

Exhibition 11 February–8 June 2026

Sabatini Building, Floor 0

Alberto Greco

Viva el arte vivo



Photographer unknown, *vivo-dito* action by Alberto Greco in Madrid, 1963
Museo Reina Sofía. Photograph: © Archivo fotográfico Museo Reina Sofía

**MUSEO NACIONAL
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The career of Alberto Greco (Buenos Aires, 1931–Barcelona, 1965) followed a crooked course, advancing against the tide like a queer detour, misstep, or disorientation in which the fleeting movement of life became raw material for art. An informalist painter and organizer of “roving exhibitions” and fairground raffles; a poet and writer; an occasional actor and gay *flâneur*; the founder of *arte vivo* (living art) and organizer of self-promotion actions, Greco turned the public exhibition of his own life into a space of aesthetic creation whose boundaries fluctuated between histrionic posturing, media events, and street rumors.

In the second half of the 1940s, after a brief stint at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano and in various theater companies, Greco frequented a diverse circle of writers and artists and attended painting workshops with Cecilia Marcovich and with Tomás Maldonado and Lidy Prati. In his early poems and short stories, Greco evokes minority sensibilities and aesthetic and affective inflections associated with the child-like, fantastical, and kitsch. In 1950, he self-published *Fiesta*, a book of poems presented at the Juan Cristóbal bookshop in Buenos Aires. The launch, which the police broke up on charges of communism, was later described by the press as Greco’s first happening.

In 1954, Greco traveled to Paris, where he lived until 1956. To make ends meet, he sold drawings and paintings in bars; he designed textiles and painted murals in the cabarets of Montmartre and Pigalle; he worked as a prostitute and fortune teller; he appeared as an extra in the Hollywood film *Funny Face* (1957); and he unsuccessfully tried to sell Creole empanadas, a typical Argentinean dish. He also visited the studios of Fernand Léger and Pablo Picasso and attended art history courses at the Louvre. In 1955, he held his first solo exhibition at the Galerie La Roue, where he presented tempera paintings in a style similar to tachism and lyrical abstraction. He also “signed” the walls of the city’s public toilets with the words *Greco puto* (Greco faggot), an action he later claimed was a precursor to *arte vivo*.



Jorge Roiger, Alberto Greco painting. *Alberto Greco* silk screen portfolio (April 1960), n.d. Photograph: Archivo Galería del Infinito

Alberto Greco, Untitled or *Pintura hombre* (Male painting), 1960. Courtesy of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires. Photograph: Viviana Gil

This trip set Greco on a migratory course: from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; from Genoa and Rome to Madrid and Piedralaves; from New York to Ibiza and Barcelona. Greco's life and career were intense and impetuous, albeit brief. His actions were inseparable from the queer and nomadic roaming of these journeys.

America's Most Important Informalist Painter

Committed to exploration of the informalist movement—and having participated in the group's exhibitions in Buenos Aires in 1959—Greco tested the limits of the possibilities of matter in near-monochrome black paintings for which he mixed oil paint with tar and industrial enamel and also used sawdust, urine (his own and that of his friends), and exposure to rain and city soot.



René Bertholo, Alberto Greco with Alberto Heredia during the *Première exposition arte vivo de A. Greco*, Paris, March 1962. Nuno de Castro Brazão Collection, Lourdes Castro-René Bertholo bequest

He thus sought the unplanned transformation of matter in the vibrant movement of paint understood as a living body, disrupted by tensions, spills, organic and urban waste, and random weather effects—an interest that continued in his actions. In October 1961, he took these explorations into a series of paintings that he exhibited under the title *Las monjas* (The nuns) at the Galería Pizarro. Also around that time, he made pendants and brooches out of horseshoe nails, suggesting a kind of twisted Christological imagery with a plebian and heretical air.

Not long after, Greco covered the streets of downtown Buenos Aires with posters printed with his name and the phrases “¡¡Qué grande sos!!” (How great you are!) and “El pintor informalista más importante de América” (America’s most important informalist



Alberto Greco, *Soldadito español* (Spanish soldier), 1964. Colección Brodersohn
Photograph: Fabián Cañas

painter). This intervention marked a radical departure from paintings and their conditions of circulation and reception in the institutional art circuit. Greco had gone from pushing the boundaries of the painting to acting directly on reality, adopting the formats and modes of address of street propaganda, advertising slogans, and popular catchphrases—strategies he would continue to use in the years that followed. Actions embedded in the city converged with the paths of bodies and images, libidinal flows and urban consumption.

Vivo-dito

Back in Paris in March 1962, Greco was photographed drawing a chalk circle around Argentine artist Alberto Heredia while holding a sign that read, “Première exposition arte vivo de A. Greco.” The action extended to antique stores and the Les Halles market, which Greco singled out and “signed” by drawing his signature

in the air. “Long live *arte vivo*. It is the art of the future,” he wrote. When he passed through Genoa in July, he plastered city walls with his *Manifesto dito dell’arte vivo* (1962), in which he calls for contact “with the living elements of our reality: movement, time, people, conversations, smells, rumors, places, situations.” *Arte vivo*—or *vivo-dito*—sought to single out ordinary moments in the flow of daily life and, for a fleeting moment, declare them art. In Paris and Rome, Greco continued to expand on the idea of *arte vivo* in his notebooks. He experimented with a restless, fugitive writing in which urban chronicles, fiction, autobiography, and snippets of the conversations and oral accounts he recorded as he roamed through the city intertwined and became indistinguishable from one another.

In Rome, Greco carried out his *vivo-dito* actions accompanied by photographer Claudio Abate, who also photographed him wearing a nun’s habit. In January 1963, he organized the *arte vivo* show *Cristo 63: Omaggio a James Joyce* (Christ 63: An homage to James Joyce) at the Teatro Laboratorio, in collaboration with Carmelo Bene and Giuseppe Lenti. Combining references to scenes from the Passion of Christ and excerpts from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and a text by Jean Genet, it was a camp carnival without a unified plot, full of orgiastic and scatological evocations, sacrilegious transpositions, and references to mass culture and popular genres. *Cristo 63* was closed down by the police on the night of its premiere, and Greco was forced to leave Italy. He later described a cinematic escape through the window of a nun’s hospital where he had been confined, and his subsequent appearance, half naked, on the front page of a newspaper.

Between Madrid and the “*Grequissimo Piedralaves*”

In 1963 Greco arrived in Madrid, where he continued his *arte vivo* actions. He also produced drawings and collages in which the experience of roaming the streets sparked unexpected associations between writing imbued with bodily intensities and references to “low” or “plebeian” aesthetics and representations from



Juan Dolcet, *Incorporación de personajes vivos a la tela* (*Encarnación Heredia, mujer sufriente*) [Incorporation of living characters on the canvas (*Encarnación Heredia, suffering woman*)] by Alberto Greco, 1963. Museo Reina Sofía
Photograph: © Archivo fotográfico Museo Reina Sofía

the domestic, popular, and queer spheres. In his drawings and texts, his rambles through the city are interspersed with open-air celebrations, readymades and tacky souvenirs, pop collage and the writing of obscenities. Greco also organized a *vivo-dito* moment in the metro, on the route between Sol and the market at Lavapiés, culminating in the creation of a collective painting that was later burned in a courtyard, defying the surveillance of bodies and spaces imposed by Francisco Franco's dictatorship. In the Galería Privada—Greco's studio as well as a venue for exhibitions and parties—he produced some works in collaboration with Manolo Millares and Antonio Saura. He also embarked on his *objets vivants*, or "incorporation of characters on the canvas," which he presented at Galería Juana Mordó in 1964, tracing the outlines of real models on large canvases as gallery visitors looked on.

That same year, Greco temporarily settled in Piedralaves, a village in the province of Ávila that he started referring to as the



Montserrat Santamaría, *vivo-dito* actions by Alberto Greco in Piedralaves, 1963. Museo Reina Sofía. Photograph: © Archivo fotográfico Museo Reina Sofía

“international capital of Grequismo” or “Grequissimo Piedralaves,” seeking to promote it as the site of a future “International Artists’ Center.” Through Greco’s singling out and “signing” actions, the entire village could be read as *arte vivo*. In Piedralaves, Greco also created the *Gran manifiesto-rollo arte vivo-dito* (1963), a long roll of paper containing a mix of drawings, advertising images, autobiographical accounts, recipes, police reports, and contributions by local children. Unfurled and spread out on



Alberto Greco, *Gran manifiesto-rollo arte vivo-dito* (Large *vivo-dito* art manifesto-roll), Piedralaves, 1963. Museo Reina Sofía. Photograph: © Archivo fotográfico Museo Reina Sofía

the streets of Piedralaves with the help of residents, the roll also became a kind of portable archive-in-progress, incorporating the random marks left by the features of the terrain. From this peripheral, rural community, Greco's *vivo-dito* experimented with a decentralized, fugitive cartography.

Arte vivo is the art of the future

After traveling to New York and Buenos Aires in late 1964—where the *vivo-dito* entitled *Mi Madrid querido* (My beloved Madrid), featuring Spanish dancer Antonio Gades, placed him at the center of the art scene—Greco returned to Madrid in 1965. He exhibited at the Galería Edurne with Millares and with Zaj members Juan Hidalgo and Walter Marchetti, then left for Ibiza soon after. On the island's beaches, he began writing *Besos brujos* (Bewitching kisses, 1965), a book that takes its title from a 1937 Argentine film directed by José Agustín Ferreyra and starring Libertad Lamarque. Greco twisted the heterosexual model of Ferreyra's melodrama into a queer story focusing on his troubled relationship—marked by jealousy, deceit, misunderstandings, and moments of despair—with former lover Claudio (with whom he had reconnected in New York). *Besos brujos* is also *arte*



Alberto Greco, *Todo de todo* [All of everything], 1964. © Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, IVAM. Photograph: Juan García Rosell

vivo: Greco wrote the story as events unfolded, incorporating graphics, drawings, traces of food and drink, and conversations. Various narrative levels and genres overlap in the novel, creating breaks in the main storyline that open it up to a disjointed montage of popular songs, spy comics, erotic stories, westerns, children's stories, and readers' letters from magazines of the time.

From its outset until the artist's premature demise in 1965, *vivo-dito* had sought to engage directly with life, its movement, and its transformative opportunities. Greco saw *vivo-dito* as an "art of the future": not an aesthetic program to be progressively realized but an "adventure" open to the unforeseen—an inopportune and fleeting gesture, a bumpy crossing, prompting the merging of art and life.

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