

The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Introduction

The collection of the MACBA is composed at the present time of works from the holdings of the institutions which make up the Museum's consortium. The collection is centred on the art of the second half of this century, and in terms of nationalities, Catalan artists are in the majority, although there is also a significant and representative sample of Spanish and European artists. In this respect the collection has a genuinely universal vocation. More precisely, it might be said that the collection seeks — in a living context of commitment to the contemporary artistic situation — to articulate its discourse around those nodes of intersection which make it possible to establish significant links between contemporary movements in art in Catalonia and Spain and related developments on the international scene.

The collection begins — with the exception of one or two earlier works of key importance — with the late forties and includes the most recent works of our immediate present. It is, then, a resolutely contemporary collection, the spirit of which is clearly evident in its three fundamental components: the historical, the current and the prospective. The first of these covers a lengthy period, from the re-emergence of the avant-garde in Catalonia (with *Dau al Set*, informalism and normative and geometric currents), through the sixties and seventies with their abstract and figurative poetics, as well as conceptual art and the general spirit of experimentalism — with its influence on the younger generation — to culminate with the neo-expressionisms of the eighties. The current moment is represented by works from the present decade, by a series of artists who constitute a fundamental field of reference for the Museum, in terms of both their outstanding artistic importance and their influence on other artists. Finally, the prospective component centres its focus on the youngest artists, closest to the Museum's own cultural context.

Unveiling of the collection is laid out on the ground and first floors, in the atrium and vestibule of the Museum. On show on the first floor, where the tour of the collection commences, are the works dating from the late forties through to the early eighties, arranged in chronological order and by decades. In the gallery on the ground floor are the more recent works, essentially ordered around those artists belonging to the generations which came to the fore during the seventies and eighties and who represent the most consolidated art of the present. In the last section we find works by the youngest artists, new artistic values to be taken into account in the years ahead of us. On show in the atrium and vestibule of the Museum are those works from the collection whose particular characteristics call for a specific exhibition space, and which provide it with a frame of international reference.

For more specific information about the artists and the works of the Collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, please consult the information point on level 0.

1 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

The forties and fifties

The Collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona effectively commences with works from the late 40s, although it also includes a small number of outstanding earlier pieces, such as those by Paul Klee and Joan Miró. The artistic avant-gardes of the first half of the 20th century openly questioned the role played by art and artists throughout the course of the 19th century, and were particularly concerned with debating the concept of art as representation that had been dominant for so long.

Out of these reflections and the constant experimentation they gave rise to there emerged, amongst a variety of other art forms, works whose frame of reference was no longer visible external reality but a reality that was interior, oneiric, imaginary or simply personal and private.

In this respect, the paintings of the *Dau al Set* group, with the figure of Joan Ponç in the forefront, draw on the legacy of the avant-gardes. Magic, dreams and chance provide the means of addressing a reality that goes beyond the everyday, visible world to engage with the occult world of the individual. Surrealism and dadaism, together with an interest in that artistic evolution that had been interrupted by the Spanish Civil War, are the most immediate points of reference. In these works — which continue to employ the traditional structure of the picture as window — the narrative approach and the spatial composition are close to those of our own time, as they also were in some of the most important works of surrealism.

Already evident in this first room is the innovative character of the work of Antoni Tàpies, who was soon to find a distinctive style of his own.

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2 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona **The fifties and sixties**

During the 50s there was a very widespread interest in the exploration of new materials and in unusual treatments of the pictorial surface. This desire for innovation was the basis for a questioning of painting as it had been understood in the past. This new form of pictorial representation, in which an interest in the textures and the artist's gestures in working the pigment momentarily displace interest in the anecdotal content, is known as informalism.

Informalism, in its desire to allow the free expression of subconscious fantasy, avoids both the world of reason and the direct observation of external reality. Dubuffet, whose *Le chien jappeur* is on show in this room, was one of its earliest practitioners.

In many cases the tools and materials traditionally employed by painters are replaced by others, new to the world of art. Thus Fontana makes holes in the canvas, Millares affixes layers of sacking to the surface of the picture to achieve greater volume, Guinovart composes his pictures on the basis of untransformed natural elements and Tàpies turns away from oil paint to experiment with latex. This accumulation of materials gives rise to a relief quality that calls into question the two-dimensionality of the painting.

But in spite of the general predominance of the informalist current in Europe, with the coming of the 60s a number of artists began to search out new forms of expression. Amongst them are painters who did not abandon their interest in the most direct representation of reality, such as Armand Cardona Torrandell or Carlos Mensa, whose work also carries a significant charge of socio-political critique. Other artists, such as Zush, Eduard Arranz-Bravo or Rafael Bartolozzi, while not repudiating such a reality, engage with it on the level of metaphor.

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3 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

The seventies

During the 70s, we find experimentation in art continuing the process of moving away from traditional materials that informalism had initiated. The influence of Marcel Duchamp is very much in evidence; half a century earlier, Duchamp was already questioning the art world in such provocative works as *La Fontaine* or *Roue de bicyclette*.

New elements could be used to suggest different visual perspectives on reality. The incorporation into painting of materials previously regarded as non-artistic evolves towards the use of actual objects themselves. This can be seen in the Rauschenberg picture, reflecting the international context, and in *Terminal*, by Joan Pere Viladecans, both on show in this section.

From the inclusion of a real object in a picture to the full autonomy of the object is a relatively short step. The art world is in constant expansion and the role of the artist becomes more and more diversified. Alongside the figure of the painter who produces a work we now find the artist who manipulates objects — such as Joan Brossa or the pioneering Marcel Broodthaers — or the artist who carries out an action in a particular place and moment in time, and whose work can only, given its fleeting nature, be documented. Accordingly, the conceptual works to be found in this room give primacy to the idea and the process over the formal execution.

From this moment on, the concepts of the ephemeral, the document or the copy coexist with those of the original and the unique.

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4 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona The seventies and eighties

The constant expansion of the language of the arts that has taken place over the course of the 20th century has progressively opened up new avenues of artistic expression, yet without closing off the more traditional approaches and forms.

The 70s brought a certain purging of materials and a new thematic approach. One part of the painting of the period set out to realign itself with its craft tradition, and in so doing reaffirm its inherent expressive capacity. The diversity that this gave rise to is notorious: it brought us the chromatic subtlety of Hernández Pijuan and of Tena, a member of the Trama group, the constructivism evident in Ràfols Casamada's work and the explosion of colour that was to characterize the painting of the 80s, represented here by works by Broto, Grau and Campano.

The use of large formats, the coexistence of different styles which reflect the individual personality of the painter, the serious or ironic references to the art of the past and an artistic conception in which the international context is clearly present are amongst the significant features of the art produced in the 80s. With regard to the last point, the ease of communication and the continual circulation of travelling exhibitions allowed an almost constant dialogue between artists. Thus works by Penck, Basquiat and Condo are found side by side with paintings by Garcia Sevilla, Amat, Sicilia and Barceló.

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5 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona The last decade (I)

On this floor the Collection puts its most recent works on show. The crossing of lines of reference between artists from different generations makes it possible to appreciate the diversity of interests, of resources and of artistic forms which shape the present moment.

The itinerary begins with Susana Solano's sculptures, together with paintings by José Maria Sicilia and Joan Hernández Pijuan. These works constitute a space of intimate reflection in the basis of the experience of an external reality.

In contrast with this approach and its refusal to abandon the real world as a referent, the work of Zush, Carlos Pazos and Ferran Garcia Sevilla centre their attention on a universe born out of the artist's imagination or memory.

These two artistic tendencies are to be found throughout this section of the exhibition. Miquel Barceló, with his manifest interest in the traditional themes of painting, interweaves the reference to reality with his own interiorization of that reality.

Minimal art, present here in the work of Donald Judd, provides the basis for the following series of works. Sergi Aguilar's forms retain a sensual quality which contrasts with the geometrical organization of the sculptures *El Ruso 3* and *El Ruso 7* by Txomin Badiola.

The pictorial counterpoint to this group of sculptures is provided by the work of Pablo Palazuelo, Juan Uslé and Juan Manuel Broto.

The piece *Flamenco figure* by Tony Oursler makes explicit the introduction of new forms of artistic expression, which we find again in the work of Muntadas. His *Portrait and Portraits*, in which he utilizes screen —printing and video, question the strategies of communication which hold sway in political discourse.

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6 The collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona The last decade (II)

It is important always to bear in mind that when we look at the most recent artwork, the differences between artists come to the fore, just as in the case of the historic works of the permanent Collection exhibited on the first floor it is the similarities between artists which are in evidence, and this allows us to speak more easily of established movements in art.

The work of Juan Muñoz links up with the last stage of the tour of the Collection. The negation implicit in his London Balcony is in sharp contrast to Perejaume's kaleidoscopic approach in *Postaler*, or even with the versatility of his conception of theatre in Sant Pol de Mar.

An interest in landscape, in the modulation and creation of new spaces, is found again in the work of Pep Agut, Jordi Colomer and Antoni Abat. Also in evidence in this room is the importance which certain contemporary artists attach to the incorporation of languages in their works: *Musée Elan* by Rogelio López Cuenca here accompanies *Emboscadura* by Federico Guzmán, a work for which the artist invites the collaboration of the spectator.

In the last exhibition room, the mask by Pepe Espaliú, with its allusion to identity and absence, is related to the works by Darío Urzay, Carmen Calvo or Ramon Guillen-Balmes. The work by Christian Boltanski, *The reserve of the dead Swiss*, which concludes the exhibition, defends the right to memory of everything that goes to make up human life.

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7 The collection of the **Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona** **Circulation spaces**

As well as the exhibition rooms, the Museum's circulation spaces have also been used to show works from the Collection which help to place the pieces inside the rooms in their international context.

Thus, before commencing the chronological itinerary on the 1st floor we find works by Calder, Miró and Oteiza; works which, as major milestones in the art of this century, serve as the pillars on which the Collection stands.

The atrium and the entrance are occupied by works which give the international referent for the pieces inside the rooms, and the personal discourse of these key works is effectively reinforced in relation to the most recent art. Amongst the artists represented here are Richard Deacon, Mario Merz, Richard Long, Adolfo Schlösser, Anselm Kiefer, Miquel Navarro, Shirazeh Houshiary, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Joseph Beuys, Robert Morris and James Lee Byars.

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