

The Schizos of Madrid
Madrid's Figurative Movement in the 1970s

3 June – 14 September 2009



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This exhibition studies the complex way of life and cultural environment that existed in Madrid during the final years of the Franco regime and the nascent democracy, through the activities and work of a group of artists who, in an ambivalently modern gesture, chose to embrace figurative painting and reject the prevalent esthetic and political conventions of their time. In an attempt to provide an overview of a period difficult to evaluate from the perspective of contemporary narrative, the show seeks to explore the cultural effervescence of those years with an unprejudiced but nonetheless critical approach.

The exhibition covers the period beginning in 1970 and ending in 1985, by which time the scene had changed definitively. Special emphasis has been placed on the behavior of those painters as a group sharing concerns and desires, supported by a growing number of art galleries, encouraged by a new generation of critics with whom they shared interests and ambitions and recognized in the media. At that time, they were dubbed *Schizos*, a name that alluded to their theoretical underpinnings, which were based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, implicitly and explicitly present in their artistic discourse in which every parcel of knowledge was mixed in order to probe the context they moved in.

Carlos Alcolea, Chema Cobo, Carlos Franco, Herminio Molero, Guillermo Pérez Villalta, Rafael Pérez-Minguez, and Manolo Quejido were the original exponents of the Madrid Figurative Movement though work is also displayed by other artists who joined them like Sigfrido Martín Begué, Carlos Forns and Jaime Aledo. Photographer Luis Pérez-Minguez, companion and witness to the group's entire existence and Luis Gordillo, their closest Spanish referent are represented too. Finally, a tribute is included to Javier Utray, the theorist who bound the group together.

Examined here is the significance of this body of works from a new, perspective, one that is esthetic as well as social and political. Thus the iconography of many of these paintings reveals an emphatic lack of inhibition in social behavior of a Spain that did not want to be excluded from international concerns. As Herminio Molero once put it, "We weren't standard combatants. In fact, our way of fighting consisted in ignoring the fact that the dictatorship existed. For us, it was already dead, and we behaved as such."



This group-portrait of the 70s and 80s Madrid art scene takes a rigorous but demythologizing approach to the task of uncovering the accumulated references underlying the work of these painters who sought to personify the role of the "high-culture" artist yet simultaneously delved into the popular culture of the time - thus shaping the *schizoid* character for which they came to be known.

Referents and contexts

The first rooms explore the contextual multiplicity in which this painting arose, drawing freely on a wide range of artistic, musical, literary and philosophical stimuli that span the gap between erudite theory and mass culture. Among the pictorial references that emerge are the varied metaphysical circumvolutions of Salvador Dalí and Giorgio de Chirico, the world of Duchamp and his awareness of artistic codes, the colorist abstraction of Frank Stella and José Guerrero, the large-format figuration of Alex Katz, the figuration of David Hockney and Richard Hamilton, and the local pop art of Alfredo Alcáin, as well as Luis Gordillo's specific rejection of informalist poetics. This complex world of references was rounded out by

Guillermo Pérez Villalta
Group of People in an Atrium or Allegory of Art and Life or of the Present and Future, 1975
Acrylic on canvas.
180 X 360 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Ed Ruscha's photo albums, Lacanian psychoanalysis, French theory embodied by Deleuze and Guattari, and the ambiguously sophisticated attitudes of pop musicians David Bowie and Brian Ferry.

Beginnings. From the 1960s to 1973

The late 60s and early 70s marked the initial experiences of Madrid's young figurative movement encouraged by the wake left by the 60s *Nueva Generación* (New Generation). As Juan Manuel Bonet put it, these were painters who "were not ashamed to proclaim their condition as such". In these rooms, we see the individual contributions of each of these artists who, from the very start, configured an unprecedented melting pot of visual transfers: Carlos Alcolea, with his swimming pools and his fascination with Greta Garbo; Carlos Franco's narrative depiction of anamorphic figures and drawings adopting the language of comics and popular culture; Guillermo Pérez Villalta's autobiographical obsessions; and contemporary works related to visual poetry by Herminio Molero and Manolo Quejido.

The articulation of a language. 1973-1977

Grupo de personas en un atrio o alegoría del arte y de la vida o del presente y del futuro (Group of People in an Atrium or Allegory of Art

Carlos Alcolea
Mickey Mouse. The Labyrinth. The Endless, 1978
Acrylic on canvas. 220 x 230 cm
Private Collection





Herminio Molero. *My Name is Molero*, 1975
 Offset on paper. 38 x 59 cm
 Private Collection

and Life or of the Present and the Future), by Guillermo Pérez Villalta consciously became a portrait of this group associated with the Buades Gallery, the launching pad for a new poetics beginning with its inaugural exhibition, *Propuesta de temporada* (Seasonal Offering). These were also the years when the new criticism - also revolving round the Buades, began to construct the esthetic discourse that supported the group throughout the 70s. The central rooms of the present show are dedicated to the key works and events that shaped the imagery of Madrid art circles in the 70s and even the next decade. This singular, heterodox universe could be summed up in the words of Pérez Villalta: “The esthetic aspects of this world changed for me: something like moving from the world of the hippies to that of *glam*; from The Incredible String Band to Bowie and Roxy Music; from protest to a more hedonistic, ironic and perhaps dramatic outlook.”

Complexity. 1977-1980

With the holding of the first democratic elections in Spain, the figurative paths of the Madrid artists became increasingly complex, delving freely into the multiple literary and esthetic references they had already acquired. There was clearly a certain degree of dispersion with respect to the shared interests that had marked them as a group in previous years. This was partially due to contact with other Spanish artists whose very different poetics fluctuated between object-oriented work, abstract painting and conceptual art.

The exhibitions at the turn of the decade, 1980 y *Madrid D.F.* (“1980” and “Madrid DF”), brought together the young figurative artists from Madrid and painters following other trends, underlining a new attitude. As the catalog noted, to “reconsider the politics of art [...] to reconsider the innermost politics” was the order of the day. The painting of the new decade had room for individual portraits, social portraits of an incipient Spanish rock scene and references to the world of Walt Disney. The only vindication seemed to be the creation of a national art market.

Other paths. 1980-1984

The early 1980s were an important period in the contemporary history of democratic Madrid. They saw the proliferation of a new alternative cultural scene, an ‘underground’ that expanded in the context of the first enthusiastic years of the Transition. Some of these artists took part in that creative effervescence, including Herminio Molero, who founded the pop music group, Radio Futura, with the Auserón brothers. *Otras figuraciones* (Other Figurative Art), an exhibition which opened in late 1981, was the swan song for figurative language and, far-removed from that moment’s neo-expressionist amalgam, failed in its attempt to export the movement to European markets where the return of painting was already a *fait accompli*.

The Cabinet of Javier Utray

The consciously contradictory and compulsively inclusive character of the artists of this generation is patent in the space dedicated to Javier Utray, one of the group’s main mentors, whose unorthodox teaching at the School of Architecture (ETSAM) in Madrid helped many of the *Schizos* find a theoretical framework. For those young painters from Madrid, Javier Utray was the exception to the rule in a highly academic and institutional context. He put the new creative possibilities of postmodern architecture – represented by Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi – at their disposal. Utray’s importance lay in his role as the catalyst for a new sensitivity to all the international breakaway attitudes that seemed to have no place in Spain’s grey cultural panorama at that time. His knowledge of new, different esthetic contexts was remarkably helpful in shaping the multi-referential (and certainly *schizoid*) figurative art of the 1970s.

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Museum hours
Mondays to Saturdays: 10.00 - 21.00
Sundays: 10.00 - 14.30
Closed Tuesdays

Exhibition galleries will be vacated
15 minutes before the museum closes

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Free admission

Timetable
October to March (included):
Mondays - Saturdays: 10.00 - 18.00
Sundays and Holidays: 11.00 - 16.00

April to September (included):
Mondays - Saturdays: 11.00 - 20.00
Sundays and Holidays: 11.00 - 18.00
Closed Tuesday

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