

Chronicles of a Discourse

The Galería Juana Mordó in post-Francoist art

June 24 – October 14, 2022

Museo Reina Sofía, Nouvel Building, Library and Documentation Centre, Space D

Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.



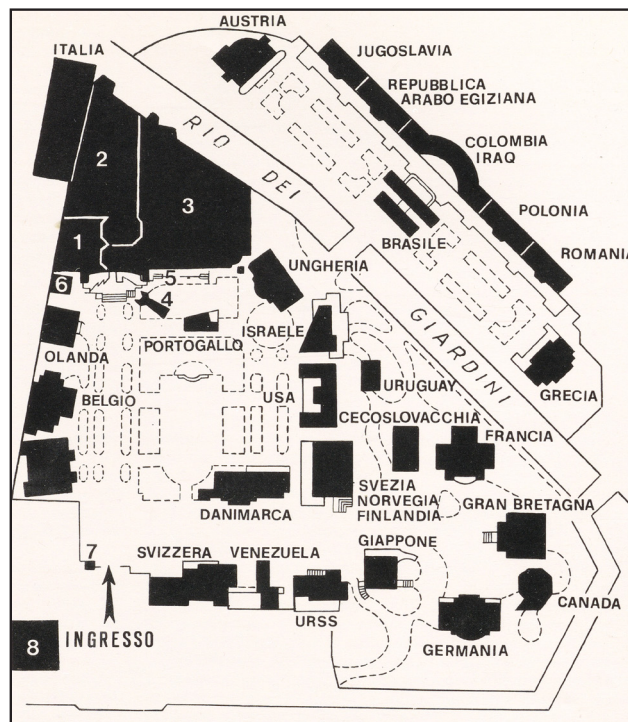
Antonio Saura outside the Galería Juana Mordó after the attack by the far right-wing group Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey, 1972.

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From the 1970s onwards, discourses on the role of Spanish art in society became diversified. As part of the change of aesthetic and ideological paradigm brought on by the country's period of transition to democracy, the Galería Juana Mordó (1964-1994) was both a witness and a setting of the disputes between several artistic tendencies in a context of proliferating discourses, all fighting for hegemony – a concept this documentary exhibition seeks to problematize. *Chronicles of a Discourse* uses the materials from the gallery's archive, which form part of the collection of the Library and Documentation Center of the Museo Reina Sofía, to construct a narrative around three thematic cores that represent different watersheds in historical accounts of Spanish art. These are political art and the politics of art, its international diffusion, and its relationship with the market.

Political art versus the politics of art

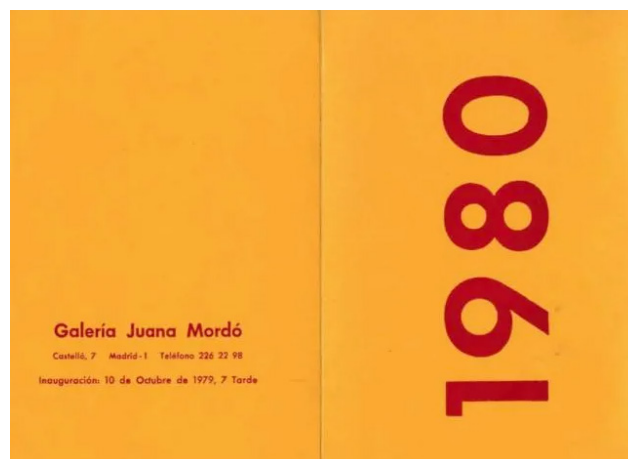
Under Francoism, the Galería Juana Mordó represented some of the most reputed artists of the period, such as those belonging to the group El Paso. With the fall of the regime, however, it also entered the debate between political art and the so-called “politics of art”, two positions that became clearly visible in the second half of the 1970s. Political art burst into the 37th Venice Biennale (1976) with *Spain. Artistic avant-garde and social reality: 1936-1976*, an “unofficial” anti-Francoist exhibition devised by a committee of curators led by Tomás Llorens Serra and Valeriano Bozal. Their curatorial proposal vindicated an alternative history of the Spanish art of the past four decades, assigning a crucial role to pro-democracy artists like Agustín Ibarrola and Juan Genovés. That same year, the Galería Juana Mordó held an exhibition on Martín Chirino during which the *Documento Afrocán* was signed. In an explicit critique of the regime, this document rejected the Francoist national identity in favor of an identity for the Canary Islands linked to the culture of Africa. The presence in the gallery in their turn of the ZAJ group and Equipo Crónica made it a space open to anti-hegemonic proposals. This openness to political positions clearly anti-Francoist sometimes led to conflict for the gallery, which was attacked twice – first during the inauguration of the Antonio Saura exhibition in 1972, and later during the presentation of books by Santiago Carrillo, Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria) and Régis Debray in 1979.



Map of the 37th Venice Biennale, 1976



Concert by the group ZAJ at the Galería Juana Mordó, Madrid, November 22nd, 1976



Covers of the 1980 exhibition catalogue, 1979

The same year, Juan Manuel Bonet, Ángel González, and Francisco Rivas declared political art obsolete in the exhibition *1980*. By contrast with the preceding discourses, this collective show presented at the gallery celebrated a politics of art that made it, in its curators' words, into "a representative sample of what the painting of the eighties is going to be in our country." The exhibition catalogue compared the spirit of its proposal with that of the *Salón de los Once* (Salon of the Eleven), linked to the figure of Juana Mordó, which had fostered the artistic avant-garde during the post-war period. With a markedly programmatic character, *1980* reflected a desire to surpass political art in a bid for a sensualist art complacent with the discipline itself. Included in it were some representatives of the new abstraction, like Miguel Ángel Campano and Pancho Ortuño, and of the new figuration of Madrid, among them Chema Cobo and Guillermo Pérez Villalta.

The internationalization of Spanish art

Under Franco's regime, the institutions tried to internationalize Spanish art through biennial art fairs, using informalism to construct a unitary modern image of Spanish art as austere, spiritual and dark. Later, in the post-Francoist period, curators, critics, and gallerists tried to redefine the idea of Spanish art at an international level by emphasizing either its free and hedonistic nature or its critical and combative intentions. The archive materials of the Galería Juana Mordó show how these approaches were made manifest at the 37th Venice Biennale, as well as at other international events such as various editions of the International Contemporary Art Fair (FIAC) in Paris, or exhibitions abroad like *Contemporary Spanish Art* (1984) at the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York.

Mordó was one of the principal promoters of Spanish art at an international level, and she did so on various occasions with artists like Darío Villalba, Manuel Millares and Carmen Laffón. She also showed the work of artists exiled under the dictatorship who were critical of the art produced in Spain, offering an alternative image to that espoused by the institutions. One of them was Eduardo Arroyo, who held his only exhibition in Spain under Francoism in 1963 at the Galería Biosca, then directed by Mordó. Pursued by the police, Arroyo was unable to attend the opening of his own exhibition, and was forced to flee to France.



Antonio Bonet Correa, Javier Solana, Juana de Aizpuru and Joaquín Leguina at the stand of the magazine *La Luna de Madrid* in ARCO 1985



Cover of *La Luna de Madrid*, nº 15, 1985

The art market

The desire to internationalize art led to the appearance of fairs like ARCO, which favored its adaptation to the commercial principles prevailing abroad. This third and last thematic core of the documentary exhibition looks at the art market as one of the main paths to modernization after the aesthetic stagnation of the Francoist years, resulting in another watershed for the image of Spanish art. This process of modernization took place to the detriment of the small galleries, which competed with their international counterparts at ARCO, and it accentuated the capitalist organization of culture that had already been denounced at Llorens and Bozal's exhibition of 1976. In 1982, there were various contrasting reactions to the first edition of ARCO as a cultural phenomenon, with criticisms of the lack of representation of several regions at the fair and the growing commodification of art in the new Spanish society. The headline of the magazine *La Luna de Madrid*, "The avant-garde is the market", and its stand at ARCO 1985 commented ironically on the mercantile character of culture, contrasting with the favorable reception given to the fair by various media and official institutions. Both the magazine and the cultural boom that was later called the *movida* of Madrid helped to blur the limits between high and low culture, denoting a change in the perception of Spanish art and introducing new ways of engaging with the commercial circuit.

Chronicles of a Discourse shows the disputes that arose around Spanish art in a context of a proliferation of different discourses struggling for hegemony. In recent years, however, the dominant narrative of post-Francoist art has tried to show there was a "return to order" during the 1980s, which leaves aside the discursive tensions that arose in the artistic sphere at the time. The thematic organization of this exhibition is opposed to the linear narrative of the history of Spanish art and questions its dualistic framework of interpretation. Through the archive of the Galería Juana Mordó, it tries to place itself at the center of the problem: the impossibility of constructing a single narrative on what is understood socially as Spanish art. It also allows us to identify other discursive tensions which emerged during late Francoism and the transition to democracy, and are still unresolved today.

Organized by

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Curatorship

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Programme

Documentary Exhibitions, Library and Documentation Centre

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