

Exhibition: **Elmer Batters**
IVAM – Centre Julio González
24th January – 2nd March 2008

Organised by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curators: Marga Paz

The IVAM presents a retrospective of the American photographer Elmer Batters, famous for his fetishistic erotic images where his female models' stockings, legs and feet are the central elements. The exhibition comprises 66 photographs belonging to the collector Benedikt Taschen, taken between the nineteen fifties and eighties. The catalogue published for the exhibition contains reproductions of the works displayed and includes texts by Consuelo Císcar, director of the IVAM, Marga Paz, curator of the exhibition, and Francisco Calvo Serraller.

Elmer Batters (Milwaukee, 1919 – California, 1997) made his debut as a photographer in the late forties. His photographs appeared in adult magazines, a new kind of publication that caused an extraordinary stir in the publishing world in the fifties. Direct successors of the pin-up posters in vogue during the war, these publications contained photographs of scantily dressed or nude girls accompanied by racy articles.

In the late fifties and early sixties, Batters began to publish his own magazines, which had titles as suggestive as *Man's Favorite Pastime*, which sold 5000 copies, *Sheer Delight*, *Leg-O-Rama*, *Nylon Doubletake* or *French Frills*, and in which he did practically

everything himself, both texts and photographs. He often took these in his own home, in the outskirts of Los Angeles, where he had moved in 1955 and installed his photographic laboratory in the garage.

In those extremely puritanical years where this type of fetishism was socially unacceptable, he was accused of obscenity and perversion and was put on trial as a result of his passion for the female foot, expressed in these magazines. Tired of problems with censorship, Batters gave up publishing his own magazines (although not his obsession with female legs and feet) and dedicated himself full-time to general photography, improving and perfecting his technique. "Everybody knows legs are for walking, dancing and loving. But they also speak in a language as eloquent as poetry to those who feel fascinated by them," said the artist about the object of his fetishist passion and art.

Tormented by money problems, he dedicated himself to accepting commissions of photographic works, but his peculiar eroticism did not satisfy the demands of the editors, who were looking for more and more explicitly sexual images. Batters stayed at home to work then, and continued photographing his models there, usually against the background of green curtains typical of his last creative period, where he concentrated almost exclusively on portraying feet, the main focus of his late work. In the mid eighties he stopped work altogether because of failing health in general and problems with his sight in particular.

The publication of his old photographs in the magazine *Leg Show* rescued him from oblivion and brought him a certain amount of fame, but real recognition of his work did not come until shortly before his death, with the publication of two monographs (*From the Tip of the Toes to the Top of the Hose* in 1995 and *Legs that Dance to Elmer's Tunes* in 1997), which attracted worldwide attention thanks to the extraordinary quality of this artist's photographs, which had not previously gone beyond the boundaries of the small universe of fetishism and whose inimitable genius was now discovered. In recent years, his photographs have been exhibited in several galleries, such as the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York (2001) or Cokki Snoei's gallery in Rotterdam (2002). His works have also been included in group exhibitions like the one held at the Kunsthalle in Basle (2000) or the recent one dedicated to the Taschen Collection at the Museo Reins Sofía (2004/5). However,

the exhibition at the IVAM is the first solo show to be dedicated to this photographer in Spain.