

Experimental Art in Spain

Experimental art in Spain grew in parallel to the death throes of Franco's dictatorship. Yet it only dealt with political areas obliquely, focusing more on experimentation. The Zaj group, created at the time that Fluxus' life-affirming statelessness burst onto the international scene, became the pioneer of an experimentalism which resonated abroad, and of various projects touching on music, performance, the body and visual poetry. Other artists such as Francesc Torres (1948), Nacho Criado (1943–2010), Francesc Abad (1944) and Antoni Muntadas (1942) got together on collective projects dealing with the need for communication, participation and interrelating with each other when beginning speculative projects in art.



For example, a project like *Tierra, aire, agua y fuego* (Earth, Air, Water and Fire, 1973) compares artists from Barcelona and Madrid, the two centers of Spanish conceptualism. The proposals (actions, interventions in the open air, body work and so on), were supported by documentation tools that meant they could be preserved: as well as the photocopier, mimeographs, photography and small format cine film (8mm and 16mm), another support was beginning to appear which would be hugely influential later: video.

The above-mentioned project, published in a series of 'Document' portfolios included the diagrams *Cinco sentidos* (Five Senses, 1972) and *Cuatro elementos* (Four Elements, 1973) by Muntadas. The references, although seemingly impenetrable, are actually to the time when Western thought turned to investigation of our perception (the five senses) of reality (the four elements). Muntadas' project attempts to drag the three "subsenses" (smell, taste and touch) out of their state of atrophy, in which they are neutralized in the shadow of the audio-visual; an appeal made in a context wherein the visual arts and music were losing their preeminence as television gained ground in everyday life.

Although the proposals are not openly political, the very act of calling for collective work and organizing meetings took on a particular significance in the context of the last years of Franco's regime. The *Encuentros de Pamplona* (1972), as well as being a platform for sharing and interrelating, put the artistic and political tensions that marked the epoch centre stage, signaling the "end of the party" for experimental art. The vacuum it left would be filled in the future by proposals of more direct political conviction.

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