At the End of the Utopia

The period between the forties and the mid-sixties is a testimony to the triumph and failure of Modernism, using the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the term. After the tremendous negative impact on the utopian avant-garde ambitions produced by the Holocaust and World War II, a war for which Spain's Civil War had been merely a general rehearsal; modernity could only find refuge in its own autonomy as its transcendental means to reconfigure the world. If pure visibility and disembodiment of the aesthetic experience had been constants in modernity's most idealistic aspects, these would now reach their full extent. This development coincided with the appearance of an omnipresent consumer society and a series of political changes that brought with them a new balance of power and would determine our perception of the world.

It was a world that appears polarized and divided between two geopolitical hemispheres, one led by the United States, and the other by the Soviet Union. In the former, the keyword would be "freedom", in the latter "equality". Both are defined as antagonistic and exclusive, although in fact they complement one another. Art and culture were not oblivious to these tensions and to the continuous polemics between devout supporters of realism and representationalism, as a means of social transformation, and those who advocated an individualistic art of an abstract nature.

In Spain, this historic period covers Franco's regime in its entirety, from the desolation of the forties to the beginning of the transition to democracy,

which started with the promulgation in 1967 of the Organic Law of the State, the beginning of the end of a regime bent on self perpetuation. Intellectuals, artists and writers played key roles in the State's democratic evolution. After the penuries of the post-war period there was an enormous appetite for knowledge, and universities, magazines and publications of all kinds were all founded in those places where resistance continually stretched and pushed the limits imposed by censorship. At the beginning of the seventies, miners' strikes were called in Asturias, and the new labour union, *Comisiones Obreras*, had started to extend its networks. For their part, in 1966 a large number of Barcelona university students locked themselves in the Capuchins' Monastery in Sarrià and the same year another significant group of teachers, poets and thinkers tried to pay a simultaneously poetic and political tribute to Antonio Machado in Baeza. Both actions were the result of problems which had been unsatisfactorily resolved by the regime and highlighted the latter's difficulties in managing a social reality that was gaining ground. Two films by Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955) and *The War Is Over* (1966), the latter with a script by Jorge Semprún, accurately characterized the different sensitivities that opened and closed the period here analysed.

The Cold War would trigger a fierce battle for cultural and ideological hegemony, to which artists were, obviously, not oblivious. If, during the first half of the century modernity had gone hand-in-hand with the Avant-garde, no matter its colour, and artists had always imagined themselves as separate and ahead of the norm of society, from that point on their symbiosis would be inextricable. It is no surprise to discover that, beyond the fact that many of these artists were classified as the "new irascible" or that they saw themselves as a sort of new savages, their work was repeatedly used by various governments as propaganda material. The struggle for cultural and artistic supremacy between Paris and New York was certainly a result of this new political situation for Art. The former did not want to lose the role it had played for almost a century and the latter represented the new order of things. Official history tells in detail how New York stole the idea of Modern Art from Paris. But what it does not tell is that this Modern Art, whose torch both claimed to hold, was only one part of the story.

The political and social realities of these decades were much more complex than the critics could see, blinded as they were by the battle for artistic pre-eminence. For example, analysing what happened in the Western world from a broader perspective, we see that, while Paris and New York wrestled in an all-out war, the enlightened national bourgeoisie in Latin America promoted a kind of international style, linked to Neo-Concrete Art, and we cannot avoid wondering about the role that these local bourgeoisies played in a moment in which the world was becoming global. An element that united most dominant classes in the American continent was the firm commitment to that which explicitly showed the features of the Avant-garde, something which represented its aspiration to aristocracy and to a total cultural power. This aspiration acquired the form that T.J. Clark defined as *vulgarity*, as opposed to popular and also to aesthetic refinement: an inclination to simplicity, to directness, to naivety, to impetuosity, to bright colours and to the emotional. In Latin America vulgarity tended toward constructivist aesthetics, in the United States it promoted gesture and action.

No matter how much Modernism advocates the purity of the artistic species, what the new mapping of Contemporary Art reveals is just the opposite, not the specificity of forms, but their tension. This direction explains better how the pictorial space of Matta, which so influenced Gorky and others, could turn, in combination with Concrete Poetry, into a phenomenon closer to poetry than to painting, as much as this was understood by the orthodox circles of modernity. In the same way, we realize that what the Abstract Expressionists extolled was not automatism, but its mark, the fact that the work looked automatic. This would explain why Robert Motherwell, to mention one example, repeated shapes from *Elegía a la República Española* again and again, the same ones he extracted from a small drawing from 1949.

If we want to reconsider this period it is clear that the concepts of pure visual imagery and immediacy of perception have to be substituted by others in which the work of Art is conceived as a statement immersed in a broader discursive framework.

The painters in the mid-twentieth century definitely opened up new fields to our aesthetic perception, but without following its laws. Their intention was to create a language that would revolutionise the limits of our world. Perhaps this was the reason for their success and also for their failure: the legitimacy of the new ways of painting was based not so much on the transcendence of their force, but on their failure to become that force. A force that they imagined, but they did not achieve.

Sometimes, in their works the American Abstract Expressionists like the Spanish Informalists, made references not only to modern painting but also to paintings from other historical periods. The allusions to some figures of Baroque Art such as Caravaggio or Ribera are significant in some cases. However, these are always present in a subjective and anti-conventional way, without recognizing their nature as an artistic genre. One of the mistakes of these authors was to ignore the institutionalization of Art. They failed to understand that the "artist's subject" was not discovering how the painting could free itself from the constraints of the frame, but rather to free from those imposed by its existence in the institution. The more they affirmed their independence and freedom, the more absorbed they were and the more they legitimated the ideologies that went against their own principles. Where Abstract Expressionism and Informalism failed was that their criticism of the system was recognised as the systems' maximum expression, and its ambassador in other countries. They did not question their own legitimacy as a movement for change. Nor did they question the process by which, not only were crises not resolved, but rather transformed, in sublime fixation, into symbols and fetishes. The battles for cultural hegemony in the Cold War made it evident that Art was not oblivious to the institution of Art, but to its uncompromising condition of existence.

This was a convulsive and decisive period in the history of the century and it is no coincidence that it is marked by the contrast and comparison between two antagonistic artistic models: on the one hand, painting, expressive and gestural, and on the other, the object, the impression and the indexing. Picasso and Miró are fundamental to understanding the worries of

Motherwell, Tàpies or Saura, but Duchamp was the greatest reference for artists, like Rauschenberg, Cage or Twombly, who determine our understanding of the sixties. In the same way, the romantic notion of the artist, as demiurge, capable of creating from nothing, is substituted by a new notion of an artist who recycles and works with found objects or graffiti. The contrast between Rothko, to give an example, and Villeglé or Raymond Hains is profoundly revealing.

Possibly, painting has not had as much prestige in any other period of the twentieth century, and this, in a certain sense, has been its swan song. After the works by Pollock, Rothko or De Kooning, the need to conceive a new alphabet spread and it was imperative to start from scratch. Ellsworth Kelly, on the one hand, and John Cage, on the other, are archetypes of this new attitude. In Spain the situation was not much different. An extraordinary generation of painters, which included Tàpies, Saura, Millares and others, would be followed by an irreplaceable group of artists with very different parameters, who questioned the fundamentals of the poetic discourse of the former. *The Tragic End of Marcel Duchamp* by Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati or Greco's actions in Lavapiés fall into this categorisation.

The generation of artists who started working in the sixties found an evident decline in what the Abstract Expressionists in America and their contemporaries in Europe maintained was high Modernism. Other practices and techniques, which showed the condition with which poetical texts could become objects – as Julia Robinson mentions in this same publication – came after, and were followed by, the spectacular transformation of the reader from active to passive spectator. These practices were more adapted to the period that was inevitably approaching. With the formation of new neo-capitalist structures, Art, as their most advanced form of culture, was under suspicion. The need for a new paradigm became obvious. But this is yet another story.

Manuel J. Borja-Villel
Director, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Is the War Over? Art in a Divided World (1945-1968)

The Reina Sofía Museum believes the presentation of its collections is an exercise in public interpretation and questioning, which requires constant updating and renewal. Each presentation is not only an exposure and development of the previously outlined hypothesis, but also issues from which the questions emerge that will be posed in the future.

The two decades after the end of World War II coincided with the toughest period of Franco's dictatorship and the fertile soil for the Avant-garde culture in Spain. The contradictions and turmoil of the time led to some very peculiar attitudes and poetics which were essential in the definition of the artistic field that is still current. It should therefore come as no surprise to find Spanish Art in the fifties in a dialectical relationship with the vector opened by *Guernica* (1937) and the Spanish Pavilion 1937 should be one of the axes of the Museum's Collection and one of its distinctive features. Without a doubt, one of our core missions must be the in-depth study and reinterpretation of this Art, both for the design of the exhibitions and also for our acquisitions policy. This is no easy task, given that as a result of its own centrality, this corpus has been systematically subjected to a canonical interpretation, for which this Museum has been largely responsible. Following our mission and in order to intervene in the way in which Spanish Art itself is valued and to open the way to new narratives, we must examine this Art in the light of new contexts and based on different objects.

Moreover, going beyond the specific field of Spanish Art, the forties, fifties and sixties were the most convulsive periods for Avant-garde Art. During these periods the relationships between artistic practice and culture as a whole were debated and radically redefined. The division and polarization of the world, as well as the rapid consolidation of western consumer society, were to force a drastic reconsideration of Avant-garde proposals and strategies. This period represented the consolidation of a modernity which was ideologically aligned with prevailing power structures and rooted in strong central-peripheral logic. However, on the other hand, there was also a proliferation of "other" modernities. These specific, divergent modernities were resistant to being redirected toward a single artistic dimension, which was the reason for which they were marginalised from the official ideology of Art history and from museums. The Reina Sofia Museum, from its singular position of "Museum of the South", has another core mission: to promote and value the poetical and critical power of these uncomfortable modernities, with respect to the central narrative, whilst at the same time avoiding falling into an atomised and deconstructed vision, which would only reinforce the dominant message. In this direction, for example, Latin American Concrete Art is presented in a direct dialogue with the works of Jorge Oteiza, which avoids the works appearing locked up in their own idiosyncratic singularities.

In fact, one of the main hypotheses which articulate the new presentation is that of the relevance of these projects in the configuration of a genuinely modern sensibility. These apparently eccentric and frustrated projects configured a sensibility which would not end with the exhaustion of the aesthetic dynamics of modernity. Episodes like those of Lettrism or Situationism were often interwoven and hidden among other famous chapters of the accepted canonical narrative, such as European Informalism or North American Abstract Expressionism, as they were destabilising elements which opened up a discourse that was, in principle, closed. The same thing happened in Spanish Art history when the *Estampa Popular* Movement was placed near some of the great names of Spanish Abstraction.

The current layout of the Collection shares an identical narrative spirit with the previous layout; a similar vocation for telling stories and of offering lines of escape that the visitor is free to follow. They also share the selection criteria and the combination of documents, works and media, as well as the rhythm in the sequence of spaces. Now, as then, we did not systematically look for the Art work or group of works that were acclaimed by the critics and history to best represent the artist's *oeuvre*. We rather, and more often, looked for those works that would reveal the artist's thinking process, as shown by the drawings by Pablo Palazuelo. On other occasions we have also looked for those works that go beyond the individual style and connect the artist with other less visited contexts, as in the case of Antonio Saura and Manuel Millares in their contact with Alberto Greco in the early sixties. Neither these two artists, nor Antoni Tàpies, the third member of this particular Parnassus of Spanish Art, appears in one single environment, which like Picasso, Miró and Dalí, are represented within different times, contexts and with different meanings.

The artistic object loses its absolute sovereignty in the exhibition hall. Documents, magazines, leaflets or posters are all present in the exhibition. They are not included to give "context" to the artistic creation but rather, as a complete redefinition of the exhibition space, to offer new points of view different from mere aesthetics and to stimulate multiple interpretations. This eruption of printed materials, of documentary photography and cinema, all created for mass reproduction, mass distribution and consumption, had only appeared diffidently in the previous display of the Collection, in the part dedicated to the post-war period. Its conspicuousness in the current layout is a result of the emphasis placed on processes and movements. Conventional artistic media are no longer the priority in the new operational space. Lettrism, Situationism or the so called New Realisms (which up until now have been absent from the Museum's ideology and its collections), are now projected onto the streets and thus invade the spaces of information and communication and day-to-day life.

Although the main focus of the spatial layout is fundamentally chronological, there is an underlying central hypothesis which is of a historical

nature: the emergence of a disoriented and fragmented subject after World War II, which at first is a painful experience of loss and anomaly, but which gradually takes on shape and finds its own voice, within a framework of economic, political and social processes from which it is no longer able to find a stable distance. The journey begins with the radical criticism of language of Jean Fautrier and Isidore Isou in post-war Paris, and ends with the Alain Resnais film, *The War is Over* (1966) which illustrates the erosion of the dynamics of the anti-Franco resistance in the sixties. This course is not linear, but rather it is a river fed by diverse tributaries, drawing wide meanders until reaching its end and forming a complex delta with numerous channels.

The most notable difference on this occasion lies in the fact that the "thesis" rooms which dominated the previous layout, like the one that presented the swan song of international painting in relation to the climax of the capitalist economic model at the end of the fifties, have been surpassed by "case" rooms, in which specific processes are dealt with and aesthetically and historically delimited. This is the case of the presentation of the works of the Argentinian Alberto Greco during his time in our country. Previously we were moved by the urgency to break inherited narrative inertia and our aim to show new hypotheses. This was done through the strategic repositioning of the works already in the Collection, since the acquisitions, loans and temporary transfers had not yet been made that now allow us a more precise and authoritative type of ideology. The Museum has acquired the Alberto Greco archive here in Spain; an important series of architectonic drawings by Roberto Matta; a large amount of Lettrist and Situationist material; as well as pivotal works of artists such as Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, François Dûfrene, Jackson Mac Low and Robert Filliou. The privilege of having temporary loans of works from the collections of Letaillieur, Ella Fontanals-Cisneros, of Latin American Art and of North American abstract paintings of Onnasch has been very significant.

The emphasis that this presentation places on historical specificities is not in response to the impossible aspiration of reconstructing that which was, just as it was. The choice and arrangement of the pieces was not motivated by an

intention to exemplify some immutable truth. During their visit, the visitors find themselves confronted by the contradictory and open nature of the historic and artistic processes which defy any closed interpretation or rigid causality. They are invited to overcome the singularity of each case and hear echoes, recognise differences and establish connections with other processes and other scenes. The spatial sequence occurs according to a counterpointing logic similar to that which organises the rest of the Collection, by means of which the visitor comes across continual contrasts, parallelisms and bifurcations, as well as an intertwining of Spanish and international Art.

There are no standalone sections in this long itinerary through the decades from the forties to the sixties, however five main nuclei can be perceived, arranged chronologically. The first of these deals with the immediate post-war period in two different political and cultural environments: Europe, principally Paris, and Spain. The war casts its shadow on the work of artists who established the dystopian nature of the world and the futility of culture and conventional languages in the mission to make this visible and intelligible. The highlight of the first section is the Parisian scene of Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux, Hans Hartung, Wols and Brassaï, and around the *Canto de los muertos* (1948) by Pablo Picasso. The innovation introduced here is the counterpoint provided by Lettrism to the negative visual drive of these artists. Lettrism, a group rooted in Dadaism and with an anti-cultural slant led by Isidore Isou, proposes a radical reinvention of language, which is also of life. In opposition to the crude canvases of the former, Lettrism abandons the traditional arts almost completely and manifests and disseminates itself through actions, manifestos, posters, poetry publications, sound poems and experimental cinema, boasting the first escape from the conventional scope of art after the war. They are encouraged by an impulse to intervene in the environment of the streets and the cultural mass media that would be inherited by the Situationists and "New Realists" at the end of the fifties.

After this first taste of post-war sentiment in Paris we turn ninety degrees to the south to look at the Spanish Art scene during the period of autarchy that

followed Franco's victory in 1939, and which would last until the international opening up of the mid-fifties. Presented as a counterpoint are the series of photos taken by Brassaï and Eugene Smith of this "other" fascination that popular Spain offered around 1950; the *fiesta* in the case of the former, and profoundly rural in the case of the latter.

On this occasion, the goal was to offer a wide-angle point of view, trying to present not just the first attempts of a cornered and crippled avant-garde to take shape again in the shadows, but also the images and formal proposals, immediately after the end of the war, of the artists on the winning side. These begin an attempt to reach an official aesthetics of the regime, starting from the common places of the "telluric" Surrealism of the thirties, from the iconographic density of Dalí, from the metaphysical solemnity of Italian painting, in a combination that redeemed the ruins and was utopian in reconstruction, as can be seen in the works of José Caballero, Carlos Sáenz de Tejada, Luis Castellanos, who propagated an aesthetics that were supposedly the bearer of the Spanish essence. Beside these figures frozen in an immutable time, one can better appreciate the semantic openness and creative freedom of the contemporary works of Joan Miró created in his Mallorcan hideaway and the tiny feminine figures carved by Ángel Ferrant in his internal exile. This surrealist escape route, which took an interest in the infantile and primitive, proliferated in small groups at the periphery of official Art, which was often also the geographical periphery with respect to the centre of the regime in Madrid. On display alongside these are the paintings of the members of Dau al Set, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart and the young Antoni Tàpies, Manuel Millares and Antonio Saura, with material that demonstrates a new cultural organisation; publications, magazines, events and other testimonies of the recovery of the Avant-garde spirit around 1948.

Within the narrative of the events of the Spanish Avant-garde during the Franco years, we wanted to portray in depth the specific terms on which the question of Abstraction was dealt with, something central to the international artistic climate of the time, a few years before the emergence of the Spanish Informalist School at the end of the fifties. The fundamental milestone in this

process was the First Congress of Abstract Art, accompanied by an exhibition dedicated to the same theme, which was held in Santander in the summer of 1953. Organised by José Luis Fernández del Amo, director of the Madrid National Museum of Contemporary Art, as part of the round of summer courses held by the Menéndez Pelayo International University, the dean of which at the time was Fraga Iribarne, it made the gradual normalisation of the Avant-garde artistic debate within the regime obvious. Although not all of the artists represented in this room were at the conference or in the exhibition, their work from those years shows the relative complexity and diversity of the options that Spanish Abstraction already presented at that time.

For the Venice Biennale in 1958, Luis González Robles, who was in charge of the organisation of the Spanish Pavilion, selected the best of the new generation of abstract artists in order to project an image of a modern country to the outside world. The dramatic burlaps of Manuel Millares, the material surfaces of Antoni Tàpies, the large canvases of El Paso group members, displayed in the Museum, manifest the high degree of aesthetic and expressive definition achieved by these painters and the assuredness with which they presented themselves to the public.

Within the framework of Spanish representation in international artistic events, the case of Oteiza again underlines the complexity of Spanish Art at the time and the regime's ambitions with its overseas policies. In contrast to the heroic painting of the previous movements, the "experimental proposal" of Jorge Oteiza is presented in connection with experiences of a constructive direction of the Brazil of 1957, the year in which the artist represented Spain in the fourth Sao Paulo Biennale. The radical abstraction of the works on display does not aim to complete the *jigsaw puzzle* of the history of Art, even in its most insignificant pieces, but completely the contrary, it aims to challenge the accepted closed narrative of modernity based on centres and peripheries.

The entry into the second nucleus, which addresses the optical predominance in the "classical" period of international modernity and its

multiple dissents, is done by means of an important cinematographic event. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). With this we are not only making reference to the hegemony of the mass culture at this time, we are rather evoking the paranoiac visual regime of the Cold War and making day-to-day life progressively more spectacular. Hollywood is the perfect introduction to the section dedicated to big North American Abstract painting, which, as its greatest champion, the critic Clement Greenberg, would assert, means superseding painting on an easel in favour of an expanded format in which the visual breaks out of the material and conceptual limits of the bourgeois frame. The Art historian T.J. Clark, reminds us of the kinship between this overflowing look and the visual nature of publicity and the mass media. In parallel, the visitor is invited to contrast the expanded perspective of North American painting with alternatives to the modernist coupling of abstraction and expressive subject that arises at the end of the fifties.

In Paris in 1955, the Denise René gallery, in collaboration with the Rumanian artist, Vasarely, organised an exhibition that aimed to recover the principals of the formal analysis of the Avant-garde of the early twentieth century, from Cubism and Duchamp to Constructivism, and pitch them against the dominant Informalism. In *Le Mouvement*, as the exhibition was named, the emphasis was placed on one aspect, Movement, which was recognised as an axial element of modernity, directly related to technological development and the transformation of lifestyles. On the basis of an analytical approach to form and movement, it was also going to reignite the interest in perceptive processes and in the temporal interaction of bodies in space, which, as it happened in the old between-wars Constructivist project, opened up the field to cinema, design and architecture. Along with these, the Equipo 57 group represents the collective and rule making reverse side of the Individualist Expressionism in Spanish art during these years. This group was made up of a group of young painters, sculptors and architects, who coincided, as did many others, in Paris, and whose work had a projective and utopian nature and derived formal solutions from a materialist analysis of the means of production and the technological media that were at the service of a new society.

Without taking away the enormous aesthetic weight of international modernity, the visitor is immersed in a sequence of spaces where the materials displayed and the processes narrated are strictly contemporaneous, but they are also radically divergent with respect to the dominant model. The first brings us into contact with the currents that run close to figurative Art, which were active in the forties and fifties and which connect with the other trends that accompanied and supported the Spanish Avant-garde since the beginning of the twentieth century. We can perceive two distinct lines. One is attracted to the grotesque, the humorous and the absurd, identifying all of those things with a certain popular Spanishness. This aesthetics can be found in the writing and attitude of Ramón Gómez de la Serna, in the comic vignettes of *La Codorniz* or in the theatre of Miguel Mihura.

The other line, more diffuse, is linked to different trends in figurative and landscape painting, long rooted in the twentieth century and always on the aesthetic and semantic threshold of the Avant-garde. These trends are shown by works as different as those of the "Realism" of Cossío, Palencia and Zabaleta, or the landscapes of Juan Manuel Díaz Caneja and Ortega Muñoz, placed in relation to the early works of Carmen Laffón and Antonio López. This figurative Art recreates the characters, the countryside and the tones of a dreamt, immutable Spain, through a realism that is in no way dialectic or critical, given that it is identified as an invariable feature of the Spanish spirit.

Another common ground in the historiography of contemporary Spanish Art which has been repeatedly marginalised from the canon is that of the *Estampa Popular* Movement. This movement had been treated as a minor expression and its interest depended exclusively on having formed part of the political movement against the regime of Franco. Consisting of a network of artists in different corners around Spain, its work is exclusively graphical and on the margin of the conventional Art market. It has a sober, harsh and expressionist aesthetics, with some allusions to Goya, *Die Brücke* and, above all, to Picasso, that assimilates formal definition with a political position of resistance and advocacy. This is the first time that it has been systematically exhibited at the Reina Sofia Museum, helping to add some new connotations

and to enrich the debate on the role of Art and artists during the central period of the Franco era.

Finally one finds the Spanish Neo-Realist photography of the fifties with works by Català-Roca, Joan Colom, Rafael Sanz Lobato, Gabriel Cualladó and Francisco Ontañón, among others. The commitment to day-to day life, to the anecdotal and to the unambiguity of these photos, which adopt the rhetoric of the documentary, is a contrast to the heroic and universalist tone of the paintings of the previous sections. The works speak to us of a differentiated sensitivity that is associated with the optical unconsciousness of photography of which Walter Benjamin spoke.

In another area we find diverse materials which show us and document a practice which does not now follow the path of technique and the production of artistic objects, but which rejects them as a dead residue and identifies itself with life, with action, often extreme and self destructive. This is the case with the Argentine artist, Alberto Greco, a catalysing artist, with distinct personal experiences and geographies, whose material, testimony to an overwhelming creativity and frenetic activity, has recently become part of the Museum's Collection. His impact on Spanish Art at the beginning of the sixties is demonstrated by his relationship with Millares and Saura. Both were close to Greco during his short stay in Madrid before he committed suicide. In these works one discovers artists far from the common ground where their work is normally interpreted.

The final phase of this second nucleus, before moving on to the last stage of this journey through the middle decades of the twentieth century, was conceived in the style of a commentary on the dissolution of the poetics and the debates of modernity and the gradual configuration of a new field of operations of Art and its relation with the world. The heterogeneity of these proposals aims to give an account of the distinct levels on which the modernist project unwinds and the multiple lines of perspective which open at the same time. To begin, two very different personalities are displayed, skipping back and forth between Europe and

Latin America, as was also the case with Alberto Greco: Lucio Fontana and Roberto Matta. The former directly attacks the expressive pretensions and transcendentalism of Abstraction. His monochrome surfaces pierced by *tagli and buchi,* maintain a direct indicial relationship with the artist's action and address the spectator's experience from an absolute literality, with particular attention to the specific physical conditions of perception of the work.

Roberto Matta makes an appearance in the new narrative of the Museum from a hardly known angle, but a very opportune one for documenting the challenge to a hegemonic notion of modernity. It involves, on the one hand, a series of drawings which Matta re-drew from memory thirty years later from those he lost, and which illustrated his thesis for his Architecture degree in 1932 in which he argued with the rationalism of Le Corbusier. This gesture of making the drawings again illustrates the intention to reactivate the polemics with the modern movement through a vindication of sensuality and affection.

The section ends with a parallelism or counter-positioning which challenges the patterns explaining the end of modernity. It places one next to the other, the last works of the main pioneers of the modern movement, Pablo Picasso y Joan Miró, and the actions, positions and attitudes of the International Situationist in those same years. The works of Picasso and Miró are reflections of and about painting, the great bourgeois genre which, however, led the Experimentalism of the first Avant-garde and in its modern reincarnation prolonged its prominence in the post-war decades. The Picasso series, in this case *El pintor y la modelo* (1963) document the compulsive gesture of the artist who again and again paints within an unsolvable hermeneutic circularity. Joan Miró, for his part, in his search to transcend the determinations which continuously threaten the anxious openness of meanings, draws close to a true zero degree of painting.

In parallel with this genuine testament to modern painting we have the leaflets, documents and posters produced by the International Situationist,

with the special importance of those related to the May '68 riots in which they tried to abolish the great institutions of modernity: University, Police, Museums, Art and the State. The Reina Sofia Museum accepts the contradictions derived from introducing the Situationist works into the very institution that should be annihilated, not as proof of the failure of its revolutionary project, but as part of the process of critical analysis of the institution, to which the Museum is committed. The iconic, textual and film production of the International Situationist inherits the counter-cultural drive of Futurism and Dadaism, although, in this case, based on a systematic reflection of social function, from which it projects a poetic gesture which is at the same time a subversive intervention in the order of reality. Situationism is a machine for generating strangeness with respect to the *status quo* and for producing alternatives, situations and derivatives, which engender areas of resistance and action within the system. The majority of the Situationist material on display is being exhibited for the first time in the Museum. Apart from the documental, graphical and film elements, relevant examples of plastic Art linked to the movement are on show, such as the "industrial painting" *Antiluna* (1957) of Pinot-Gallizio, the *New Babylon* series (1963) by Constant or the *Baguettes* (1964) by Gil Joseph Wolman.

The last nucleus of this itinerary puts us in that decade which was at the same time extrovert and cynical, the sixties. The defection of Philip Guston from the files of Abstract Expressionism is paradigmatic of the end of a long period of hegemony. The canvases of Elsworth Kelly, however, establish the limit of autonomous pictorial practice. The key figure we wanted to highlight in this last passage of modernity could not be any other than Marcel Duchamp and his rediscovery on both sides of the Atlantic, but fundamentally in the United States, where he would give his famous conference "The Creative Act" in the American Federation of Arts convention in 1957, through to the monographic exhibition dedicated to him in Pasadena in 1962. The teachings of John Cage, with his defence of semantic and formal lack of determination, as well as the shift of emphasis of individual expression towards the specific terms of reception, would mark the way in which young North American artists, from Allan Kaprow to

Robert Rauschenberg, were going to understand the Duchampian alternative. The film *Tree* Movie* (1961) by the poet Jackson Mac Low, has been chosen to exemplify the principals of minimum intervention, semantic openness and randomness which Cage claimed for artistic practice.

The central position taken by dance, alongside 'happening' and 'performance', in the teachings of Black Mountain College (Merce Cunningham founded his famous company there in 1953) illustrated the notion of experience of time and space that was in use at that time and that would later have an enormous influence on the development of the American Avant-garde, from Robert Morris to Bruce Nauman.

Although in continuous dialogue with the other side of the Atlantic, European Art also concluded towards the end of the fifties its exodus from the Informalist Abstraction which had dominated the post-war period. The work, *Turning Friendship of America and France* (1962) by Jean Tinguely and Larry Rivers, is offered as a humorous commentary on the ambivalent relationship that kept both foci of the Avant-garde in their respective liberations of the conventional Art media.

Under the title "New Realisms" we have grouped a heterogeneous combination of practices and artists who, in Europe, try to dismantle the traditional notion of artistic autonomy and go out into the streets and the public arena, where their interventions range from the ironic or provocative to social criticism. The interpretation of Marx, from Paris to Düsseldorf, passing through Milan or Cologne, would mark one of the main differences with their American colleagues. The attitude of the Affichistes, Raymond Hains, Jacques Villeglé and François Dufrêne, is representative of a new kind of artist who leaves the studio to work directly with the waste and ruins of a society, that of capitalist consumption, that does not stop generating obsolescence. The controversial Yves Klein was to have a different understanding of the social role of the artist, personifying his contradictions and ambivalences, and making it impossible to tell the difference between reality and simulation, transcendence and parody.

This journey ends with the revolt against modernity's seriousness, turning our gaze back to Spain, the political circumstances of which had not changed, although social habits had, due to the rapid establishment of consumer culture during the period of development. The intensification of the circulation of goods, images and ideas, as well as the official promotion of tourism, with its standardisation of Spain's image, generates the specific field of action of the local "New Realists". Criticism of the regime, not always explicit, was to become an inevitable feature of this reflection of reality. Close to the French debate for reasons of cultural tradition and geographical neighbourliness, Catalonian artists like Jaume Xifra and Joan Rabascall, and the photographer Xavier Miserachs, started an ironic disassembling of the iconography of the modern Iberia. In Paris, Antoni Miralda started his *Cenotafios* (1969-1975) which are sharp critical reflections on the rhetoric of power and which acquired specific connotations after being expressed by a Catalonian artist, who lived in France during the last years of the dictatorship.

It is within this same circle of intellectuals and artists living in Paris that the works of Eduardo Arroyo (born in Madrid) must be put in context. In contrast to his Catalonian contemporaries, Arroyo opted for a figurative style of painting full of allusions that took him away from the positions that were most explicitly aligned with *Estampa Popular* and the *Ruedo Ibérico* circles. Spain and Art history, often in combination, make up the array of references with which he built his peculiar narratives. On this side of the Pyrenees, especially in Valencia, the debate on realism and the social function of Art, launched by *Estampa Popular*, was going to result, in the mid-sixties, in a collective artistic practice that was politically committed, and that used the subversive appropriation of the language of the mass media as its working methodology. The works of the groups *Equipo Crónica* and *Equipo Realidad*, chosen to close our itinerary, show how the traumatic relationship between Art and social and political reality resulting from the Civil War had become more diluted, allowing the articulation of a new voice. The images offered show their drive for public advocacy that was not limited to going against Franco, it was moreover directly projected as a criticism of the symbolic and real violence of American imperialism, to which the regime was an

accomplice. In these cases, the inversion of language is absolute, and the imagery of the North American comic is turned against the ideological principles that support it.

As a final coda and a pivot for what will be the art ideologies of the following decades, this journey finishes with a selection of authors and works from the European context of the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies. On the other side of modernity, but also of the dialectic of its deconstruction and inversion in the New Realism and various Pop Art tendencies, we find artists who are rehearsing a new poetic based on fragments of art and day-to-day life, which become critical and political without having to surrender their aesthetic radicalism. Artistic practice proclaims the educational mission of opening new fields of thought and experience in the fissures of culture. Literature, Theatre, Music, Cinema are all kin to these practices and not mere strategic allies, as can be appreciated in the work of Öyvind Fahlström, Robert Filliou, George Brecht or Marcel Broodthaers, among others.

This publication has not been conceived as a user's guide, but, in tune with the spirit that inspires the arrangement of the spaces, it is composed of a series of strata for tastings or transversal readings which reflect so many other personal visions; those of their authors, the poetry, the popular or the continuous tour around the object and reality are just some of the threads that can guide us in the labyrinth of this complex period of the middle decades of the twentieth century. Alongside these, we have asked four experts to briefly analyse four specific milestones which, in some way, mark the difference of this arrangement of the Collection and make clear the way we, in the Museum, want to respond to the order and canon of the history of Contemporary Art.

Jesús Carrillo - Rosario Peiró