

Exhibition April 27 - September 26, 2016
Sabatini Building, Floor 3

Campo cerrado

Art and Power in Post-war Spain. 1939-1953



Antoni Tàpies, *Parafaragamus*, 1949
© Comissió Tàpies, VEGAP, Madrid, 2016

**MUSEO NACIONAL
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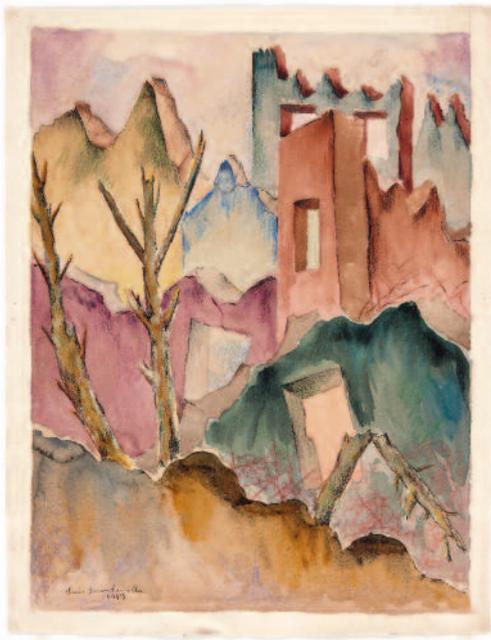
Campo Cerrado:

Art and Power in the Spanish Postwar, 1939–1953

In April 1939, the rebel army led by General Francisco Franco entered Madrid, and Spain's long dictatorship began. In September 1939, World War II broke out in Europe, ending in 1945 with the defeat of the Axis nations whose political positions were aligned with Franco. Spain, devastated and internationally isolated, was forced by the regime into a campaign of literal and metaphorical national (re)construction that had a decisive effect on its culture. This was a period of contrasts, in which the solemnly ceremonious coexisted—often violently—with poverty, the rhetoric of a glorious past with the harshness of present conditions, continuity with rupture, and the struggle for survival inside the country's borders with exile. Relations between power and art were altered and embittered, and all possible nuances between the coercive and repressive efficacy of official power and the capacity for resilience of culture and its makers were displayed.

Invoking the critical spirit and the connotations of Max Aub's *Campo Cerrado* (translated as “Field of Honor,” but literally “Closed Field”) (Mexico City, 1943), which focuses on the years preceding the Civil War, this exhibition revises the Spanish postwar period through research combining broad overviews with detailed studies and well-known with obscure works, and also including a widely ranging selection of pieces, some types of which are unprecedented in the history of art. The exhibition questions clichés such as the scarcity or irrelevance of cultural and artistic activity in the 1940s, and attempts to sketch an image of the period that will resist the habitual simplifications.

The exhibition proposes a map through which different paths can be followed, where chronology is taken into account but submission to linear temporality avoided. Instead, the narrative is structured into themes that relate to key aspects of the time and function as independent blocks, although there are connections and linkages between them.



Luis Quintanilla, *Ruins*, 1943

1. A NEW ERA

In 1939, while belligerent military parades contrasted with the precarious paths of exile, and as the violence of World War II portended, the (re)construction of the nation moved into the forefront as one of the dictatorship's most important tasks. The creation of a symbolic image for the new regime invaded every aspect of Spanish life. This image was systematically represented in oil paintings and magazines, as well as in books and other material for young people: everything can be used as a ground for visual pedagogy, one of the regime's most crucial propaganda weapons.

The nation's new image also led to conveniently advertised building

campaigns (founded on prison labor). Examples include the new emphasis on the ruin as a sublimating element in warfare, and the establishing of symbolically charged settings that were to imbue places such as Toledo or the Madrid university campus with a new significance.

2. ACADEMIES AND RETURNS

Official policy acclaimed what was known as the *Escuela española*, the "Spanish School," as the essence of national art. This first became evident at the 1938 Venice Biennale (the Spanish pavilion was curated by General Director of Fine Arts Eugenio d'Ors) and continued at exhibitions in Berlin in 1942 and Buenos Aires in 1947. The idea took force in 1939 with the return of works from the Museo del Prado from Geneva and also with the reinstating in 1941 of the National Exhibitions of Fine Art.

The significance of academic forms of fine art and their conjugation of Italian and German models, which until 1945 and at other times had been strongly present, became diluted as the place of the artist in the new social and cultural order was interrogated, intersecting with the influence of surrealist and classicist figuratism. D'Ors directed the *Academia Breve de Crítica de Arte*, also characterized by its eclecticism, after 1942. His elitist *Salones de los Once* sketched out a genealogy of Spanish modernity that ran from forms of classicism to national authenticity and the *Noucentisme* of Barcelona to a toned-down view of the modernity of the times.

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Godofredo Ortega Muñoz, *La jaula* [The Cage], 1940-1941
Ortega Muñoz © Clemente Lapuerta

3. THE CITY AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

One of the fundamental aspects of the autarchic Spanish culture in the 1940s was the construction of an agrarian ideal. The rural world was mythicized, aestheticized, and utilized. Landscape, its inhabitants, and the objects in it became themes of preference and emblems of the vigor and timeless discipline that were seen to represent the essence of the national spirit as it was rescued from the past. New villages were situated between modernity and traditionalism and assisted in a subtle form of social control. In contrast, life in the cities—characterized by harshness and suspicion, persistent and invasive political repression—a specific social place for women defined by the Sección Femenina de Falange Española (and closely bound to ideas about the fertility of the countryside), and humor and public spectacle as permissible forms of everyday escapism, played their part in the urban culture of the 1940s and were sometimes portrayed in

film and literature in critical opposition to representations of the rural world.

4. THE ERUPTION OF THE IRRATIONAL. POSTISMO

In 1945, *Postismo*, a marginal movement, advocated a tendency toward irrationality, cosmopolitanism, and the recuperation of strategies from the prewar avant-gardes—a strategy that became more visible as the decade progressed. The movement was founded by Carlos Edmundo de Ory, Eduardo Chicharro Briones, and Silvano Sernesi in two briefly published, irreverent, eclectic magazines, *Postismo* and *La Cerbatana*. Exhibitions in Madrid and Zaragoza brought together artists with different sensibilities and styles. But the relevance of the movement, particularly in literature, can be properly considered only if we take into account both those closest to its founders and its liberating influence, whether direct or indirect, on artists other than its direct members.

5. THEATRICAL INTERLUDE

Theater was to become a privileged territory for experimentalism and a space for artists who could not aspire to a visible place in the visual arts, and it played a pivotal role in the regimes staging of its own image. Mass events such as victory parades, historical commemorations, and theatrical street performances came first, followed by the inauguration of the National Theaters. Some scenographers and filmmakers made use of formal resources that included totalitarian ritualism, surreal iconography, and the recuperation of popular folklore

and historicism. Among the most ambitious experiences were Val del Omar's urban radio (*Circuito perifónico*, 1940), performances in city spaces, and Salvador Dalí's *Don Juan Tenorio* at the Teatro Nacional in 1949.

6. EXILES

The forties were marked by exile for many Spaniards opposed to the Franco regime. Their main destinations were Mexico and Argentina, where Spaniards in exile set up theaters and publishing companies and printed magazines and books. The pain of nostalgia and a future with no certain return, the rupture and bewilderment of displacement, and the need to integrate in a foreign culture were combined with often-explicit political positions.

Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró's positions on exile were complementary. Both artists were present yet simultaneously absent from Spain. Picasso was acclaimed at international modern art museums as a classical reference for modernity, but his work was seldom exhibited in Spanish museums, and he never returned to his own country. He lived in Paris during the German occupation, and was politically committed to the Second Republic, anti-Francoism, and communism. Much of Picasso's work after World War II focused on a return to Mediterranean classicism, and he was admired by many exiled Spanish artists. Miró made a quiet return to Spain in 1942, keeping up many of his international contacts and activities and positioning himself on the margins of official culture inside Spain. Within a few years he became a reference for younger artists in search of unexplored paths



Nanda Papi, *Untitled*, n.d.

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Maruja Mallo, *Cabeza de mujer negra* [Head of Black Woman], 1946. © Maruja Mallo, VEGAP, Madrid, 2016

in painting and as a means of channeling their diffuse resistance to the regime.

7. ARCHITECTURES

In the late 1940s, the aim to combine all the arts into architecture gained prominence internationally, and this idea continued into the 1950s. In Spain it took shape in instances such as the refurbishing of the Cine Dorado, inaugurated in 1949 and designed by painter and architect Santiago Lagunas (a member of the Pórtico group that was related to the beginnings of postwar abstraction); the Córdoba Chamber of Commerce, designed by Rafael de La-Hoz and José María García de Paredes; and, most particularly, the Spanish pavilion at the 1951 Milan Triennale. José Antonio Coderch and Rafael Santos Torroella's decision to blend popular local

tradition with international modernity led to the Franco regime's first international success. The idea was also taken up by Miguel Fisac in interiors such as the Instituto de Óptica Daza Valdés, the CSIC bookstore in Madrid, and the Instituto Laboral in Daimiel.

The urban habitat and the question of religion were focal issues in the official discourse on abstract art and also led to intensified discussion on the new architecture. In 1951, Grupo R was founded in Barcelona, symbolizing the bridging of architecture and the visual arts and of pre- and postwar modernity. The union of the transcendental and the modern can also be seen in Josep Soteras's grand urban altar for the 35th Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona in 1952 and is especially palpable in the Sanctuary of Aranzazu, a temple of Basque identity whose design by Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oiza and Luis Laorga included the active collaboration of sculptor Jorge Oteiza.

8. PRIMITIVE, MAGICAL, DARK

The aesthetic discoveries of Mathias Goeritz in 1948, as well as the support of the local authorities, led to a series of international debates on the Altamira Cave and the primitive roots of modernity. The Escuela de Altamira revived aspirations to a modernity based on the prewar model. The idea of an obscure, primitive modernity was echoed by groups such as Dau al Set in Barcelona, Pórtico in Zaragoza, and LADAC (Los Arqueros del Arte Contemporáneo) in the Canary Islands. Also in 1948, the first issue of *Dau al Set*, a magazine of surrealist and Dadaist lineage, was published, the Saló de Otoño was launched, and the first Ciclo



Santiago Lagunas, Cine Dorado, 1949

Experimental de Arte Joven took place—all served as independent platforms for new forms of painting. The dark, magical, irrational leanings of the new forms of art—particularly Dau al Set, which was also linked to *Postismo* by the presence of Juan Eduardo Cirlot, were echoed in the music of the Jazz salons organized by the Hot Club's Club 49, and were related to Rafael Santos Torroella's *Cobalto* publishers and magazine.

9. THE OFFICIAL APPROPRIATION OF MODERNITY

In the early 1950s, the Franco regime, with its sights on the Cold War, officialized its

institutional support of modernity. In 1951, after a successful 9th Milan Triennale, minister Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez inaugurated the Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte and was responsible for the creation of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo directed by architect José Luis Fernández del Amo, who also directed the exhibition of abstract art in Santander, a point of encounter for some of the artists who would set up the El Paso group four years later. The group would become the official embodiment of Spanish informalist painting in the 1950s. This seemed to announce a period that would bring an end to the stifling closure of the early postwar period.

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from 10 am to 2.15 pm
the whole Museum is open,
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are open Collection 1
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(check website)

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Exhibition rooms in all venues
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Related activities

A propósito de... *Campo cerrado*

Guided visits with commentary
by the Mediation Staff
Thursdays at 7.15 pm and
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Audiovisual season

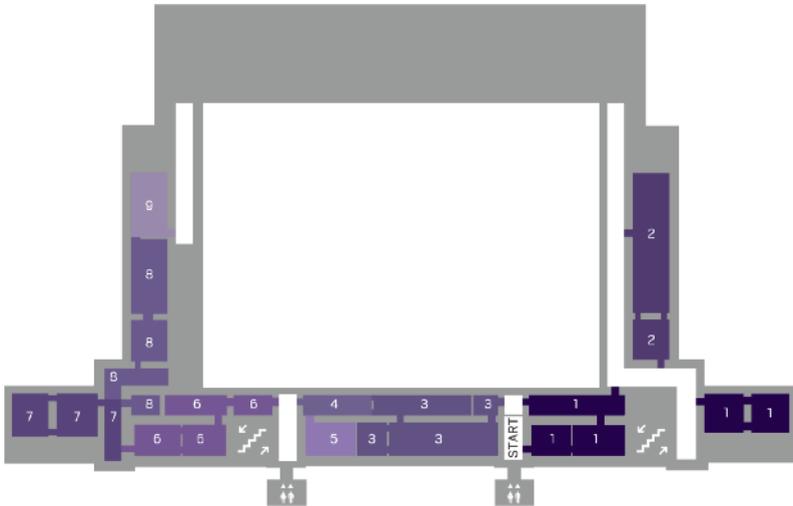
*Life in the Shadows. Spanish
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(1939–1953)*

Thursdays and Fridays,
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