COLLECTION from November 27, 2021

COMMUNICATING VESSELS
Collection 1881 – 2021

Diego Rivera, *Les vases communicants* (The communicating vessels), 1939.
Long-term loan of Fundación Museo Reina Sofía, 2020 (Donated by Vicente Quilis Moscardó).
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MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA | MINISTERIO DE CULTURA Y DEPORTE

A museum has many of the qualities required to help build the present. This new presentation of the Museo Reina Sofía permanent collection has been developed in accordance with and in response to the complex moment we're living in, a moment that is not unconnected to the museum as an institution. These days our future seems more uncertain than ever: we're facing the huge challenge of a climate emergency that implores us to definitively rethink our way of life, to swap short-termism and individualism for more sustainable lifestyles that ensure we live in harmony with the planet. Such a complete and coordinated restructuring will require spaces where we can discuss and listen, spaces that are increasingly hard to come by in these times of constant noise, tension, instability, political and institutional disaffection, and communication technologies that frequently foster isolation and propagate disinformation.

Having reached this juncture, the Museo Reina Sofía has reorganized its permanent collection with the aim of offering narratives and experiences that speak to the present moment through a critical study of our common past, albeit without claiming to be comprehensive or categorical. And this has been done through a commitment to the museum's own place in time and its position within a pluralistic and diverse ecosystem, one that ranges from the local neighborhood to the global and that is cut through with various different tensions and problems. This reorganization is, therefore, intended to favor and encourage collective reflection and dialogue, and serve as a tool for tackling the complex challenges we face.

In this exercise in reading the twentieth century through the eyes of the present, the patriarchal, colonial, and memorialist perspectives that defined the hegemonic modern era are replaced by feminist, decolonial and ecological viewpoints; an exploration of what has often been omitted from the official and dominant narrative of art history and the recovery of a more bastardized, diffuse, complex, and heterogeneous modernity. This ranges from the dissident surrealism of Georges Bataille, which skewered the illustrious movement, to the rupturing experiences of Brazil's tropicalism, with its vitalist, sensual, and collective works expressed from the Global South.

General view of the room displaying *From drought to palm trees*, Nouvel Building, First Floor, Museo Reina Sofía, 2021

Several key aspects and turns ensure this reorganization is firmly situated in the present day. For a start, **genealogy**, as an epistemological tool, replaces a history dotted with milestones and big names, the better to dig deeper into the frameworks, relationships, echoes, silences, continuities, and ruptures that can be traced through our recent past. In this sense, it is essential we examine **exhibitions from the twentieth century**. Taking note of how art is exhibited and received in different contexts – in other words, its 'social history' – provides key information about the dominant arguments and sensitivities of any given period, but it also flags what was left out, and that's often even more revealing. Such a focus exposes the way the devices of an art exhibition works, devices that are never neutral, for they are deeply interwoven into the political, economic, and social circumstances and tensions of the surrounding environment. A case in point is documenta 7, held in Kassel in 1982 under the artistic direction of Rudi Fuchs, which was understood in Spain as confirmation of the triumph of painting and the art market, as well as a turn towards conservative values, in contrast to other artistic works also at the

show, such as arte povera, conceptual art, video works, and the textile and performative offerings of Franz Erhard Walther. Adopting this theory, which would shape the future of art in the 1980s, was in keeping with the politics of the time: the Reagan–Thatcher era, dominated by the so-called New Right. But a more contextualized reading requires a revised view that reflects the diversity of the work presented at the show, work overlooked by the majority of critics and art historians.

General view of *documenta 7, 1982*, Nouvel Building, First Floor, Museo Reina Sofía, 2021

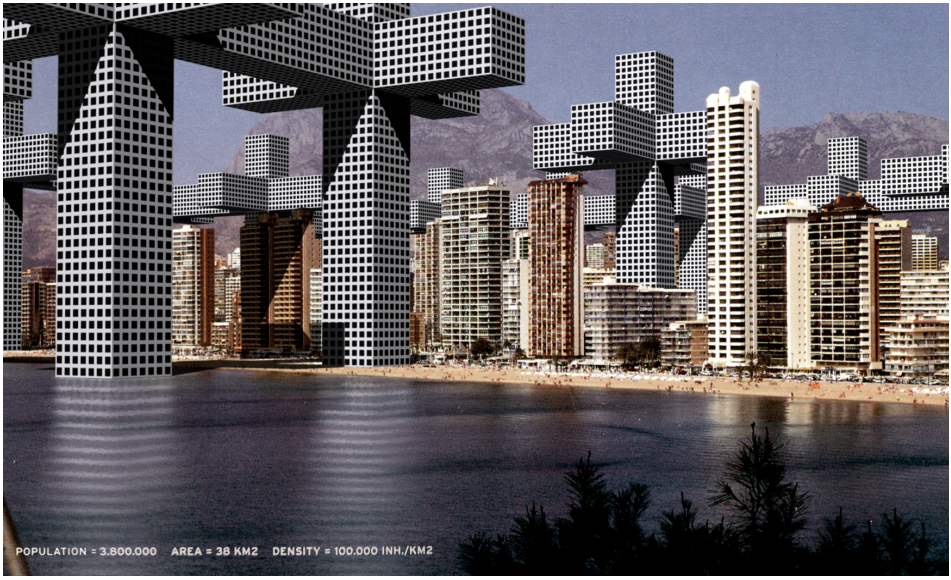
In the same way that examining past exhibitions can reveal a lot, so, too, do documents hold tremendous importance, as artistic expressions in their own right or as evidence of changes in the social status of works over time. Placing emphasis on documents also shows a willingness to shake up and question artistic categories, which translates, in this reorganization, into increased

importance afforded to more marginal and unstable artistic manifestations. Thus the spotlight is shone on photo books, artist books, artist's sketches, mail art, magazines, and graphic design, especially **posters** and experiences such as the Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico. These formats are simple to produce and circulate, ideal for experimentation and for trying out languages and ideas from outside hegemonic structures, and for being widely received and having broad repercussions. **Architecture** also plays an important role, given the direct effect it has on life and the organization of public and private realms: from the detached homes of the US suburbs to the utopian experiment of Brasília. In Spain, architecture played a defining role in the autocracy period of early Fracoism, marked by a clear separation between countryside and city, and during the mass development of the 1970s and the property booms of the 1990s and 2000s. Finally, the city itself provides the ecosystem par excellence for analyzing the sociability of different creative practices: a place of vital and changeable attraction, the city is the ideal setting for understanding the transformational principals of every historic moment.

Meanwhile, as we navigate the current global migratory crisis, it's vital that we reflect on **exile**, specifically the exile of Spanish Republicans in the aftermath of the Civil War, a subject long overdue the attention of art historians. The exile of Spanish Republicans is another of the determining threads in this rearrangement of the collection, which calls into question the very concept of the nation and related ideas of territory and ownership. By incorporating those who suffered this uprooting, such as Maruja Mallo in Argentina and Josep Renau, Remedios Varo, and Max Aub in Mexico, as well as their artworks and initiatives, into the narrative of Spain's recent history, we gain a more complex, encompassing, and, above all, mestizo picture of the past.

The idea of exile leads straight into another important concept: the need to **decolonize** our thinking and gaze. If exiled Republicans cannot be left out of any critical, inclusive, and corrective history of Spain, neither can our colonial past and the marks and echoes it has left on the present. The ways in which art from the Global South, especially Latin America, has been studied, displayed,

and cataloged have been cut through with power dynamics and symbolic violence. A prime example are the Chilean Art exhibitions held in the 1980s, in which the works of Carlos Leppe or Elías Adasme were read as examples of epigonic conceptualism. In fact they were vanguard, innovative works born as a response to the first example of neoliberalism: the Chicago Boys' experiments in Pinochet's Chile.



MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob Van Rijs, Natalie De Vries), *Costa Iberica: Upbeat to the Leisure City*, 1998. Courtesy MVRDV

First tried out in Chile, that neoliberalism is now global and has caused a **crisis** in our societies, one now understood not as something cyclical, but structural. Many of the most modern pieces in the collection are concerned with this new paradigm, such as the dystopia on the horizon of the Spanish Levant property bubble that Rafael Chirbes portrays, Angela Melitopoulos's depiction of breakdown, or Henrik Olesen's new take on Dante's *Inferno*. Meanwhile, *Postcapital*, Daniel García Andújar's archival project, makes its time frame the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attacks on

the World Trade Center in New York, two milestones on a compass pointing to a time with no future or utopia, and no recognizable past either, in order to analyze the effects and implications of the move from a production economy to an information one.

Daniel García Andújar, *Postcapital Archive*, 1989–2001. Museo Reina Sofía

Faced with such a scenario, several voices, from different areas, reclaim the centrality of the body and affection to collectively define a new ethical outlook, one in which life can be understood in all its vulnerability and interdependence.

Andrea Büttner in her film *Little Sisters: Lunapark Ostia* (2012) perfectly reflects this desire for communal life. Such a reflection is arguably even more pertinent today, in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and offers a new filter through which to read the reorganization of the collection: a reading that takes into account the emotional and sensitive side of different

artistic manifestations; that is, the "affection dimension." Other examples of this perspective include Joan Jonas's performative pieces and Victoria Gil's and Carmen Laffón's paintings.

Carmen Laffón, *Salt,* 2019 (detail from the series *Salt*). Long-term loan by Fundación Museo Reina Sofía, 2021. Donated by the Colección Mario Losantos [works 1 to 4] and Helga de Alvear [works 5 to 8].

Alternatives to the neoliberal way of thinking, working, and creating, as articulated by feminist and ecological movements, revolve around critiques of essentialism and gender issues, as well as calls for recognition of multiple and diffuse forms of identities, such as cyborg identities, defined by Donna Haraway as being part human and part machine or part animal, and represented by Guerrilla Girls' simians or Mallo's astral bodies. The cyborg element, in this sense, seeks to dissolve gender, denaturalize the biological, and rely on technological revision, through prosthesis, masking, grotesquery, and humor, paving the way to poetic strategies for feminist emancipation.

Maruja Mallo (Ana María Gómez González), *Viajeros del éter*, 1982. Museo Reina Sofía

What takes precedence in this new arrangement of the collection is not the chronological order of events and works, but the relationships and genealogies that we can peel back or trace from our standpoint in the present. We have thus devised eight thematic episodes, that are open to flexible temporalities and interdisciplinary perspectives and combine to tell new stories:

Episode 1. Avant-Garde Territories: City, Architecture, and Magazines
(Sabatini Building, Floor 2)

Episode 2. The Lost Thought
(Sabatini Building, Floor 4)

Episode 3. Enclosed Field
(Sabatini Building, Floor 4)

Episode 4. Double Exhibition: Art and Cold War
(Sabatini Building, Floor 4)

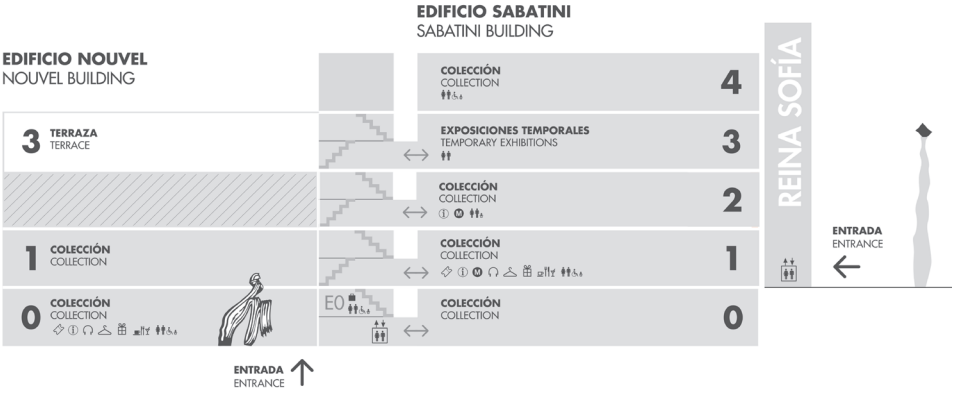
Episode 5. Enemies of Poetry: Resistance in Latin America
(Sabatini Building, Floor 4 and Nouvel Building, Floor 1)

Episode 6. A Drunken Boat: Eclecticism, Institutionalism, and Disobedience in the '80s
(Nouvel Building, Floor 0)

Episode 7. Apparatus 92: Can History Be Rewound?
(Sabatini Building, Floor 0)

Episode 8. Exodus and Communal Life
(Sabatini Building, Floor 1)

Through these eight episodes, the Museo Reina Sofía Collection has been rearranged to respond to the present moment – in all its discomforts, challenges, and hopes – and to reiterate that the past is an alive, rather than static, element as we build our collective present.



Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Main venue

Sabatini Building
Santa Isabel, 52

Nouvel Building
Ronda de Atocha s/n
28012 Madrid

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www.museoreinasofia.es

Opening hours
Monday to Saturday
and public holidays
from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Sundays
from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Closed on
Tuesdays

Exhibition rooms in all venues will be cleared 15 minutes before closing time.

© MVRDV, Carmen Laffón, Maruja Mallo, Bruce Nauman, VEGAP, Madrid, 2021

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