

MACBA Collection XVII Collection

July - September 2005

During the summer months the MACBA collection is presenting a selection of over 160 works distributed in different parts of the museum. On floor 0 visitors will find a broad chronological reading of the collection, which spans the period from the fifties to the late eighties. The rooms on floors 1 and 2 and Convent MACBA complement that reading and bring it up to the present day, looking more closely at different authors and subject areas such as the ones devoted to photography after the eighties or the cinema.

The show begins on floor 0 with a series of works that illustrate the confrontation of the discourses that dominated the artistic debate from the fifties. The collection brings together these multiple responses to the period and its conflicts, such as the flowering of Informalism, American Abstract Expressionism or the *Nouveaux Réalistes*. As its starting point it takes the work of Roberto Matta, which opened up the conception of fundamental space over the following decades.

Many of these works point to two main tendencies linked to abstraction which, through apparently contradictory, are in fact complementary. On the one hand, Informalism, partially rooted in Surrealism, with artists like Antoni Tàpies. In this line we find artists who in some way respond to the Spanish political situation like Antonio Saura and Manuel Millares, members of the Grupo el Paso. In contrast with that tendency is another, rooted in Functionalism and Constructivism, in which the abstraction is the result of a search for order, clarity, balance and objectivity and which leads to Concrete Art, two of whose main figures in Spain are Pablo Palazuelo and Jorge Oteiza.

At the end of this period the works of a new generation of artists linked to Neo-Dada interrupt the abstract homogeneity of the pictorial space by including real objects in it which emphasise the material conditions of the work to the detriment of illusion and representation. That can be seen in the work of Larry Rivers, George Segal and most of all in the work of Robert Frank, a photographer linked to the *beat* generation, presented here for the first time.

The next rooms develop this discourse towards another turning point: the one that covers the sixties and seventies and corresponds to the flowering of new critical discourses and new artistic practices. In this period tendencies like American Minimal and the various offshoots of Conceptual Art live side by side and question artistic activity aimed at the production of objects, rather favouring the performance and process aspects. Along that line, Marcel Broodthaers is a fundamental artist in the collection. His work brings together two essential traditions of modern art, Duchamp's *ready-made* and

Magritte's image-rhetoric. Although it springs from writing, it adopts different media: photography, film, installation, graphics, multiples, books, etc. His work is a prelude to the consequences of the transformation of artistic production under the expansion of the culture of consumption, which began in the sixties, and the transformation of the museum from the impact of the new practices and the critical thought of the new social movements.

Floor 1 begins with the reception of Conceptual Art in Catalonia in the seventies. In these works practices and strategies that favour of the processes and conditions of the work abound. Activity, information and debate are the other guidelines that structure the artistic creation of the moment, which corresponded to the end of the dictatorship in Spain, and can be seen in the work of the Grup de Treball, whose members included Francesc Abad, Fina Miralles and Francesc Torres.

The next rooms show two differentiated aspects, which place themselves at a third turning point related to the unstoppable *boom* of the market in the late seventies and early eighties and the return of painting and certain premodern traditions. Here we find the work of Dan Graham, with its fundamental element: the dialectical relation between cultural discourse – from the hybrid conception of artistic and architectural work, the value of use and attention to the phenomena of popular cultura – and the game of perception, as well as the tension between the spectator and the work, between public and private. That tension, in which the focus of interest moves from the work of art to the subject who looks at it, also appears in the work of James Coleman. The work of those two artists, which is shown with other earlier references like the photographs of Gordon Matta Clark, exemplifies the recovery of narrative traditions as a response to the dogmatism of Conceptual Art, in an attempt to overcome its contradictions and tautological limitations.

In this process the role of photography, to which the next room is given over, is significant, as is that of film and video, which are shown in the Convent space. In the eighties photography burst onto the art scene and became the emblematic medium for the theories of the criticism of representation, linked to certain postmodern ideas. The works here propose another definition of the pictorial from the notion of picture or photographic *tableau*, a strategy by which photography could occupy the architectural and cultural spaces of painting. Here we find the works of Jeff Wall, Craigie Horsfield, Suzanne Lafont and Jean-Marc Bustamante.

The construction of the gaze in the photographic *tableaux* in Craigie Horsfield or Jeff Wall bears some relation to the use of landscape in the films of Alexander Sokurov. On floor 2 of the museum there is a showing of his *Spiritual Voices. From the Diaries of War* (1995). It is a diary recorded on the battlefield with real characters, in which the filming of the landscape and of the passage of time produces a sensation of elegiac, unreal quietening. In the words of Jacques Rancière, "the real has to be fictionalised to be thought", and that is the case of the documentary work of this film-maker who fully assumes the discursive nature of all representation. In the Capella other works by Sokurov can be seen, together with a selection of films and videos by authors like Tacita Dean, Pere Portabella or Harun Farocki. All these works redefine the documentary through different strategies, such as revealing the process and the methods used in the relations between the director and the subjects, revealing that the documentary *constructs* a meaning and showing that the narration that goes with it is never an impartial account, but an open interpretation. In many of them the notion of testimony is fundamental, insofar as it involves a different work process that gives rise to a new relation of collaboration between an author and some social subjects.

**Museu d'Art
Contemporani
de Barcelona**

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Museum hours:

Weekdays, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
(From 25 September, 11 a.m. to 7.30 p.m.)
Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Sundays and holidays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Closed on Tuesdays (except holidays)
Thursdays in July and August until 12 a.m.

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