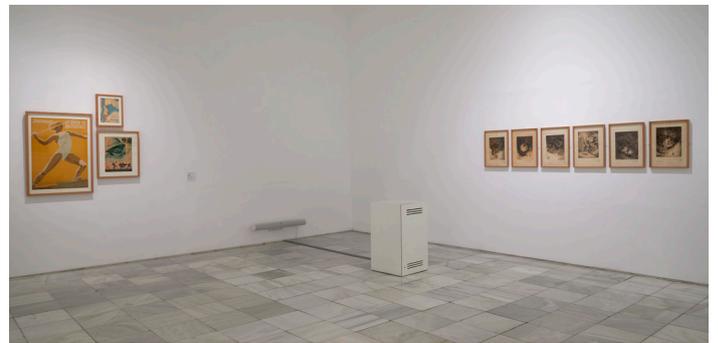


Front and Rearguard: Women in the Civil War

The Spanish Civil War witnessed different ideologies at odds over the place women should occupy in the public sphere, their considerable role in the Republican zone's industrial sector contrasting sharply with efforts to preserve traditional gender roles in nationalist-controlled territories. In the era's mass culture, the battle for ideas on gender relations was zealously played out through visual expression and, particularly in the Republican faction, saw numerous contributions by women artists and photographers from both Spain and abroad.



Conservative forces' opposition to political, economic and social reforms introduced during the Second Republic culminated in a military uprising in July 1936 against Manuel Azaña's government, constituting the starting point of the Civil War in Spain. Favourable social reforms under the Republican Government included the Constitution approved by Spanish Parliament in December 1931, acknowledging women's suffrage, legal gender equality, a secular State and divorce rights. These and other reforms, viewed in certain sectors as threats to the traditional social order, enhanced and broadened many women's access to education and financial independence, yet the tensions brought about by these changes in Spanish society would be more keenly felt during the armed conflict.

As in other countries, the proliferation of illustrated magazines in Spain put these women at the centre of visual and mass culture in the interwar period as technological advances such as rotogravure enabled high-quality images to be reproduced and harnessed by means of new graphic design techniques. Thus, the ideological confrontation in the Civil War also issued forth on the covers and pages of myriad magazines, giving rich visual expression to the conflicting social imaginaries and different ideas on the place women should take up on the front and in the rearguard. Likewise, the spread of propaganda posters played a key role in promoting different gender-related stances during wartime.

In the Republican-controlled zone, women actively became part of different sectors of the economy, including the war industry, replacing the male labour force that had been sent to the war front. In the meantime, in territories controlled by the nationalist faction their participation in the public sphere was reduced to relief and aid work via institutions like the Women's Section of Falange Española, which insisted on keeping traditional gender roles and maintaining women under male rule. This resulted in magazines and posters in the so-called 'national zone' stressing, via their visual discourse, women's responsibility to take care of men, the home and children.

During the war, numerous artists fought for the Republican cause, and such examples, among many, were painter and poster artist Juana Francisca Rubio (1911–2008) and engraver Francis Bartolozzi ("Pitti", 1908–2004), whose series of etchings *Pesadillas infantiles* (Childhood Nightmares) was shown in the Spanish Republic's Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of 1937. At the same time, different female photographers went to Spain to cover the conflict for international publications, including German photojournalist Gerda Taro (1910–1937), partner of Hungarian-born photographer Robert Capa (1913–1954), both of whom had fervent anti-fascist convictions. From the Republican zone, Taro submitted many reports for illustrated weekly papers such as *Regards* and *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, until her tragic death in July 1937 while

she was covering the Battle of Brunete. This room displays photographs that entered the Museo's collection in 1998 under Capa's authorship and were recently re-attributed to Taro. In this respect, the Museo received counsel from Cynthia Young, from the International Center of Photography, who conducted extensive research to identify and attribute every image taken during the Civil War by both Taro and Capa, and by Polish photographer David Seymour ("Chim", 1911–1956). These efforts have led to the conclusion that three of the photographs from the collection previously attributed to Capa were in fact taken by Taro (registration numbers AD00712, AD00717, AD00722), while another three can be attributed to either Taro or Capa (registration numbers AD00763, AD00764, AD00765) given that both were in the places where the images were taken but no negatives have been conserved, and nor is there any reliable evidence to verify their authorship.

Unlike Taro, who was associated with the foreign press, Hungarian photographer Kati Horna (1912–2000) moved to Spain to work with local anarchist organisations during the war. As a photographer for the CNT-FAI Foreign Information Office, graphics editor of the weekly publication *Umbral* and a contributor to publications such as *Libre-Studio* and *Mujeres Libres*, Horna witnessed the efforts of anarchist groups to lead a social revolution during the war. Hailing from a wealthy Jewish family in Budapest and schooled in avant-garde photography traditions, Horna personified the modern ideal of the independent, cosmopolitan and politically committed woman. Before travelling to Spain, she lived in Berlin, where she became involved with transnational anarchist networks, and later Paris, the city where she started out as an independent photographer. Her technical adroitness and libertarian credentials were enough to earn her an invitation to participate as a photographer in the revolutionary exploits of anarchist groups in Spain during the war — active on the front and in the rearguard, she closely followed the plights of women. Her commitment to the fight for gender equality is reflected in works such as her photomontage *La mujer española antes de la revolución* (The Spanish Woman Before the Revolution, 1938), with its patent Surrealist influence. In the run-up to her definitive exile to Mexico, Horna and her future husband, Andalusian artist José Horna (1909–1963), worked together on a series of pieces that touchingly illustrated the human cost and tragic outcome of the war.

Bibliography

Nash, Mary. *Rojas: las mujeres republicanas en la Guerra Civil*. Madrid: Taurus, 1999.

Lubben, Kristen; Schaber, Irme; y Whelan, Richard [eds]. *Gerda Taro*. New York: International Center of Photography; Gotinga: Steidl, 2007.

Otayek, Michel. "Loss and Renewal: The Politics and Poetics of Kati Horna's Photo Stories," in Told and Untold: *The Photo Stories of Kati Horna in the Illustrated Press*. New York: Americas Society, 2017: 20–39.