

MACBA receives entire Brossa legacy

The Joan Brossa Foundation and **Barcelona City Council** have deposited the poet's collection, archive and library with the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. Altogether, this legacy comprises **more than 60,000 items**, including poems, objects, installations, posters, letters, books, manuscripts, photographs, paintings, magazines and other documents

Barcelona, 13 January 2012. Joan Brossa never threw away even a single piece of paper. He had his own personal order, or disorder, depending on how one sees things. The photographs of his studio are famous, as they show the vast mountains of papers that were piled up on the floor. When a visitor approached his desk, they had to take great care not to disturb a single newspaper clipping or risk a telling-off. For Brossa, a poet in the broadest sense of the word, art was an indivisible whole, and there were no such things as genres. His vast legacy amply demonstrates this view: manuscripts, visual poems, film scripts, plays, artist's books, translations, posters, installations, fine art works, toys, magic tricks, documents and other objects that defy classification. In accordance with the artist's desire that his work should not be broken up, the Joan Brossa Foundation and Barcelona City Council have now deposited this impressive legacy with the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) under a renewable twenty-five year loan agreement in which MACBA undertakes to safeguard, conserve, and catalogue the legacy, as well as disseminating and providing access to the works. Barcelona City Council also provided 300,000 euros to digitise much of the legacy. MACBA is the natural choice, for the Museum's very nature facilitates the transversal readings that are so necessary to understanding the work of this poet; the complementary relationship that is established between the MACBA Study Centre and Collection means that no distinction is made between *document* and *work* and enables the legacy to be conserved as a whole. The legacy comprises more than 60,000 items: 50,000 documents (half still to be catalogued), 6,000 books, 5,700 magazines, 100 artist's publications, 130 visual poems (many unpublished), 1,000 photographs, 150 installations and 1,000 posters, amongst others. MACBA also undertakes to increase the presence of Brossa's visual work in the MACBA Collection and, in cooperation with the Joan Brossa Foundation, to select materials from the legacy for presentations of the artist's visual works at La Seca and other centres. Finally, in 2013, the Museum will devote the exhibition on the Collection to a reading of Brossa's life and work and his influence on Catalan and international art.

Amongst the various objectives that form part of MACBA's mission, an important place is occupied by that of conserving and providing access to the work and personal archives of artists, critics and other important figures in the world of contemporary artistic practice. To

this end, several important collections and archives have been deposited with the Museum in recent years. These include archives pertaining to Art & Language (Philippe Méaille Collection), Gordon Matta-Clark (Harold Berg's LATA Collection), Xavier Miserachs, Marcel Broodthaers (Barbara Herbig Collection) and Joan-Josep Tharrats and Josep Maria Casademont, amongst others. The addition of the Joan Brossa legacy to the MACBA collections now presents the Museum with a new challenge, as the resources it contains reflect the many facets in the work of this tireless poet and include thousands of documents that defy classification.

Due to the accumulation of these documents and other objects, it eventually became almost impossible for Brossa to work in his studio. Thanks to the help of Barcelona City Council, however, in 1987 the poet was able to rent a second studio in the building in Carrer Gènova where he had his home. In exchange, Brossa agreed to bequeath part of his work to the municipal authority. Since his production continued to grow, and as the inventory made was far from exhaustive, Brossa established in his will that a foundation should be set up to conserve both the legacy he left to the Council and all his other works and papers, ensuring that the collection should not be dispersed. After Brossa's death in December 1998, all this material was brought to the offices of the Joan Brossa Foundation. Now, nearly fifteen years later, this legacy has been deposited entirely at MACBA.

The word, the poetic experience and theatrical action are at the heart of Joan Brossa's artistic practice. Just as Stéphane Mallarmé does in relation to space, Brossa broadens the concept of object and communicative action. Moreover, his profound influence on several generations of Catalan artists makes the poet essential to any understanding of the shifts that took in the artistic paradigm in the second half of the 20th century. Within the MACBA collections, Brossa occupies a place near such central figures in the Museum's discourse as Öyvind Fahlström, Marcel Broodthaers and Dieter Roth, who place the reality of poetry within the visual environment of the expanded page.

Artworks, library and archive

The inventory of Brossa's work is divided into three categories:

- **Artworks.** Painting, collage, series, originals of visual poems, posters, objects, installations and artist's books, not only by Joan Brossa, but also by other artists, such as Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies, Moisès Villèlia, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart, Erwin Bechtold, Will Faber, Perejaume and Jaume Xifra, amongst others.
- **Library.** This comprises 6,000 books and 5,700 magazine issues, forming a rich bibliographic collection that includes literary works, exhibition catalogues and essays on the theatre, magic, film and other forms of artistic expression that interested the poet.
- **Archive.** A collection containing more than 50,000 documents, including poetry proper, sketches for visual poems, film scripts, theatrical pieces and other writing (both drafts and final versions), as well as artworks in printed publications, translations of literary works, correspondence, flyers, invoices and other pieces impossible to classify, such as the 18th-century manuscript *Muera la incredulidad*.

An outstanding aspect of this legacy is the relationship that can be established between the archive pieces and the artworks. This is the case, for example, of the manuscript for the visual book *Nocturn matinal* ([Morning Nocturne], 1969), the bibliophile book made in cooperation with Tàpies in 1970, based on Brossa's suite, the manuscript *Pluja* ([Rain], "Poemes habitables" [Habitable Poems] series, 1970) and the artist's book *Pluja* ([Rain], 1973). Conserving all this material in a single place, with the possibility of creating a completely cross-referenced catalogue, will greatly help researchers from all over the world to study Brossa's personal universe.

Most of the **artworks** in the legacy are by Brossa, but the collections also include graphic work and paintings by the poet's many artist friends. Nearly all Brossa's visual poems are also here, including the file *Septet visual* ([Visual Septet], 1978), containing the famous *Elegia del Che* [Elegy to Che], and the untitled poems formed by an "S with fish", the "poem-revolver", etc. The collection also includes his first experimental poems from 1941 and 1947, some included in the MACBA Collection exhibition *Volume!* Here, too, is the complete collection of posters, Brossa's most popular facet, linked to political circumstances in the country. Particularly outstanding are the objects and installations, from the first *Dau al Set* objects in 1951 to pieces practically never shown (the 1991 work *Ateu* [Atheist], for instance), as well as the installation *Pau paula*, formed by a circle of chairs around a mountain of dice crowned by a skull. Another jewel in the crown of this legacy are the bibliophile books, which Brossa produced in cooperation with such artists as Miró, Tàpies, Cuixart, Villèlia, Amat, Niebla, Yamamoto, Perejaume, Chillida, Esclusa, Riera i Aragó, Madoz... Particularly outstanding are *El pa a la barca* ([Bread on the Boat], 1963) and *Carrer de Wagner* (1998), made with Tàpies, and *Tres Joans* ([Three Johns], 1978), with Miró. The collection also includes works by other artists, including graphic works by Miró, a portrait of Brossa by Tàpies, reed sculptures by Villèlia and other pieces by Frederic Amat, Alfons Borrell and Perejaume, amongst others.

The 6,000 volumes in Brossa's **personal library** were catalogued thanks to an agreement with the Vila Casas Foundation and the cooperation of the University of Barcelona. The online catalogue, which has now been added to the MACBA library catalogue, can be consulted from both the Museum website (www.biblioteca.macba.cat) and the Collective Catalogue of the Universities of Catalonia (ccuc.cbuc.cat). All these volumes are now available for reference at the MACBA Study Centre. The 5,700 magazines (which MACBA is currently in the process of cataloguing) are highly varied in content (artistic, literary, political, satirical) and even include comics and publications for children and young people: *D'Ací i d'Allà*, *Destino*, *¡Cu-cut!*, *Títère*, *Treball* (PSUC), *Dock(s)*, *Estel*, *Aventurero*, *En Patufet*...

Large collection of photographs of Brossa

The work of cataloguing Brossa's **personal archive** began in 2003 thanks to a grant from the Spanish Culture Ministry's Directorate-General for Archives and Libraries. Due to the fragile and complex nature of this material, only half the more than 50,000 documents have so far been catalogued. The archive contents are highly varied in type: plays, such as *El cop desert* ([Desert Stroke], 1944) and *Escenes d'equitació* ([Equestrian Scenes], 1947), the last version of the manuscript *Fora de l'umbracle* ([Outside the Greenhouse], 1968), Brossa's translation from the French *Les ungles del guant. Ronda de Rimbaud* [The Nails of the Glove/Round of

Rimbaud], his abundant correspondence with Miró, Cabral de Melo, Saura, Millares, Maria Mercè Marçal..., flyers and small publications that help us to reconstruct the history of the post-war Catalan avant-garde and Catalan experimental poetry, etc.

The archive personal also includes a large collection of photographs taken of Joan Brossa by different artists over the course of his life. Some 200, including portraits by the photographer Martí Gasull, amongst others, are now available online for consultation on the Study Centre's Flickr profile. This selection will be gradually increased over the coming months.

In order to further the dissemination of this content, and in agreement with the Joan Brossa Foundation, MACBA has now made ten photographs of Joan Brossa available to the public under a Creative Commons license. These images, which can be found on the aforementioned Flickr album, are available for reference at www.flickr.com/photos/arxiu-macba/collections/

The Joan Brossa Foundation

The Joan Brossa Foundation was constituted on 20 October 1999. The idea arose from the poet's will, in which he left all his belongings to a foundation that should be established under his name, and in which he expressly named several trustees: Pepa Llopis, as life president, Barcelona City Council, Glòria Bordons, M. Lluïsa Borràs, Mercè Centellas, Jordi Coca, Daniel Giralt-Miracle, Dolors Guilleumas, Josep M. Mestres Quadreny, Lluís Permanyer, Lluís Riera, Andreu Rossinyol and Antoni Rubió. After Brossa's death, Pepa Llopis, the poet's lifetime companion, took the initiative and had the Foundation statutes drawn up. At present, the trustees are: Barcelona City Council, Hermann Bonnín, Glòria Bordons, Mercè Centellas, Mirentxu Corcoy, Daniel Giralt-Miracle, Dolors Guilleumas, Jesús Julve, Carme Llopis, Jaume Maymó, Josep M. Mestres Quadreny, Lluís Permanyer, Lluís Riera, Andreu Rossinyol, Antoni Rubió and Guillem Sánchez. The president is Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny; the vice-presidents are Daniel Giralt-Miracle and Mercè Centellas; the treasurer is Guillem Sánchez; and the secretary is Jaume Maymó.

In early-2000, the Foundation opened in premises in Carrer Llúria, on the corner with Carrer Provença. Here, material was brought from the poet's two studios: the original workplace on Carrer Balma and that established in Carrer Gènova in 1987 thanks to the assistance of Barcelona City Council. The year following cooperation with the Government of Catalonia's KRTU to organise the major exhibition *Joan Brossa, or the Poetic Revolt* at the Joan Miró Foundation in 2001, work began on cataloguing Brossa's personal library. Once the 6,000 volumes had been catalogued, the library opened to the public at the Vila Casas Foundation in Carrer Ausiàs Marc in Barcelona in 2003. After this, the enormous work of cataloguing the poet's personal archive personal began. At the same time, in cooperation with the Institute of Catalan Letters, literary activities were organised around Brossa's work and several exhibitions were organised. In 2006, the Foundation opened a centre on Carrer Provença as a space for the permanent exhibition and to organise educational activities and "Brossa routes" around Barcelona and environs.

In 2010, with the return of the Brossa library imminent due to termination of the agreement with the Vila Casas Foundation, and in the midst of the financial crisis, the Brossa Foundation began negotiations to house the archive and library with some public institution. Finally, during the first quarter of 2011, the Board of Trustees decided to loan the entire Brossa collection to MACBA. This decision was taken in coherence with the spirit of Brossa's work and in view of the fact that MACBA is an institution capable of managing both the archive and library and the art collection. In June, just as formalities began for signing the loan agreement, the Foundation's president, Pepa Llopis, passed away. The composer Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny, one of the trustees and a friend and collaborator of Brossa, immediately took over and was unanimously elected as the new president on July 12.

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BIOGRAPHY

Joan Brossa (Barcelona, 19 January 191 - 30 December 1998) is the most outstanding twentieth-century Catalan avant-garde poet. He began writing after being enlisted during the Spanish Civil War. On his return to Barcelona (1941), he met J. V. Foix, Joan Miró and Joan Prats. Thanks to the advice he received from these artists, and taking a neo-surrealist line, he began to write sonnets, prose, odes and plays (which he called "scenic poetry"). Brossa was a poet in the broadest sense of the word, and for him there were no genres or frontiers between the arts. In 1941, he produced his first, futurist-style visual poems (which he called "experimental poems" in those times). His first *objet trouvé* dates to 1943 and his first pairing of distant objects to 1951, whilst he produced his first installation, in the shop window of Gales the tailor's, in 1956. In 1947, with Antoni Tàpies, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart, Arnau Puig and Joan-Josep Tharrats, he founded the magazine *Dau al Set*, whilst in 1951 he took part in the exhibition by Dau al Set group at the Sala Caralt gallery, contributing three experimental poems.

In 1950, influenced by his friendship with the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo, Brossa's poetry began to take a radical turn towards social engagement with the book *Em va fer Joan Brossa* [Joan Brossa Made Me]. Brossa's interest in politics is also reflected in odes, sonnets and plays with more traditional structure (including such books of poetry as *El pedestal són les sabates* [The Pedestal is the Shoes], 1955, and, amongst his theatrical works, *Els beneficis de la nació* [The Benefits of the Nation], 1958, and *Or i sal* [Gold and Salt], 1959). Alongside these concerns, however, was also an interest in conceptual art, which he explored particularly from the 1960s (*Poemes civils* [Civil Poems], 1960, *El saltamartí* [The Tumble Doll], 1963, etc.). It was at this time that he began his in-depth experimentation with the genres of visual poetry and object poems, a facet of his work that he would continue to pursue throughout his life.

In 1960, at Miró's invitation, he took part in the exhibition *Poètes, peintres, sculpteurs* at the Maeght gallery in Paris. At the same time, he began to work with Antoni Tàpies and Joan Miró, amongst others, and went on to gradually extend his field of collaboration to include artists from all the generations: Eduardo Chillida, Frederic Amat, Perejaume, Alfons Borrell, José Niebla... In each case, the results were strikingly unusual books, such as *Novel·la* ([Novel], 1965, with Tàpies) and *Tres Joans* [Three Johns], 1978, with Miró. In the latter, particularly, the veteran painter and the poet achieve total mutual understanding. In the world of visual poetry, Brossa gained recognition from the first, and in 1971 he took part in an international collective exhibition staged in Nuremberg and Belgrade.

At the same time, building on the surprise caused by the publication in 1970 of *Poesia rasa* ([Bare Poetry], a selection of writing since 1943, which was continued in *Poemes de seny i cabell* [Poems of Sense and Hair], 1977, and *Rua de llibres* [Cavalcade of Books],

1980) and the six-volume work *Poesia escènica* ([*Theatrical Poetry*], published from 1973 to 1983), Brossa was fast becoming a leading light in contemporary Catalan literature, whilst also gaining international recognition as a visual artist. Little by little, Brossa's work was requested in more and more places, but it was after his first anthological show at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona (1986) that exhibitions became a constant for the poet. Moreover, his work had taken to the streets in the shape of his so-called "poems corporis", or corporeal poems, such as *Poema visual transitable* [*Transitable Visual Poem*] at the Barcelona Velodrome (1984). These poems began to form part of the everyday landscape, not only in Barcelona and towns around the Catalan capital, but also in Majorca, Andorra and more far-flung places such as Frankfurt and Havana. Another landmark in the artist's career was the exhibition *Joan Brossa, entre les coses i la lectura* [Joan Brossa, Between Things and Reading, which was staged at the Palau de la Virreina in Barcelona (1994).

Art, literature, theatre and film

However this may be, Brossa's interest in visual art never interfered with his prolific production of literary and theatrical works. He had been writing actions and shows for the stage, influenced by happenings and performances, since the 1940s, and he went on to engage in all kinds of paratheatrical genres, such as monologues and transformation, ballet and concerts, whilst also producing text theatre, opera libretti and film scripts (his collaboration with the director Pere Portabella is particularly well-known). Other outstanding collaborations were with the musicians Josep M. Mestres Quadreny and Carles Santos, with whom he achieved international fame thanks to the premieres of *Suite bufa* (with Mestres) in Bordeaux in 1966 and *Concert irregular* (with Santos) in Saint-Paul-de-Vence in 1968. In 1978, he presented the opening work at the Catalan Weeks in Berlin, for which event he also produced the poster *Musiktheater*.

Regarding poetry proper, Brossa never stopped writing his playful and surprising short poems (*Els entra-i-surts del poeta. Roda de llibres* [*The Ins-and-Outs of the Poet. Round of Books*], 1969-75). In the 1970s, moreover, he began to work in a new poetic genre, the *sestina*, a medieval form that he took to its very limits in his experimentation (his books of *sestinas* are collected in *Viatge per la sestina* [*Journey through the Sestina*], 1987). In his last books, we note a contained and moving reflection on life and death, full of digressions and serenity (*Passat festes* [After the Holidays], 1995; *La clau a la boca* [*The Key in the Mouth*], 1997, and *Sumari astral* [Astral Summary], 1999). During the final years of his life, he received awards in all the genres he had worked in and from a wide range of institutions. These include, amongst others, the City of Barcelona Prize in 1987; the UNESCO Picasso Medal in 1988; the Government of Catalonia National Art Prize in 1992; and the Gold Medal for Art, awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in 1996. In 1999, to mark his 80th birthday, he was to have been made a *doctor honoris causa* by the Autonomous University of Barcelona, but this was finally not possible due to his unexpected death.

Brossa's international presence includes, particularly, Art'20 in Basel (1989) and the biennials in São Paulo (1994) and Venice (1997), as well as solo exhibitions in Munich (1988), New York (1989), Ceret-Cotlliure (1990), Houston (1990), London (1992), Marseilles (1993), Malmö (1993), Paris (1995), Kassel (1998) and Mexico and

Monterrey (1998), amongst others. After his death, it was the great anthological show organised by the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona that finally established Joan Brossa's reputation as a truly outstanding artist. Since 2005, moreover, subsequent anthological exhibitions have been taken cities in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, Austria, Czech Republic, Sweden, France, Germany and Poland.