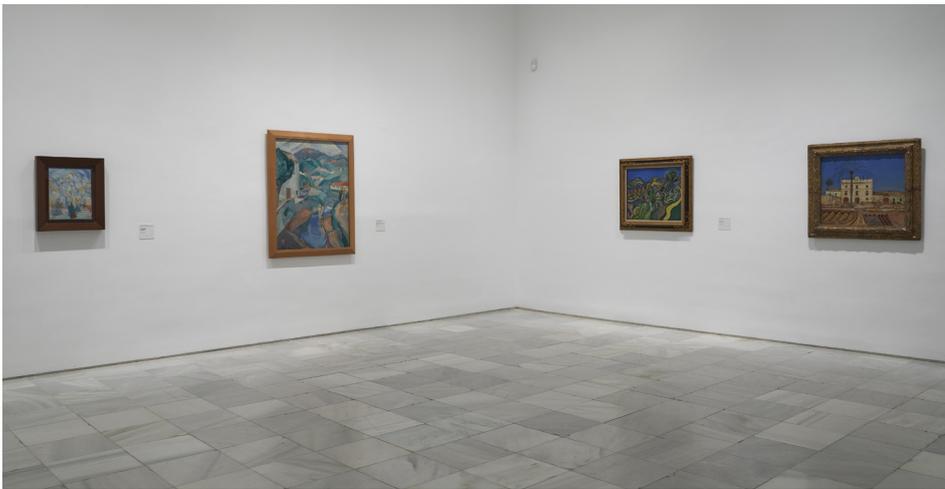


# Noucentisme and New Art in Spain

In the 1910s, the Catalan art world saw the coexistence of, on the one hand, *Noucentisme* as an artistic tendency aiming towards reaffirming Catalan identity, and on the other, the new output of the avant-gardes arriving from Europe, which mainly focused on the breakthroughs of Cubism. This situation saw a renovation in Spanish plastic arts, which included the early works of artists like Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró.



In the Spanish landscape, the creative sensibilities linked to Symbolism and to the aesthetic of the *fin-de-siècle* endured robustly during the first decades of the 20th century. Even creators of the same generation as Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) or Juan Gris (1887–1927) held these positions, updating them. Nonetheless, two currents of sensibility wanted to consider or to suggest a new artistic situation. On the one hand, beginning in 1911, and with a unique capacity for definition unique to the Catalan artistic scene, there arose the *Novecentista* proposal. On the other hand, beginning in 1912, although with greater intensity during the years of the First World War, the echoes of the first artwork from the European avant-garde reverberated in the Peninsular space.

What we today know as *Noucentisme* was something more complex than an artistic trend. It was a civilian endeavor, with clear political implications, with identity references, theoretical support, and importance in the educational, scientific, and social spaces. The *Noucentista* approach entailed the conception of a new type of artist (in opposition to the turn of the century Bohemian) and demanded a clear implementation of the arts in every day spaces. Of transcendental importance in poetry and literature, *Noucentisme* also favored the integration of the arts, expanding them beyond the fine arts, to the realms of architecture, urbanism, the graphic arts, and the so called “popular arts”.

In the realm of fine arts, *Noucentista* art strived for expressive purification and formal simplicity, and came to be considered synonymous with classicism and Mediterraneanism. But among its creative registers, *Noucentisme* also embraced Post-Impressionist and Cezannist inheritances, approached the Primitivist endeavor, or found the possibility for the structural synthesis of forms. With the precedent of Josep Clarà (1878–1958), who extended the power of his work from the turn of the centu-

ry to the 1930s, Manolo Hugué (1872–1945), Joaquín Sunyer (1875–1956), Joaquín Torres García (1874–1949), and Josep de Togores (1893–1970) were the most significant representatives of *noucentisme*.

But if *noucentisme* held sway in Catalan society around 1911, the following year, in 1912, the Cubist school was in Barcelona thanks to the gallery owner Josep Dalmau. Said presence didn't generate artistic practice joining it, but situated in the creative space a dual reference in the identity of *the modern* (or the new) which influenced the proposals of all the Spanish artistic renovation. Barely five years later, around 1916 or 1917, the relationship between *Noucentisme* and the avant-garde modernized its principles. *Noucentisme* took on body and maturity, despite having lost part of its ties with the political institutions. But the pro-avant-garde sensibility published a new chapter through the turn toward the *art-evolution* of

Torres García, from the arrival in Barcelona of Rafael Barradas (1890–1929), bearer of his personal *Vibrationism*, and of the passage through the Catalan capital of notable European avant-garde members, being especially significant the presences of Robert (1885–1941) and Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979), Albert Gleizes (1881–1953), and Francis Picabia (1879–1953). It was in this context that Joan Miró (1893–1983) appeared, surpassing the premises of the debate surrounding him. Miró knew how to reconcile organic inte-

gration with his own native landscape and the assumption of an entire skillful and intense repertory of formal syntheses learned in the first *isms* of the avant-garde. Miroan synthesis was one of the first hits of the Peninsular artistic renovation. Although he rejected the idea of the *return to order* and although his graphic sign always had a Primitivist accent, he progressively interested himself in the meticulous capturing of the objective, coming to be, together with Josep de Togores, a clear precedent of *magic realism*.

Beyond the Catalan context, we can also note the ascent and the spread of a sensibility of a *Noucentista* character in the artistic spaces of Bilbao and Madrid, although said *Noucentista* sensibility did not opt for the canonical features of the Catalan *noucentisme*. And this other *Noucentista* sensibility also had a first encounter with the mainstays of the avant-garde, to in the same breath acknowledge receipt of the *return to order*. In the Basque Country, the encounter between *Noucentisme* and *the new* was marked by a strong accent in favor of the vernacular. In the Madrid context, the dialectic between *Noucentisme* and the avant-garde had as a backdrop the emergence of the intellectuals and authors of the Generation of '14, especially Juan Ramón Jiménez and of Ramón Gómez de la Serna. But also the emergence of the Ultraism and capacity for dissemination of Rafael Barradas. Daniel Vázquez Díaz (1882–1969), from Huelva, knew how to be a bridge between the Bilbao and Madrid circles, representing another of the *Noucentista* poetics.

But the dynamic created by the confluence between *Noucentisme*, the avant-garde, and *return to order* overcame the very generational framework of those who had seen it arise and had developed it. The work of the young Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) is a good proof of this, for it collects, re-orders, amplifies, and projects all of these references. In addition, Dalí brought them to Madrid in his student years, where other young creators slightly older than he, linked in various ways to the context of the Generation of '27 and supporters of *arte nouveau*, contemplated encounters with similar or relatable aesthetic keys. These were the cases of Francisco Bores (1898–1972) and Benjamín Palencia (1894–1980). And even in his independence, this was also the case of Alberto Sánchez (1895–1962), introduced into the artistic debates of the moment by Rafael Barradas.

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