



March 2020



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Salvador Dalí (1904 - 1989)
Objet scatologique à fonctionnement symbolique
(*Le Soulier de Gala*), 1931 / 1973
Leather shoe, wood, wire, paper and
miscellaneous objects
49 x 28 x 9 cm
Purchase with participation of the Heritage Fund
[Fonds du patrimoine], 2014
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí /
Adagp, Paris 2020 / Photo © G. Meguerditchian -
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PRESS RELEASE

FROM MIRÓ TO BARCELÓ, A CENTURY OF SPANISH ART

12 MARCH 2020 – 1 NOVEMBER 2021

AN ALL NEW DISPLAY FOR THE COLLECTION

The Centre Pompidou Málaga, in association with a renewed 5-year partnership with the Centre Pompidou, will unveil its latest permanent exhibition tour on March 12th. Entitled "From Miró to Barceló. A Century of Spanish Art" and running until November 1st 2021, this outstanding presentation of the collection will feature throughout the Centre and will immerse visitors in almost a hundred years of Spanish art history.

Cubism, surrealism, figuration and abstraction, painting, sculpture, film and video; there is not a single period or field in the 20th and 21st century art history that has not been dominated by Spanish artists. Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí or Luis Buñuel were the pioneers of new ways of seeing and creating that continue to influence art today.

This chronological pathway through a century of Spanish art demonstrates the extraordinary energy with which the current generation of artists keeps the spirit of the avant-gardists alive. Their predecessors witnessed major events in history, including exile in Paris, war and ostracism, which gave birth to moving, radical and even sacrilegious images.

Their freedom restored, their successors Miquel Barceló, Cristina Iglesias and La Ribot among others, continue to surprise us today by inventing new forms of painting, sculpture and space that breathe new life into the materials, rituals and myths of Spanish art.

A CENTURY OF SPANISH ART (1920–2020)

By Brigitte Léal

Deputy Director of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle - Centre Pompidou
Curator of the exhibition

The Spanish collection now in the Centre Pompidou, which has been built up since the nineteenth century, is one of the most important and richest of all the French national collections.¹ How could we possibly select from it for a representative exhibition that would cover a century of Spanish art, from 1920 to 2020? Draconian decisions had to be made: the duration of the exhibition meant that works on paper had to be omitted altogether, leaving more room for paintings and sculptures, which have been organized in a chronological sequence from Cubism to the present day so as to make the exhibition easier to comprehend as a whole. Lastly, the unusual, hybrid character of the Centre Pompidou in Málaga justified the choice of a more narrowly defined theme for the exhibition, that of the interactions between French and Spanish artists. Modern art in Spain has long been overshadowed by the colossal figure of Pablo Picasso, so much so that in 1988 an official exhibition in Paris, celebrating five centuries of Spanish art, was called "The Century of Picasso".²

Málaga's famous son is well represented in the rooms devoted to the 1920s and 1930s, when he did indeed dominate the art of the day; but to open and close the exhibition as a whole we have deliberately selected two of the most important female artists of our time. The video artist and performer La Ribot greets the public with music, a catchy tune from *Carmen*. La Ribot gives her own interpretation of Bizet's Costumbrist opera and its colourful heroine, which popularized the traditional French cliché of a proud, indomitable Spain, in her video *Traveling Olga / Traveling Gilles* (2003). It was shot entirely in close-up, in two uninterrupted simultaneous sequences in which a dancer-camera (Olga Mesa), running breathlessly through a garden, is juxtaposed with a solo performance in an enclosed space by a second dancer-camera (Gilles Jobin).

The museum's vast central atrium calls for the presence of strong, impressive works. Thanks to the generosity of Cristina Iglesias, whose contribution was indispensable and who immediately agreed to participate in our project, two works from her series, *Corredor suspendido I [Suspended corridor I]* and *Corredor Suspendido III [Suspended corridor III]* (2006), defy space with their aerial yet welcoming forms, encouraging

visitors to slip inside them so as to experience them more fully. Alongside them, the massive bronzes of Juan Muñoz's *Four Piggybacks with Knife* (2001) bear witness to his haunting body of work, building on the sense of unease provoked in spectators by his metaphorical, mysterious figures, disturbing in their subdued violence.

The circular route through the exhibition is divided chronologically into decades, focusing on the major movements which dominated the twentieth century and in which Spanish artists led the way. After the decline of Cubism and the emergence of the Return to Order movement and greater stylistic eclecticism, the 1920s were marked by the impact of Picasso's work. It influenced the Cubist and post-Cubist artists exiled in Paris since the beginning of the century, such as Juan Gris, Pablo Gargallo, and María Blanchard; it also impinged on the future Surrealists, who had gone into exile because Barcelona provided them with no creative outlet, even though it was the only Spanish city receptive to the avant-garde at that time.³ [Let us not forget that Picasso welcomed Miró as a brother to Paris in 1919, and Dalí in 1926.]

It would be impossible to introduce Surrealism, whose originators (André Breton, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, and Tristan Tzara) were all poets, except in the form of a collection of documents from the holdings of the Bibliothèque Kandinsky. Reproductions of manifestos, magazines (including *391*, the magazine founded by Picabia in Barcelona in 1917), tracts, flyers, and photographs by Man Ray express the literary and radical dimensions of the movement, which rose out of the ashes of Dada in Paris in 1924. The first Surrealist group exhibition, held at the Pierre Loeb gallery in Paris in 1925, demonstrated the international range of the circle, headed by Breton and at that time including Jean Arp, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, André Masson, Joan Miró, Picasso, Man Ray, and Pierre Roy.

From the outset, the role played by Spanish artists was a crucial one, first in Montparnasse as members of what became known as the Rue Blomet group, co-led by the trio of Michel Leiris, Masson, and Miró, and then with the volatile couple formed by painter Salvador Dalí and filmmaker Luis Buñuel. These two joined the Surrealists in 1929, the year in which *Un chien andalou*, their first masterpiece, was created;

¹ In 2019 the Spanish collection of the Centre Pompidou contained 1676 works by 180 artists, representing the plastic arts, architecture, drawing, photography, design, film, and video.

² Tomas Llorens and Francisco Calvo Serraller (eds.), *Le Siècle de Picasso. Cinq siècles d'art espagnol*, exh. cat., Paris, Paris-Musées/Ministerio de la Cultura, 1987 [Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 10 October 1987–3 January 1988].

³ On this subject see Brigitte Léal and María Teresa Ocaña (eds.), *Paris-Barcelone. De Gaudí à Miró*, exh. cat., Paris, Éditions de la RMN, 2001 [Grand Palais, 9 October 2001–14 January 2002; Barcelona, Museu Picasso, 28 February–26 May 2002].

the film will be shown continuously during the period of the exhibition.

The following years saw the movement become politically radicalized, a change reflected in its aesthetics (in 1930, André Breton launched *Le Surréalisme et la Révolution*, Louis Aragon published "La Peinture au défi" ("The challenge of painting"), and Dalí and Buñuel made their virulently anticlerical film, *L'Âge d'or*). The group fractured, but also expanded, and found a pair of enlightened patrons, open to every kind of avant-garde movement, in Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles. The exhibition includes a masterly portrait by Luis Fernández of the Vicomtesse de Noailles, his muse, reminding us of the extraordinary freedom that was possible at that period.

Sculpture is a field in which Spanish artists played a decisive role in the twentieth century. It is present throughout the exhibition, with one common denominator: work in metal, first practised by Picasso in 1914 with his Cubist *Guitare*, then continued by Gargallo and especially by Julio González. González gave genuinely new life to the technical and plastic possibilities of iron through his innovative concept of "drawing in space", increasing the role of empty space at the expense of solid mass, a move with a decisive impact on Eduardo Chillida among others. We may recognize the same spatial tension between light and shadow in Cristina Iglesias' wrought-iron flying structures, and even in Jaume Plensa's mysterious, luminous monument, *Bedroom*.

After the Spanish Civil War, in which many intellectuals and artists actively took the side of the Republic, and the Second World War, which made Picasso (*Femme en bleu [Woman in Blue]*, 1944) the symbol of an iconography of resistance, Spain's politically isolated regime, hostile to modernity, once again imposed exile or internal withdrawal on its artists. Formerly a "campo abierto", Spanish art became a "campo cerrado", to quote the title of Max Aub's work, recently adopted by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía to define post-war Spanish art.⁴

In the "Cubo" section, three rooms vividly bear witness to the endurance of these larger-than-life personalities: here their portraits, captured by the lens of Cuban Jesse Fernández,⁵ join those of their predecessors as observed by Man Ray. Encouraged by the presence in Paris of the two legendary Surrealists, Miró and Dalí, a new generation of artists emerged despite the obstacles to try their luck in the land beyond the Pyrenees; some, realizing that the School of Paris

was in decline, pushed on as far as London and New York. Miró was the best possible mediator between past and present: his imagination, along with his gestural, Matterist painting, was permanently grounded in the primitive and the prehistoric, and his continuing prestige and freedom encouraged contemporary sensibilities to move towards an "other", informal art, promoted in Paris by Michel Tapié, the guru of the "metaphysics of matter". This trend coincided with the quest in Spain itself for passionate, tellurian, tactile painting, first practised by Mathias Goeritz' School of Altamira in 1949, then by Antoni Tàpies and Antonio Saura, and today by José María Sicilia and Miquel Barceló. As we look at the Spanish art of the 1950s and 1960s in the collection, beneath the inevitable stylistic eclecticism we can recognize a steadfast loyalty to painting and to the image, filtered through abstraction (Pablo Palazuelo) as often as through realism (Antonio López García, Xavier Valls), as well as the continuing existence of the various groups of artists. In Madrid in 1957 the El Paso circle brought together Manolo Millares and Antonio Saura who, like Tàpies, were promoted in Paris by the major gallery owners specializing in informal abstraction – Rodolphe Stadler, Karl Flinker, and Daniel Cordier.

Should I stay or should I leave? In his ironic diptych, *Jean Hélon évadé en route de Poméranie vers Paris [Escaped prisoner Jean Hélon on the way from Pomerania to Paris]* (1974), Eduardo Arroyo, who fled from Madrid to Paris and then back again, was alluding to his own story: as a dissident artist, he was finally granted the status of political refugee in France in 1974 – only a year before the dictator's death. That question, which loomed over almost a century of Spanish art, is now moot; the global historical panorama on display at the Pompidou Centre in Málaga, by including the most recent generation of Spanish artists who have found fame not only worldwide but also in their native land, is proof of the ongoing fellowship between the past and the avant-garde, and of a dynamism which is still alive and well in the twenty-first century.

⁴ María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, *Campo cerrado. Arte y poder en la posguerra española, 1939-1953*, exh. cat., Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, April–September 2016.

⁵ On the work of Jesse Fernández, see Gabriel Bauret (ed.), *Tours et détours de La Havane à Paris. Jesse A Fernández*, Paris, Filigranes/Maison de l'Amérique Latine, 2012.