

# To remember is to build memory

The Museum's Communication Space features a series of projects done by primary and secondary school students on the basis of their visits to the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) during the 1996-97 school year.

Like all museums, the MACBA is a place where the artistic experience is accumulated and periodically returned to visitors in the form of exhibitions.

Alongside the chronological sequence of the MACBA's display of its permanent collection, a number of exhibitions are staged to allow visitors to follow the development of artists' careers: monographic exhibitions (*On Kawara: Whole and Parts*); thematic exhibitions (*Màscara i mirall*); group shows that exhibit a particular moment in the history of art (*Identitat múltiple. Obres del Whitney Museum of American Art*); monographic research exhibitions (*Tony Cragg*); or shows gathering together works well-suited to visitors' initiation in the arts (*Seeing the light. Eugènia Balcells*, see page 7.)

It is the task of the Museum's Documentation Services, from its library to its publications programme, to keep the memory of these exhibitions alive. These exhibitions are meant to make it easier to understand the specific forms of today's art – an art that is so close to us that it very often and very easily slips through our fingers.

But it is also the Museum's aim to keep the memory of visitors' reactions to these undertakings alive – that is, to remind itself of them and their experiences. In doing so, the Museum works as a transmitter of artistic initiatives, and thus the Museum speaks. The Museum also works as a receiver of people's comments, and thus the Museum listens. That is why the Museum, in its daily life, is a time and a place for conversation.

Every morning, from 10 to 12, the Museum is reserved for those visitors who would like a guided tour. It is especially younger people, that is, citizens whose formal education is still underway, who make use of these hours and, with the help of museum guides, begin or complete the process of learning what 'contemporary' means. (See *Art en veu alta*, page 8.)

Yet the act of beholding works of art is but the first link in a chain of questions; answering these questions requires considerable time. When such questions are asked, visual arts classrooms and lessons in the history of art become the true workshops of the Museum, and the Museum itself becomes an indispensable centre of artistic resources for those who want to carry on searching for their own answers. (See the MACBA's activities designed for schools: *El llenguatge de la fotografia: l'autoretrat* [page 6]; the book *Mirar, tocar, escoltar* [page 9];

and weekend activities within the programme *Les arts, una forma de coneixement* [page 5].

Memory, thus, begins in the present: the present of the visit. It begins in the present when visitors feel the strength of the work of art they are facing; in the present when the visitors feel disconcerted and numb. And this present continues in conversations: such conversations help one to behold and to understand, to share the opinions of others and to disagree with them, to shape our own perception and to find a place for it within our own sensorial world.

When the Museum is open to the public, a team of guides is available to help visitors who come to see the exhibitions by giving them the support they need to better understand what they are seeing. Students coming back to the Museum to finish their projects know that the Museum's team of guides is ready and willing to be of assistance. Thus, there is constant feedback between school and museum.

The projects that are currently being exhibited in the communication space are the result of these conversations. All of them are already included in the Education Service's Documentation Centre, and may be consulted in the library.

The projects resulting from collaboration with universities will be presented in the future. What it is currently on show comprises projects done by children and young adults whose ages range from three to eighteen years old approximately, and the materials that the Education Service has prepared as a consequence of its dialogue with schools. Each page, each sentence, each drawing is nothing but a page, a sentence, a drawing. But together they reflect a process of artistic exchange between children and children, between students and teachers, and between schools and the Museum. We hope that this exchange will remain a fundamental part of the memory of the MACBA, where the present is regarded as a meeting point between the inherited past and an imagined future.

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This table brings together the catalogues of the exhibitions staged by the MACBA over the 1996-97 school year. The exhibitions and special presentations to which they refer are the starting point for all the projects that can be consulted in this room.

**Fons per a una Col·lecció 2**  
(Holdings for a Collection 2)  
7 June 1996 - 6 January 1997.

**Light Construction.**  
28 June - 13 October 1996

**Noves Abstraccions**  
(New Abstract Painting)  
11 October - 30 November 1996

**Vassily Kandinsky.**  
La revolució del llenguatge pictòric.  
(Vassily Kandinsky.  
The revolution of pictorial language)  
11 October 1996 - 6 January 1997.

**Veure la llum. Eugènia Balcells.**  
(Seeing the light. Eugènia Balcells).  
18 October - 8 December 1996.

**En Reserva. Llibres especials**  
**de la Biblioteca del MACBA.**  
(En Reserva. Special books from  
the MACBA library)  
17 October 1996 - 6 January 1997.

**Situacionistes.**  
**Art, política i urbanisme**  
(Situationists. Art, Politics and Urbanism)  
13 November 1996 - 6 January 1997.

**Identitat Múltiple. Obres del**  
**Whitney Museum of American Art.**  
(Multiple Identity. Works from the  
Whitney Museum of American Art)  
20 December 1996 - 31 March 1997

**Pepe Espaliú.**  
20 December 1996 - 2 March 1997.

**Mike Kelley.**  
24 January - 31 March 1997.

**Introversions. Aspectes de la Col·lecció.**  
(Introversions. Aspects of the Collection)  
4 April - 31 August 1997.

**Sert. Arquitecte a Nova York.**  
(Sert. Architect in New York).  
4 April - 31 August 1997.

**Ciutat Roja. Miquel Navarro.**  
12 April - 15 July 1997.

**Fata Morgana. Martin Honert**  
12 April - 29 June 1997.

**Mascara i Mirall. (Mask and mirror)**  
23 April - 31 August 1997.

**On Kawara. Whole and parts.**  
1 May - 29 June 1997.

**Tony Cragg.**  
15 July - 24 September 1997.

**Christian Boltanski:**  
**Els testimonis (The witnesses).**  
**Els àngels. (The angels).**  
15 July - 19 October 1997.

**Nous paisatges, nous territoris.**  
(New landscapes, new territories)  
16 July - 5 October 1997.

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The Education Service's Documentation Centre was first conceived in 1995, shortly after the MACBA had been opened. On observing groups of students who were following a guided tour through the exhibition spaces, we began to realise how important it was for the Museum and for the visitors themselves to preserve the activities that were being generated there.

Two projects from primary schools started this collection: the Escola Laboure's *Descobrim l'art contemporani* (Discovering Contemporary Art), and the Escola Sant Pere Claver's *Art Brut* (Dirty Art). In just one year, the number of projects had risen to thirty, all of which, including the two initial ones, are shown here. By combining finished projects with series of slides we hope to give equal importance to both results and work process.

It is not the intention of teachers or museum staff to create new artists. On the contrary, by making the students better museum-goers, better users of the arts, and thus citizens with more resources to improve their quality of life, this project is meant to enrich their lives, just as the arts have, for thousands of years, enriched the lives of those who have allowed themselves time enough to contemplate them.

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For many primary school students, the visit to an exhibition is a second moment of surprise. The first surprise is the Museum itself: its whiteness, the height of its atrium, the ramp that emerges from the square and then winds its way into the building, openings that are not doors, the transparency of the floor, shadows that move along the shapes of the space. It may even happen, sometimes, that this initial surprise leaves no room for new emotions. That is why there are whole projects devoted to the discovery of the place where art is.

For those who are more familiar with museum-spaces, the questioning process may begin with the works of art. The focus of the projects is then specific works, relationships among them, and similarities and differences among artists.

Going to the Museum is thus combined with working in class and coming back to the Museum to ask for a catalogue or perhaps a video, until we are able to distinguish a painting from an installation, or a metaphor from a mere copy.

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5 Many young visitors do not come to the Museum on their own initiative, but on the initiative of the school or high school where they study. More and more educational centres – from primary schools to universities – enable students to get to know the resources that form their cultural environment. Group visits foster a dialogue that enriches this initial curiosity in a way that is perhaps more effective than what may happen in the solitude of an individual visit.

The Museum offers weekend workshops where the students may participate in specific arts education projects, which they chose according to their particular interests. Thus, this school initiative becomes part of the life of the city.

*Les arts: una forma de coneixement* is a museum programme whose aim is two-fold: to allow for continuity with the educational interests generated during the rest of the week, and to enable a confluence between those who want to keep on looking closely at some works, and those artists interested in the educational aspects of the arts. This table shows the projects that have sprung from this collaboration.

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A programme that acts as a bridge between school projects and weekends activities deserves special attention. *El llenguatge de la fotografia: l'autoretrat* is the title of a seminar-workshop designed for teachers. In it two Dutch photographers, Marieke Middelkoop and Marije van der Hoeven, have brought us an experience that – as the joint catalogue shows – already had an international life of its own:

We should remember that portrait as a theme, the theme of one's own image, has been continuously present in the MACBA's exhibition spaces: among the exhibitions involving portraiture are *Pepe Espaliú, Identitat múltiple. Obres del Whitney Museum of American Art*, and *Màscara i Mirall*, as well as *Tony Cragg* and *L'última mirada*.

Accordingly, students were encouraged to follow this diversity via a personal referent, that is, the difficulty in fixing their own image. This could bring them singularly close to the works of art to which they had been introduced.

Many of the projects dealing with this topic are still unfinished: they will be completed with the visit to *L'última mirada*.

What is remarkable about this programme is the fact that the question 'How does the camera work?' is replaced by the question 'What is it worth taking pictures of?'

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## 7

Schools may become museum workshops as long as they have a regular space and time to invent and develop new projects. At the same time, the Museum provides those working in the field of arts education with 'live' art, with a face-to-face experience of works of art, and with activities with the artists.

*Veure la llum* began as a collaboration between the artist Eugènia Balcells and the MACBA Education Service. For the exhibition, works of art were conceived as ways into and initiations in the world of the arts. Colour and shape were presented as constituent elements of the visual world. The combination of these two elements suggested the kaleidoscope-like multiplicity of artistic creation, and enabled visitors to perceive an obvious dimension of the works of art that very often goes unnoticed: the criss-crossing of lines and the gradation of colours that configure each piece as a unique work.

The *Veure la llum* exhibition, the documentation for which we include here, was a meeting point for the regular museum visitors and students not yet fully acquainted with contemporary art. It also acted as a way into the rest of the exhibitions in the Museum. In the wake of this exhibition a new programme was created, *Des del MACBA a...*, which consisted in itineraries from our Museum to a number of other museums in the city. (See adjoining video.) Meanwhile, several projects were being made at schools, high-schools and universities.

*Veure la llum* is currently on show in Sa Llotja in Palma de Mallorca, and will later travel to Bologna, Italy.



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8 Usually, it is art historians who, through their publications, bring us closer to the world of artistic creation. But very often it is those who work directly in the creative processes that give us clues to open our minds to new ways of interpreting what we see.

We may find here a strange analogy between children discovering the world by manipulating whatever comes into their hands, and intellectuals trying to break open what they see until they understand it.

The aim of *Art en veu alta* is to nourish exhibitions with the views of people who, while not specialists in visual arts, feel particularly attracted to a particular exhibition, and are willing to start a conversation about what it suggests to them. In this way, the room staff – monitors and guides – will enrich the contents of their presentations to students by combining the curators' contributions with those of these more heterodox guests.

Students join in this exchange of views in different ways: through guided visits (see adjoining video); through the Internet, as in the aesthetic education project PECA (<http://www.xtec.es/~ecalvet>); or in the magazine *Revista 100*, where, within the framework of philosophical inquiry, there is a continuing, growing space devoted to arts education (the third issue of this magazine is a monographic issue on this topic).

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## The book *Mirar - Tocar - Escoltar*

*From MACBA to...* constitutes one embodiment of our desire that the Museum not become self-sufficient, but rather open itself to the city, becoming a resource centre and engaging in a dialogue with other artistic and cultural organisations.

Among other collaboration projects, the programme *From MACBA to...* has allowed the Museum to be physically present in several Catalan towns by means of small thematic collections. One of the results of this initiative has been the project *MACBA at school*, which is to begin its tour in 1998. The book *Mirar-Tocar-Escoltar* (Look-Touch-Listen) is part of this initiative.

Though it may seem otherwise, the task of fostering artistic creation in children requires a resolve in favour of an all-encompassing perception of phenomena. Children are more open to complex wholes than they are to breaking up what they perceive.

The book *Mirar-Tocar-Escoltar* is meant to help students be creators when they are beholding and listening and touching; to be creators when they are spectators or visitors to the Museum. This will make it easier for them to rediscover the artist behind each work of art.

*Mirar-Tocar-Escoltar* is a book because, although many other formats are available, books remain the foremost vessels of knowledge. We intend to use this classic format together with 'on-screen' elements, recorded music and the confusion that touching produces when one is deprived of the sense of vision. We believe that this will foster a favourable environment for schools to devote one week to art as a preamble to their visit to the Museum, or as the final phase of a project that began in the exhibition rooms.

Thus, the screen allows us to see what has happened to the visual arts after the invention of photography, cinema, video, and the digital image; the sense of hearing allows us to recognise language as sound and music as language; the sense of touch allows us to reconcile ourselves with the materials used by contemporary artists; and, finally, through the mixing of our senses, we come to regard artistic perception as a powerful tool for attaining knowledge of reality.