

José Val del Omar. *Aguaespejo granadino* (Water-Mirror of Granada), 1953-1955

The work of José Val del Omar (1904 – 1982), which is polyhedral and full of nuances, glides across many of the themes addressed in the rooms *Is the War Over? Art in a Divided World (1945-1968)*, but it bears a special relation with the rooms devoted to realism. In addition to the styles of Nouveau Réalisme and Existentialist Realism, this room contains proposals made by the Granada-born artist, whose work could be defined as *mecha-mystics realism*.



Mecha-mystics is one of the basic terms that can be found throughout the theory and work of Val del Omar. With this neologism, the artist referred to the universe of machines, to which he took a mystical approach – looking beyond the immediate –, the same way he approached reality. The term appeared for the first time in 1955 although he had spoken of the 'meta-mystical' as early as 1935. This mystic sense of creation also appears in the *Corporación del Fonema Hispánico* (Hispanic Phoneme Corporation). This text, considered a manifesto, was written in 1942 and it contains his reflections on sound and on the importance of the spoken, or *sonorous*, language, as opposed to printed, or *silent*, language. This concern, which arose after he attended the Spanish-Latin American Film Congress in 1931, where the impact of language in the new 'talking pictures' was discussed, is manifested in his wish to organise an acoustic recording and reproduction service, a great phonetic publishing house. This interest came during the years following the Spanish Civil War, which were times of great political and religious exaltation of everything Spanish. Val del Omar did not go into the doctrinal issues of that era. Instead he delves into the mystic traditions of Spain, while providing definitions and nuances of the most important themes in his work: the cinematograph, the documentary, technique and the spectacle, in addition to the research into the field of sound and mystics just mentioned.

Aguaespejo granadino, also entitled *La gran siguiriya*, is a film in the form of an audiovisual symphony about the Andalusian city of Granada, featuring music composed by Manuel de Falla and the flamenco style known as *cante jondo*, with images of the fountains of the Alhambra and close-ups of the gypsies from Sacromonte. The application of the diaphonic system plays a vital role in the film. This device was patented by Val del Omar in 1944, several years before the consolidation of the stereo system: while the latter was based on the use of two lateral sources of sound, in the diaphonic system one source was placed behind the screen, to transmit the sound associated with the images, and the other was placed at the back of the room, to transmit the subjective sound of echoes and reflections. The spectator is thus enveloped in sound, at the central point where the two sources of audio meet, bump into each other and intersect with one another.

For Val del Omar the realism of cinema was what justified the mystical attitude, precisely because cinema was a medium capable of recording the most ordinary actions. That is why he called his documentaries *elementaries*, in allusion to the elements of nature to which they alluded, but also because of his interest in poetics, as a means of looking deeply into the *elemental* of each one of them.

Donation of María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga archive, 2011.

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