

The Museum brings together more than 150 little-known works by the artist which represent one of the key periods in his career

## Unseen Rabascall, at the MACBA

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**Title:** *Rabascall. Production 1964-1982*. **Inauguration:** 22 January 2009, at 7.30 p.m. **Exhibition dates:** From 23 January to 19 April 2009. **Curator:** Bartomeu Mari. **Organisation and production:** Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). **Travelling to:** The exhibition will be showed in Autumn at Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst/Studienzentrum für Künstlerpublikationen in Bremen. The international tour is organized by MACBA and co produced with State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad, SEACEX and Institut Ramon Llull.

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**Montages, assemblies, repetitions, superpositions, changes of scale, mixtures of texts and images...** Under the title *Rabascall. Production 1964-1982*, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) recovers the production of one of the critical periods in the work of Joan Rabascall (Barcelona, 1935). His is a discreet oeuvre, distanced from aesthetic vacillations and little known in Spain, but regularly exhibited in France (Rabascall has lived in Paris since 1962). Far from a retrospective, the exhibition focuses on a key period in the artist's life and invites spectators to decipher the central core of his concerns which, despite the passage of time, have not lost their currency: the omnipresence of communication, the implementation of language by the powers that be, the stereotyping of women's image as a sexual object, the growing militarisation of society, the incessant transforming power of tourism, and the progressive computerisation of forms of knowledge. "There is too much thesis without antithesis. I try the antithesis", says Rabascall who, through his works, recreates manifest poems aimed at surprise, poetic disorientation and the critical message. His work can be situated in the context of that which we could call European pop art, concerned with the individual, with the ideological components that form society rather than with industrial products and mass consumption.

"His art cannot become fashion at a particular moment: it's like a negative of the art and the society of his time", writes Bartomeu Mari, director of the MACBA and curator of *Rabascall. Production 1964-1982*, in the prologue to the catalogue which accompanies this exhibition. The position of art as an antidote and counterpoint to the trivialisation of ideas is precisely the *leitmotiv* of this display.

The exhibition brings together more than 150 works from such Spanish and French institutions and private collections as the MACBA Collection, the Rafael Tous Collection, the FRAC Limousin Collection, the Reina Sofia National Museum Art Centre (MNCARS), ARTIUM, the National Contemporary Art Foundation-France (FNAC), and the Patio Herreriano Museum, among others. Some 70% of the pieces now on display have never before been seen in the Catalan context. Such is the case of such symbolic works in Rabascall's production as *Bandera olímpica* (1972-2009) and *Atomic Kiss* (1968), the reconstruction of the exhibition *Art contra la ideologia* (1974), which was presented in the Rencontres Gallery in Paris, and the series *Spain is Different* (1973-1977) and *Paisajes de la Costa Brava* (1982).

The display opens with a collage on wood dated 1964 and entitled *La fragilité des apparences*, in which Rabascall criticises the construction of the stereotype of women's image being used as a sexual object of desire under the masculine gaze. The chronological spectrum of the exhibition concludes with the series of photographic emulsions on canvas *Paisajes de la Costa Brava* (1982), in which the author highlights the transformation of landscapes and culture brought about by tourism on the Catalan coasts. Between these two pieces are assembled works and series such as *Textos* (1972-1973), *Kultur* (1971-1974), *Paysages souvenir* (1975), *Spain is Different* (1973-1977) and *Elecciones Show* (1977-1978).

Also featured is the installation *Bandera olímpica* (1972-2009) which, along with creations by other invited artists formed part of the programme of artistic projects organised around the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, but whose presentation was cancelled as a result of the Palestinian attack on the Israeli delegation. A contrast is presented in the shape of the "toy" *23-F. Reflex condicionat* (1981), the mechanism of which is employed by Rabascall to ridicule a historic event which was reduced to a simple operetta: the attempted coup d'état of 23 February 1981. All of the pieces are solo works, with the exception of the film *Bio Dop* (1974) made together with Benet Rossell, an exercise in exposing the advertising image by disarticulating a publicity film for a brand of hair cream by means of dissynchronicity and photomontage.

## **Beyond the Paris Catalans**

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In 1970, the art critic Alexandre Cirici (author of a brief chronicle on the beginnings of Rabascall's artistic career, which is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue) wrote, "We often encounter Rabascall's name among the promoters of research events in Paris, London or Amsterdam. Of late, we find him involved in the curious phenomenon of the resurgence of the ceremonial. In Catalonia, however, he goes on being very little known. That's why we think it's essential to talk about him". But it was necessary to wait until 1976 to be able to see his art in the exhibition *Barcelona-Paris-New York: The Course of Twelve Catalan Artists 1960-1980*, first at the G Gallery and later, in 1985, at the Palau Robert, with projects being presented subsequently at the Virreina (1993) and the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica (2000). Now, the MACBA has recovered part of his work, so little-known but containing a profound element of cultural criticism during a period of European upheaval.



While Rabascall's participation in organisation of the "rituals" in Paris is well documented (from 1969 to 1970, alongside Miralda, Dorothée Selz, Jaume Xifra and Benet Rossell, the latter being the group's audiovisual chronicler), his personal production during those years has almost never been exhibited. Rabascall often distanced himself from any kind of artistic collective (even from the "sociological art" movement with which he was linked at the beginning of his career) in order to develop an individual practice which was consistent in its technique and content, discourse and attitude, in the face of the growing commercialisation and mediatisation of the artistic object. The city of Paris has always been a working platform from which he has been able to exhibit his art the world over.

Rabascall's production can be situated in the setting of a "perverse", sharpened vision of the critique of the object and of the consumerism that developed in Europe, in contrast to the fascination for industrial products of American Pop. A connoisseur of British and French art of the time, he met Lawrence Alloway and Pierre Restany, came into contact with the Independent Group and the Nouveaux Réalistes and participated in the avant-garde groups that rehabilitated techniques and positions reminiscent of Berlin Dada. Social critique, linked to political positions of denunciation and revolt, led him to explore culture's dependence with respect to the economy, fashion and politics, and to develop, in the 1970s, a reflection on the construction of history and the way the tourist industry impacted on landscapes, regions and languages.

### **Works featured in the exhibition**

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In 1973 Rabascall wrote, "Around 1963-1964 I began to make *assemblies* based on newspaper and magazine cuttings, sticking them onto canvas and adding the finishing touches with acrylic paint. The next phase consisted in creating photomontages which I enlarged on canvases and photographic metal plates to attain a different dimension to the image and produce a greater impact on the person viewing them". The first part of the exhibition is precisely centred on the collages produced between 1964 and 1968, composed of images, printed on paper, which had very obviously been taken from magazines and other publications, and on the first photographic emulsions on canvas. Such is the case with *La super-femme* (1967), *Mass Media* (1967), *Golf Competition* (1968), *American Way of...* (1970), *La bombe* (1966), *IBM 360* (1967), *JFK* (1965), *Le sourire du cosmonaute* (1965) and the *Textos* (1972-1973), *Kultur* (1971-1974) and *Galeria Eros* (1971-1972) series.

A new section of the exhibition includes the model 23-F. *Reflex condicionat* (1981), in which a beetle with the word "Tejero" written on its back and activated by a mechanism climbs up a Guardia Civil tricorne hat until arriving at a television screen in which the King of Spain's face appears. Once inside the hall, the installation *Elecciones Show* (1977-1978) is presented, through which Rabascall observes a crucial moment in recent Spanish history: the first democratic elections following the death of Franco. Three desynchronised projections show images from erotic films, mass demonstrations and politicians in the election campaign, while a soundtrack plays songs of the period and election posters appear spread out on the ground. This same section also includes the series *Paysages souvenir* (1975), *Spain is Different* (1973-1977) and *Paisajes de la Costa Brava* (1982).

With the *Paysages souvenir* series Rabascall initiates a critical reflection on the relationship between history, landscape and tourism. In November 1975 a symposium was held in Neuenkirchen, one of the Germany's prettiest spots, to revitalise the area. The town was attempting to sell an idyllic image of the countryside on the souvenir postcards sold to tourists. In reality however, it was an operation intended to camouflage the remains of Nazi concentration camps and improvised cemeteries that had existed in those woods and fields. For the first time, Rabascall took photographs of locations in the region (until then, the artist had used images he had found in other mediums) to contrast with the tourist pictures shown on the postcards of the zone.

The *Spain is Different* series is made up of emulsions on canvas (some of which have formed part of the MACBA Collection since 2002), as well as original models, and the title is taken from the campaign promoted by Manuel Fraga Iribarne aimed at attracting mass tourism to Spain. In this series, the map of Spain is shown just as it was reproduced in the newspapers of the day (including Portugal), alongside the timetables of church masses, which were then still being published in the press; over a blank TV screen the slogan "His master's voice" can be read; there are images of the dictator playing golf, beside a list of the multinationals that invested in the country; and the link is highlighted between television and football, which at the time was confused with popular culture.

A few years later Rabascall returned to these issues in *Paisajes de la Costa Brava*. On this occasion however he did not use images cut from the print media but took photographs himself of the different places he had visited in his youth and which were then overrun with rubbish, filled with *kitsch* decorations and destroyed by the lack of urban planning coupled with the effects of building the A-7 motorway. The word "paisatge" (landscape), written in italics in six languages (those of the tourists who most frequently visited the Costa Brava) over each photograph cannot fail to be an "auratic" trademark of a landscape that has suffered the imprint of massive construction and has lost its aura. A vision which denounces the abuse of scenic heritage by both public and private powers for the sake of the massive exploitation of banality.

→ ACTIVITY RELATED TO THE EXHIBITION. A conversation between Joan Rabascall and Jordi Coca moderated by Bartomeu Marí. Friday 23 January, at 7.30 p.m. MACBA Auditorium. Admission free.



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## ***Rabascall. Production 1964-1982***

From 23 January to 19 April 2009

**Inauguration:** Thursday 22 January, at 7.30 p.m.

■ MUSEU D'ART CONTEMPORANI DE BARCELONA. Pl. Àngels, 1. 08001 Barcelona.  
[www.macba.es](http://www.macba.es)

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■ DAILY GUIDED TOURS (included in the admission price). Weekdays, at 6 p.m. Saturdays, at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. Sundays and bank holidays, at 1 p.m.

■ TIMES. Weekdays (except Tuesdays that are not holidays), from 11 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sundays and bank holidays, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays that are not bank holidays, closed. Mondays, open.

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