Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com

