

The Reina Sofía reviews the complex period of Spanish art in the 1940s

- The exhibition *Closed Field. Art and power in post-war Spain. 1939-1953* surveys a period that has been little analyzed so far by historians and museums
- After three years of research, the show presents **nearly 1,000 exhibits by over 200 artists** and an abundance of **previously unseen material**
- The exhibition opens on **April 26** in the Sabatini Building

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On **26 April**, the **Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** is inaugurating the exhibition *Closed Field. Art and Power in Post-War Spain, 1939-1953*, which attempts to analyze **Spanish art in the 1940s**, a **complex period** that has received little attention despite its importance for the formation of Spain's modern sensibility.

Although important political, social and economic studies of the early years of Franco's régime have been published, **the visual arts and architecture**, which went through a particularly oppressive period in the years after the Civil War, **have not yet received the examination** they merit from museums.

Invoking the critical spirit of *Campo Cerrado* ('Closed Field', Mexico City, 1943), the novel by Max Aub set in the years leading up to the Civil War, this exhibition, one of the most important organized by the Reina Sofía in 2016, reviews post-war Spain, an obscure period of history that has received little attention from museums, on the basis of **more than three years of research**.

The exhibition's starting point is the end of the Civil War, and it spans the period up to the early 1950s, when there were many glimpses of the beginning of a new cycle. According to the curator, María Dolores Jiménez Blanco, "the period from 1939 to 1953 was undoubtedly a period marked by fear and silence, but not even ideological or material difficulties reduced it to a desert. Nor was it successfully isolated either from the outside world or from the past."

The exhibition shows an abundance of **previously unseen material** from public and private collections and archives. It comprises **nearly 1,000 exhibits**, including about 100 paintings, 20 sculptures, 200 photographs, 200 drawings, theatrical designs, 26 films, 10 architectural models, 200 magazines and a variety of documentary archive materials, by **more than 200 artists**.

On the one hand, general overviews are combined with specific case studies, and well-known works with others rescued from oblivion. On the other, the show includes pieces with very different characteristics, some of them ignored until now by art history. The result questions and problematizes clichés about the scarcity and irrelevance of cultural or artistic activity in the 1940s, and sketches out a picture of the period that defies schematization.

Some of the works were acquired by the Museo Reina Sofía specifically for this occasion, like those by Pascual de Lara, Tàpies and Luis Castellanos, while others have not been shown to the public since the 1970s, one example being Salvador Dalí's *Portrait of the Ambassador Juan Francisco Cárdenas*.

The exhibition

The exhibition maps out a number of different but complementary paths that take chronology into account but are not constrained by temporal linearity. They are therefore laid out around thematic sections focusing on key aspects of the period, which function as self-contained units despite the connections and links between them. To reconstruct the period, the show has been organized in the following sections:

- A New Era

In 1939, the Spanish Civil War ended with the tide ultimately turned in favour of the military uprising under General Franco, and martial parades were superimposed over the plight of those fleeing into exile across the French border. The photographs of **Robert Capa**, the drawings of **Clavé** and **Narro**, and the oil painting by **Esteban Francés** all speak of the extremely harsh conditions in the French refugee camps. Fear of the emerging Fascist movements created a wave of international solidarity, prompting artists like S.W. Hayter, **Kandinsky**, **Miró** and others to put together a portfolio of engravings entitled, significantly, *Fraternity*. The tension of that moment, with the two battle lines drawn up, is visible in the scream of Julio González's *La Montserrat*, and also in *The Enigma of Hitler*, where Salvador Dalí presages all the violence of the Second World War.

This area also addresses the initial attempt to construct a totalitarian image of Franco's régime, in consonance with those holding power in Italy and Germany. The display will include images related to the heroicization of certain Falange figures, and the monumental cult of 'the fallen'. Models, drawings, photographs and magazines will bring to light a particular case study in this respect: Madrid's University City, a decisive front during the Civil War which afterwards became the setting for great propaganda events.

One of the central ideas of the propaganda of the Francoist régime was the construction of a new country befitting a new era. This idea took material form in the building of numerous towns and structures that were given their due share of publicity in magazines and exhibitions, the intention being on the one hand to leave the devastation of the war behind, and on the other to exalt the heroic significance of both what was being built and what had been destroyed. This section also includes works by, for example, **Luis Quintanilla**, the **Marqués de Santa María del Villar**, **José María Sert** and **Juan Ismael**, as well as documentary and archival material and a selection of excerpts from films.

- Returns and Academies

This section of the exhibition ranges from the display of the régime's propaganda image in international bodies to the exhibitions of the Academia Breve de Crítica de Arte, directed by **Eugenio d'Ors**. It also looks at the revival of the National Art Exhibitions, the recovery of certain forms of Italian-style classicism, the reflection of the art of painting itself in depictions of studios, and the ambiguous return to an ancestral sense of sculpture.

Among the artists represented in this section are: **Zuloaga, Julia Minguión, Luis Castellanos, Urbano Lugris, Dehly Tejero, Solana, Ferrant, Zabaleta, Dalí, Oteiza** and **Tàpies**.

- Town and Country

This section counterposes the construction of a rural ideal, somewhere between a mythological dream and the strict necessities of a nation striving for self-sufficiency under autarky, with the difficulty of survival in an urban environment riddled with material and moral decay. Landscape painting, generally considered one of the principal paths to renewal in the visual arts of the period, was contextualized within an omnipresent campaign to reinvent Spanish rural tradition. Also explained in this section is the ambiguous role granted to women by the régime within the Falange's so-called 'Feminine Section'. In the meantime, the still life, regarded as the other key genre of the period in the art historical tradition, also found a new significance within the framework of an everyday life characterized by shortages.

The city, whose bustle contrasts with the silence of the countryside, appears in the visual and literary culture of the forties as a dark place where melancholy, poverty and perdition lurk, and where the sense of loss becomes more dramatic. The photographs of **Otho Lloyd, Martín Santos Yubero, Cristóbal Portillo** and **Pérez de Rozas** show that the city is also a place where life continues in spite of all. Here are the cold and loneliness of the streets, National Catholicism in the schools, women always performing tasks of an auxiliary nature, football and bullfighting, democracy symbolically erased by the scaffolding erected in front of the building that had once housed it, and the circus, the fairs, the theatre and the cinema as essential places of refuge. This is the setting for widely read humorous magazines like *La Codorniz*, and also for clandestine publications like *Pueblo Cautivo*. The drawings of **Manaut** and **Robledano** reveal the persistence of repression, just as the ration cards, officially in force until 1952, testify to the persistence of shortages in everyday Spanish life.

- Irrationality bursts in. Postism.

Possibly the first attempt in the mid-forties to revive the irreverence of the earlier avant-garde movements, 'postism' was fundamentally a very eclectic literary movement founded by **Carlos Edmundo de Ory, Eduardo Chicharro** (junior) and **Silvano Sernesi**. Nevertheless, it sent out an interesting shock wave that encompassed **Gregorio Prieto** and artists very close to the circle like **Nanda Papi** and **Francisco Nieva**. However, its impact can also be traced in the artists and poets of younger generations, like **Saura** and **Juan Eduardo Cirlot**, who were to affiliate themselves specifically at the end of the decade with various forms of Surrealism.

- Theatrical interlude

A privileged territory for experimentation and at the same time a refuge for artists who would or could not aspire to a very visible role in the artistic scene, the theatre plays a central role in the *mise-en-scène* of the new régime, with mass political and cultural events and later the creation of the National Theatres. **Víctor Cortezo, José Caballero, Luis Escobar, Juan Antonio Morales, Victorina Durán, Clavé...** Many of these had participated in La Barraca and other pre-war avant-garde theatrical experiments, and were now the principal stage designers of the time, with a formal language feeding off totalitarian ritual, Surrealist iconography, and historicist and folklore revivals. Their work was also shown through the cinema (**Serrano de Osma, Magrané**). Ambitious experiments at that time included the urban radio project of **Val de Omar** ("Circuito perifónico", 1940), performances in open-air urban spaces, and Dalí's *Don Juan Tenorio* at the Teatro Nacional (1949).

- Exiles

This section studies one of the most transcendent consequences of the war and the subsequent post-war period: the expatriation of one part of Spanish culture, and the wretched interior exile suffered by another. Alongside a documentary selection of magazines from the period, **Picasso** acts as the key referent of a section that also features works by artists like **Remedios Varo, Maruja Mallo, Manuel Angeles Ortiz** and many others. The nostalgic heartache of those who leave without knowing if they will ever return is present in the paintings of **Feliu Elías, Alberto Sánchez, Renau** and **Moreno Villa**, and the feeling of absence in those who stay behind is reflected in the sketchbook of **Hermenegildo Lanz**, who made drawings in 1941 of the interior of the Granadine house of **Manuel de Falla**, exiled in Argentina since 1939. Here too is **Joan Miró**, whose work is the starting point for the recovery of the pre-war avant-garde spirit. The publications of the period are also represented by a selection of magazines that appeared in Latin America.

- Architectures

In the transition from the 1940s to the 1950s, architecture acted as an emblem for the image of the country's modernization, the burning desire of the régime, and helped to boost the renovation of the plastic arts that had start to sprout from the recovery of pre-war modernism. Among other subjects, this section examines the Spanish Pavilion at the 9th Milan Triennale in 1951, designed by José Antonio Coderch and with contents selected by Rafael Santos Torroella, which was the régime's first successful attempt to project a fully modern image of itself on the international stage.

- Primitive, magic, dark

The German **Mathias Goeritz**, who settled in Madrid after the Second World War and came into contact with Ferrant, the postists, and galleries like Clan, Palma, Buchholz and d'Ors's Galería Breve, was left dumbfounded in 1948 by the cave paintings of Altamira, and proposed the creation of a School that would link the primitive with the new. The idea was put into practice by two intellectuals from Santander, **Gullón** and **Beltrán de Heredia**. Their concept of the new was outdated from an international perspective, but the Altamira School resuscitated the quest for universality of pre-war modernism, attracting international artists to Santander and fostering a climate of aesthetic debate on the primeval that found echoes in groups like **Dau al Set** in Barcelona, **Pórtico** in Zaragoza, and **Ladac** in the Canary Islands.

- Official appropriation of modernism

In the early fifties, the Francoist régime officially confirmed its institutional support for modernism in a bid to improve its image within the framework of the Cold War. After the success at the 9th Milan Triennale, the 1st Hispano-American Art Biennial, with a large amount of non-academic art on view, was inaugurated in 1951 on October 12, Columbus Day. It was then that the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Contemporary Art Museum) was created and placed under the direction of the architect Fernández del Amo. In 1953, the year of the Hispano-American treaties, he was in Santander himself to direct the course and abstract art exhibition that served as a meeting point for some of the artists who four years later founded **El Paso**, the group which came to epitomize informalist painting in the Spain of the 1950s. Although informalist abstraction emerged in the rest of Europe as an expressive reaction to the moral crisis of 1945, it appeared in Spain nearly a decade later. Branded as escapist and romantic by sectors of the left, it was justified and defused by Francoist critics and politicians as a sign of the modern longing for spiritual transcendence, itself seen as a symptom of the persistence of the Spanish essence in modern art.

Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication that itself forms part of the research project. With essays by Jordana Mendelson, María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco and Timothy J. Clark, it will include 15 thematic sections based on period texts selected and introduced by Miguel Cabañas, Óscar Chaves, Timothy Clark, Julián Díaz Sánchez, Ignacio Echevarría, Ángel Llorente, Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, Jordana Mendelson, Alex Mitrani, Patricia Molins, Idoia Murga, Alina Navas, Rosario Peiró, Juan Pérez de Ayala, María Rosón, José Luis Sánchez Noriega, Leticia Sastre and Genoveva Tusell.

DATES:	April 26, 2016 – September 26, 2016
PLACE:	Museo Reina Sofía. Sabatini building. 3 ^o floor
ORGANIZED BY:	Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
CURATED BY:	Dolores Jiménez-Blanco
COORDINATED BY:	Patricia Molins, Leticia Sastre and Fernando López

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For further information:
GABINETE DE PRENSA
MUSEO REINA SOFÍA
prensa1@museoreinasofia.es
prensa3@museoreinasofia.es
(+34) 91 774 10 05 / 06
www.museoreinasofia.es/prensa