

Exhibition December 18, 2019 – November 2, 2020

Sabatini Building, Floor 4

Ignacio Gómez de Liaño

Forsaking Writing



The exhibition *Ignacio Gómez de Liaño: Forsaking Writing*, organized by the Collections Department of the Museo Reina Sofía, revolves around the donation to the museum of the personal archive of the writer, poet, and philosopher Ignacio Gómez de Liaño (b. Madrid, 1946). The gift includes a valuable set of works by Spanish and international artists, as well as a documents section made up of a large number of letters, writings, and other poetic, philosophical, and academic materials. Along with the bulk of the archive—which spans from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s and has not been shown publicly before—the exhibition presents loans and productions of poetic works that had been destroyed or existed only as projects. They position Gómez de Liaño both as an influential actor in the development of public and action poetry and as a promoter of artists and a prominent figure in the cultural activity that emerged from the major art production centers during the decades in question.

In Spain, the 1960s was notable for the half-hearted liberalization of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship and gradual economic developmentalism, accompanied by cultural initiatives that sought to transmit an image of modernity and progress abroad. The experimental art scene found cracks in the regime in which to grow and even secured the support of public bodies, although with limited means. This was the case of the Problemática 63 movement led by the Uruguayan poet Julio Campal, who was joined by Gómez de Liaño in 1964. Gómez de Liaño then became familiar with the most contemporary experimental poetry trends, including Brazilian concrete poetry group Noigandres and the French spatialism theorized by the poets Ilse Garnier and Pierre Garnier. These influences prompted him to create his first poems within the parameters of the geometric abstraction of typographic language, devoid of any kind of expressionism or “irrationality” and based on the principles of objectivity and reflection.

Thanks to his involvement with Problemática 63, Gómez de Liaño came into contact with many foreign artists and became part of the international network of experimental poets who used the epistolary medium for a constant exchange of publications, works, and ideas. After several trips to other European countries, he developed personal friendships with the poets Julien Blaine, Jean François Bory, Arrigo Lora-Totino, and Adriano Spatola, as well as the philosopher Max Bense, among others, and collaborated with them on various publishing, exhibition, and performative projects. This led him to publish his first manifesto, *Abandonner l’écriture* (1969), in the audiovisual magazine *OU*, founded by the sound poet and independent publisher Henri Chopin, who greatly influenced Gómez de Liaño’s work. Like the manifestos of the early avant-gardes, Gómez de Liaño wanted to shake up the established order and suggest new forms of language in which words are not confined to a single meaning but can occupy space and become action.



As had been the case with concrete art—a movement started by writers but based on collaboration among poets, plastic artists, and museums—Gómez de Liaño occupied an aesthetic space that sought to break the boundaries between genres and media. Although he was a regular in circles frequented by writers, his closest friends were always plastic artists. With cohorts such as Herminio Molero and Manuel Quejido, and thanks to his strong network of international contacts, he founded the Cooperativa de Producción Artística y Artesana (1966–1969), which included members of the group Castilla 63 (Elena Asins, LUGAN, and Julio Plaza), the Belgian-American poet Alain Arias-Misson, and German-British composer Lily Greenham. Like poetic guerrillas, they defended the social function of art and rejected the commodification and fetishism of the artistic object. Their intended purpose was not to create artworks together but to establish a framework that would allow artists to advance in their practice. Their aspirations materialized, in part, thanks to an intense collaboration with the German Institute in Madrid and Barcelona, where, for a brief period, they organized exhibitions, lectures, and performances.

Gómez de Liaño’s friendship with Arias-Misson led him to write one of the most interesting chapters in the history of action and experimental poetry in Spain. In 1969, Arias-Misson invited him to collaborate on the public poem *A MADRID*. Imbued with the spirit of May 1968—which, despite having swept across the world, was felt with less intensity in Spain—and influenced by philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, Gómez de Liaño interpreted the street as a place of meeting and spontaneous theater. His principal desire was to “bring poetry into life,” take poetry to the streets, mark the city by means of semiotic signs, liberate the word from the page to boost its disruptive power, and occupy the city as a privileged site of protest and revolution. In Spain during Franco’s regime, such an attitude would take on sociopolitical significance and enormous critical importance.

In 1972, Gómez de Liaño was expelled from the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Madrid, where he was professor of aesthetics, as punishment for failing to prevent one of his students from carrying out a poetic action in the classroom. His disgust at this repressive action, coupled with burnout following the Encuentros de Pamplona (1972) and an intense period of activity as coordinator of the Seminar on Automatic Generation of Plastic Forms at the Computing Centre, University of Madrid, prompted him to move to the island of Ibiza. This period of introspective isolation led to one of his most productive and intimate periods as a poet but also marked the end of a decade of fast-paced experimental activity.

Ignacio Gómez de Liaño: Forsaking Writing looks at its subject from both central and eccentric points of view. Gómez de Liaño was a poet, historian, teacher, cooperativist, and programmer of seminars and exhibitions. He was, in short, the “agitator” of a support network of national and international artists that is presented here not simply to give shape and meaning to the oeuvre of a particular artist but to situate Spanish experimental poetry within the narratives that make up art history, where it has always been present, but only as an isolated, indistinct chapter. Gómez de Liaño emerges as a key case study enabling us to think about experimental poetry as an archipelago rather than an island. His poetry and his writings, as well as the rich complexity of the countless collaborations and contributions he engaged in with the core group of artists who made up his artistic network, are imbued with the main elements that shaped the avant-garde spirit of heterogeneous experimentation in Spain. Its traces can be seen today in the legacy of his archive.