

**LA FABRA CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORANI**

# **Julia Montilla**

**Strawberry Fields**

**15.11.2025 - 25.01.2026**

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Current history is written from an urban-centric perspective that places us in a position of privilege over the rural world. The city defines the world, describes it, interprets it and establishes whether or not what lies beyond exists. However, the countryside is being constantly rediscovered. Its reinventions range from bucolic poetry to Baroque painting, pastoral novels, Romanticism and Thoreau's 'simple life'. In the context of Spain, the concept of rural life underwent its last metamorphosis after the era of developmentalism, leaving behind the image of peasants who carried out the social revolution or left for the city to escape the established life models, the small-town. Since then, a certain imaginary has idealised the rural world as a place of defiance and associates the countryside with smallholding peasantry, a kind of Gaul that is resistant to the system, in the words of Emma Zafón. However, recent demonstrations by the agricultural sector have shown that this countryside is primarily composed of large businesses that cause environmental damage, impoverish the remaining farmers and exploit local and migrant workers. This is why seasonal workers were excluded from the debate on sustained demands. From the fruit orchards in Lleida to the tomato fields in the Canary Islands and the greenhouses in Almeria, day labourers carry out essential tasks for filling the larders of the West; jobs that remind us that eating implies political responsibility.

*Strawberry Fields* explores the figure of female seasonal workers and the issues that arise from intensive agriculture, establishing a continuity between our colonial past and the current extractivist regime. The film, which encompasses visual essay, documentary and experimental video and film practices, references the song by The Beatles of the same name in its title. The song —a lysergic, psychedelic story, written in Almeria— alludes to the perception of reality ("nothing is real"), exploring the idea that life is simpler when we close our eyes to our surroundings ("living is easy with eyes closed"). However, seeing is a political act. What we see, we affect and, at the same time, we are affected by what we see, which is why this reference mentions both voluntary avoidance and the established view of the world. Two positions that determine the lack of visibility of female day labourers. Following this theme, some of the issues that the film addresses are the

factors that have led to the absence of visual representations of these workers and how the dominant culture has constructed their image.

*Strawberry Fields* is, in part, a hallucinatory and kaleidoscopic journey through the physical and human landscapes of strawberry cultivation in the region of Huelva, which explores the subjective and political nature of the film apparatus and breaks the reality effect of the device. The film project aims to create a critical space for current forms of colonialism and ecocide through audiovisual language, aligning with the principles of representational intersectionality, a tool for resilience and the interruption of dominant narratives about subordinate subjects.

It brings together various layers of content that are connected using vertical editing techniques and loops, slow and fast motion. The materials come from different sources, including documentary-style footage and appropriated footage. In this production, we can find everything, from reflections on the visual construction of the figure of the female day labourer and the origin of strawberries to recordings of the strawberry farming towns of western Andalusia (of their abundant and ostentatious colonial symbols in public spaces to the polytunnel fields for the red berries and the makeshift settlements where some of the workers live in poor conditions). There are also archive images of female day labourers in the social revolution, the Franco regime and the Transition, and of their struggle today. An audiovisual narrative that triggers the debate on the impact of land ownership on its exploitation systems. The previously mentioned layers are complemented by conversations with activists and feminists, as well as excerpts from texts by Lucía Mbomio, Chadia Arab, Ana Pinto, Najat Bassit and Ana Cabana Iglesia about female farm workers.

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The means mentioned above merge into a soundtrack composed of simple rhythmic and musical sounds, such as the percussion produced by clapping hands or by fingers and knuckles tapping on a surface or another part of the body; elements that can take the form of murmurs or become arrangements of restlessness. The choice of sound tools, such as clapping, allows us to highlight the gender and class biases that take shape in the hands of the female labourers. On the one hand, it places the context of the film within the harvest (when employers mainly hire women on the grounds that their delicate

hands prevent the fruit from being damaged) and, on the other, it refers to the dehumanisation implied by the use of the notion of manual labour. Manual work is reflected in their appearance; this work has left marks where the memories of their lives can be read. The hands of female farm workers are calloused and hard, but they are not just work. Hands create and shape the land. They are a symbol of resilience. Hands caress, intertwine and rise in a gesture of solidarity and collective commitment, as Miguel Hernández's poem of the same name reminds us.

In short, this film, somewhere between poetic and observational documentaries, visual experimentation and reflection on the audiovisual medium itself and representation, is the illegitimate child of several genres in which the director, like the female day labourers, works as a harvester, in this case of images, and the mundane can become enchanting. In line with Agnès Varda's film-writing process, the choice (or harvest) of shots, accounts, sounds, visual effects and editing cuts functions in the film like words, ideas, full stops and commas do in a text.

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Sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel places the beginnings of European colonial expansion in the genocide or epistemicide carried out in the Muslim civilisation of Al-Andalus (mosques converted into churches, libraries burned, slavery, etc.). The practices carried out by the conquerors in Al-Andalus on the Muslims who remained in Spain, specifically the system of forced labour known as *comanadoria* (land granted with labour rights), would serve as a trial run for what would later be applied both to the indigenous peoples of the Americas and to the mass kidnapping of Africans for enslavement or to witch burning in Europe.

Colonies have been, in many ways, laboratories of modernity, particularly in terms of the exploitation of living labour and the appropriation of non-human nature. *Strawberry Fields* is about the updating of old mechanisms of domination inherited from colonialism, which, in this case, manifests itself, among other things, in the hiring of women living in Morocco through the legislative systems for collective recruitment from the country of origin. Importing women to export strawberries is called 'orderly migration', a euphemism indicating that mobility is determined by the needs of the labour market rather than by the needs of the people.

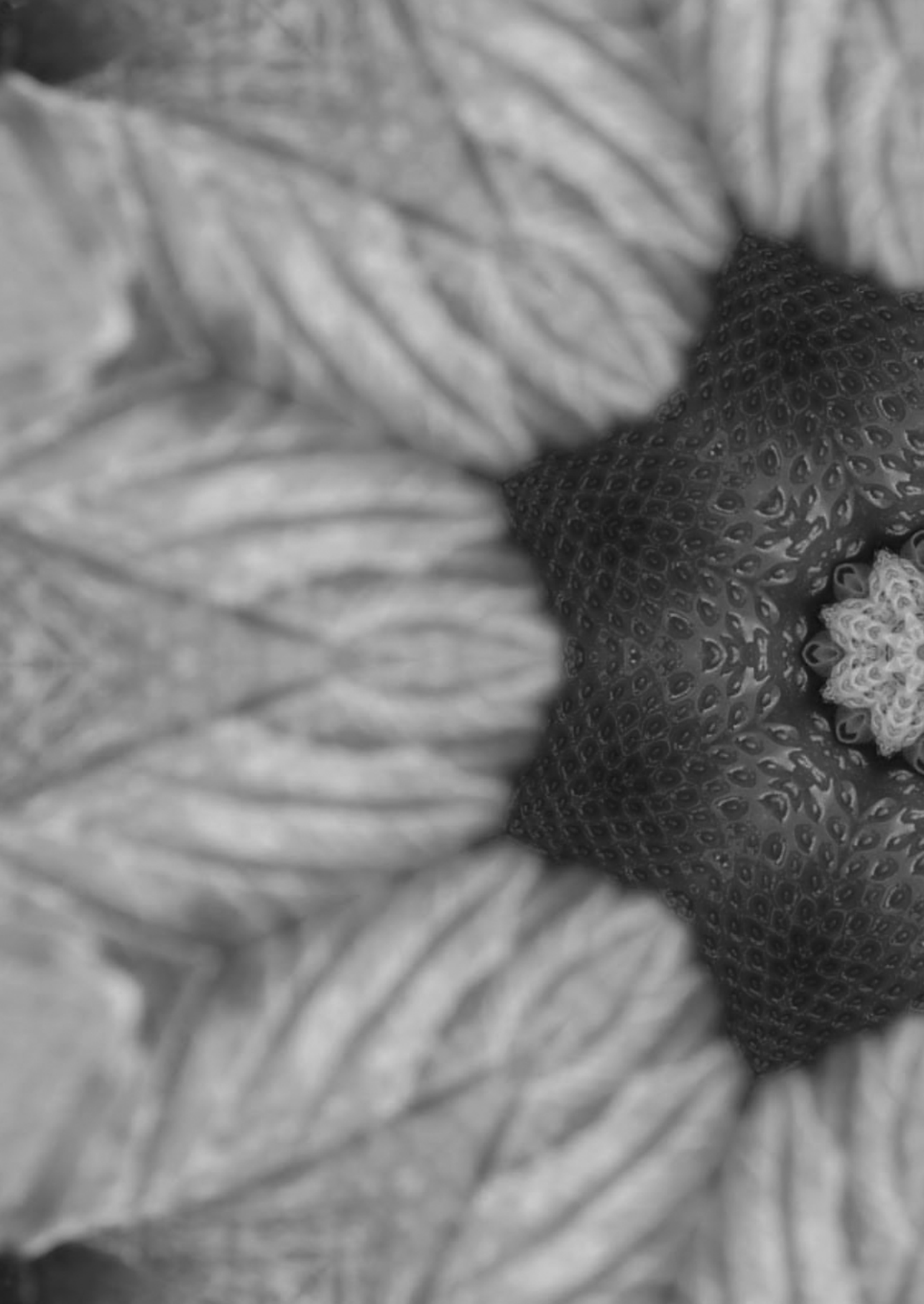
Despite the above account, the journey that this film sets out on is a commitment to the principle of hope and overcoming dejection. And it must bear the fruits of a 'safe journey', as it is based on strategies of resistance and solidarity from the past and present, on the alliance forged between locals and people with a migrant background, on the creation of favourable living conditions and on the latent possibilities of the future.

*Strawberry Fields* is the winning project of the 11th edition of the Video Creation Award. A co-production of the video creation project between the Regional Centres of the System of Public Visual Arts Facilities of Catalonia, Santa Mònica, the Generalitat de Catalunya's Department of Culture and Loop Barcelona.

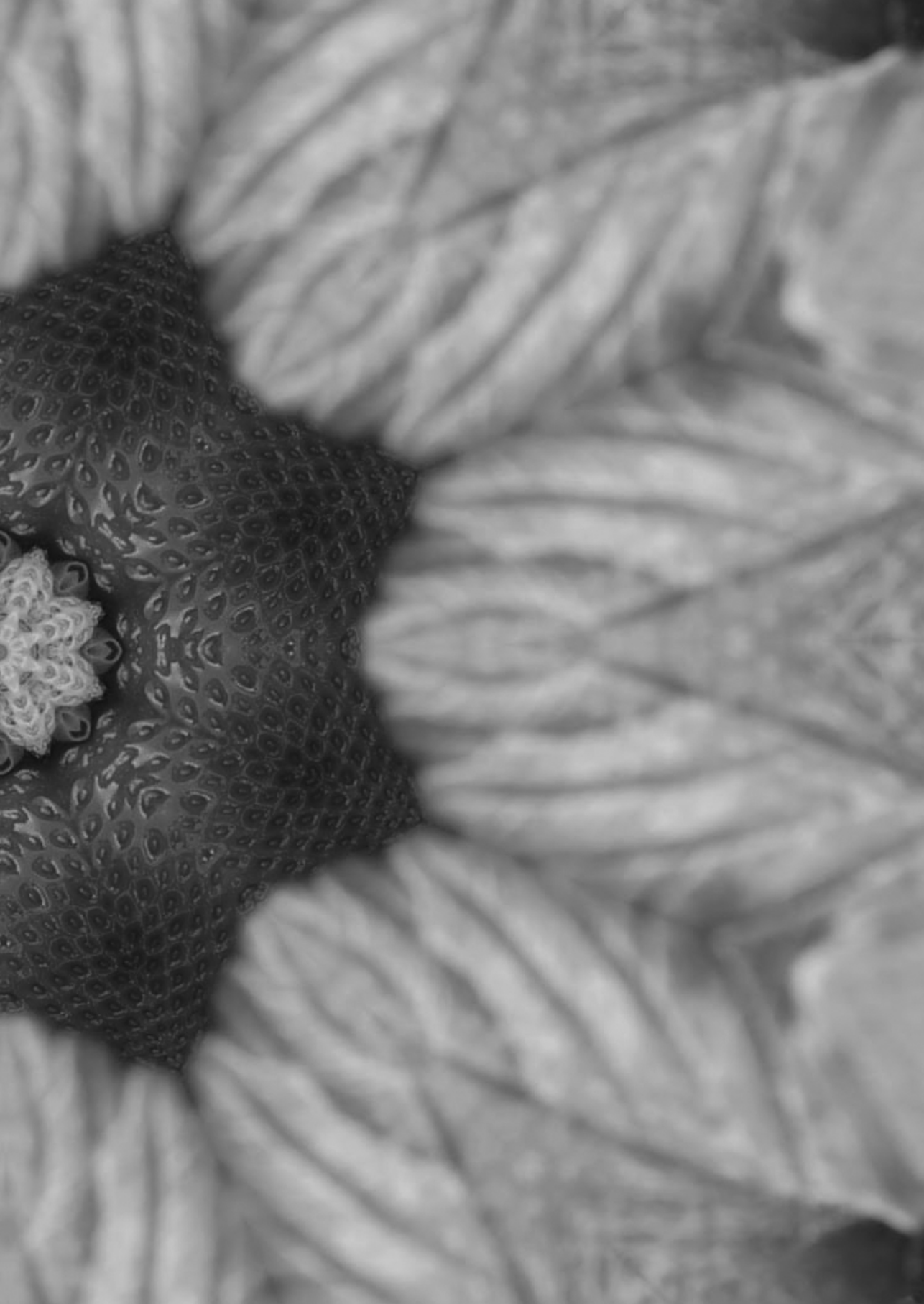
The regional centres of the System of Public Visual Arts Facilities of Catalonia are: ACVic Centre d'Arts Contemporànies (Vic); Bòlit, Centre d'Art Contemporani (Girona); La Fabra Centre d'Art Contemporani (Barcelona); M|A|C Mataró Art Contemporani (Mataró); Mèdol – Centre d'Arts Contemporànies de Tarragona (Tarragona); Centre d'Art la Panera (Lleida); Lo Pati – Centre d'Art Terres de l'Ebre (Amposta); and Centre d'Art Tecla Sala (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat).

This exhibition is part of the Loop Barcelona festival.

Julia Montilla (Barcelona, 1970) graduated in Fine Arts from Universitat de Barcelona (UB), where she is currently working as an associate professor and studying her PhD. Montilla is part of the Spanish *R&D&I project Ritmos del trabajo femenino en la historia del arte y la cultura visual, 1936-2022* (Rhythms of Female Work in the History of Art and Visual Culture). Using a multitude of means, she analyses the role of images and the visual construction of everyday life. Over the past decade, she has developed productions relating to mental distress, religious ecstasy and job insecurity and exclusion. Since the late 1990s, her work has been exhibited at venues such as La Capella and Espai 13 at Fundació Joan Miró, in Barcelona, Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo in Madrid, MACBA in Barcelona and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León. She has been awarded grants by institutions such as MoMA, Fundación Botín, Fundació "la Caixa" and the Institut de Cultura de Barcelona. She was a trustee on the board of Hangar, has worked on the Hamaca Experimental Audiovisual Platform and founded the bookshop La caníbal.







## Public Activities

The dates are provisional and subject to change.  
Please, check our website for the updated programme.

29.11.2025

Tour with those involved.

12 h.

14.12.2025

Guided tour with exhibition room staff.

12 h.

11.01.2026

Tour with those involved.

12 h.

24.01.2026

Screening of *Strawberry Fields* and conversation  
with Gemma Casal.

17 h.

Photo credits:

©Julia Montilla, *Strawberry Fields*, 2025-26.

# LA FABRA CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORANI

## Opening Times

Tuesdays to Saturdays 12 to 20 h

Sundays and Holidays 11 to 15 h

Guided tours information at  
[barcelona.cat/lafabracac](http://barcelona.cat/lafabracac)

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