

Slipping Tourists. Val del Omar in the 1960s.

The María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive

Over a fifty-year period, José Val del Omar (Granada, 1904 – Madrid, 1982) created a body of work and film inventions with staggering richness in terms of language, technique and the themes he explored. Under the general title of *The Mechanical Mysticism of Cinema*, this room displays his work from the 1960s and has a point of convergence in tourism, his quintessential film *Fuego en Castilla* (Fire in Castile) — his other major film *Aguaespejo granadino* (Water-Mirror of Granada) is screened in room 412, on the same floor — and the recreation of what would be his final work, the PLAT Laboratory.

These works are part of the loan and donation generously given to the Museo by the María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive to support the research, exhibition and dissemination of this Granada-born artist undertaken by the Museo since 2009.



Long-term loan and donation of
The María José Val del Omar &
Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive,
2011.

Archive coordinated by
Piluca Baquero
Archivovaldelomar@gmail.com

Val del Omar's relationship with the politician Manuel Fraga Iribarne can be traced through the correspondence between the two over a number of years and the notes the film-maker made in his writing. It possibly dates back to 1952, when Fraga was general secretary of the Institute of Hispanic Culture, where Val de Omar staged his work *Autosacramental invisible* (Invisible Auto Sacramental). Nevertheless, the Granada-born artist claimed they met incidentally some time before, in the 1930s, during a visit made by the Misiones Pedagógicas (the Teaching Missions), of which he was part, to the politician's hometown, Villalba. In 1955, Fraga was serving as the technical secretary of Spain's Ministry of Education and, through his intervention, the artist was able to take part in UNESCO's world meeting of Film and TV experts in Tangier to present his *Teoría de la Visión Tactil y la Diafonía* (Theory of Tactile Vision and Diaphonic Sound).

These encounters and the support for Val del Omar's work would explain the contact they maintained across the 1960s, when Fraga assumed the position of minister of Information and Tourism (1962–1969) and hired him as technical coordinator of the Information Directorate-General — for Val del Omar, these were years of financial sta-

bility and hard work. In May 1963 he was commissioned to produce a documentary series on Festivals in Spain, a campaign of folk events promoted by the Ministry which aimed to screen them in the Spanish Pavilion at New York's World Fair, held in 1964 and 1965. Framed inside the celebrations of "25 Years of Peace", Spain participated at the Fair with an 8,500 square-metre pavilion featuring a museum with works by Picasso, Gris, Miró and Dalí, in addition to numerous other cultural creations. The government undertook a major international propaganda exercise to send out a message of openness, with a pull effect, in order for its tourist development plan to grow. The series would not be finished in time for the Fair, but Val del Omar still travelled to New York to work on installations in the Pavilion and quite possibly took away some of the official tourism posters found in his Laboratory. The

film-maker's commission for the festivals documentary fell within the new programme guidelines put forward by the Ministry to impart a new image of a more modern Spain, underscoring the photographic image through illustrious photographers like Nicolás Muller, Francesc Català-Roca and Francisco Ontañón.

From his new position, Val del Omar set in motion the Section of Research and Experiences at the Official School of Photography, where he set up his Laboratory (the beginnings of PLAT), to develop new technical inventions and return to patents from previous years, for instance the Bi-Standard 35. The proposal, essentially constituting the redistribution of image and sound in 35mm tape to save on material and the developing process, was well received but failed to make a mark on the meagre and heavily bureaucratized film industry. Similar versions, like Techniscope, would promptly surface in other countries.

In 1968, following his disappointment and frustration with the inactivity of those in charge of setting up the application of his systems, Val del Omar shot, in Granada, some rolls of film to test out his Bi-Standard system. A few years later, in 1974, he once again filmed in Super 8; part of this footage, known as *Turistas resbalando* (Slipping Tourists) or *El color de mi Granada* (The Colour of My Granada), is shown in the digital montage made by Eugeni Bonet. Across its 25-minute running time, we see different sequences with groups of tourists visiting the Alhambra, a monument Val del Omar would continue to film throughout his life. These repeated scenes of tourists snapping away, touching, slipping, hurrying, entering and leaving denote a lucid visual reflection on the changing face of tourism.

Around 1972, the film-maker wrote a document entitled *Zócalo* (Plinth), in which, along with certain aphorisms and reflections in line with his poetic thought, he was critical of the methods used to promote tourism and proposed a "tactile" exhibition with innovative systems for their improvement.

Bibliography

Bonet, Eugeni (et. al.). *desbordamiento de Val del Omar*. Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía / Centro José Guerrero, 2010 [cat. exp.].

Mendelson, Jordana. *Documentar España. Los artistas, la cultura expositiva y la nación moderna, 1929-1939*. Madrid: La Central / Museo Reina Sofía, 2012.

Ortiz-Echagüe, Javier (ed.). *José Val del Omar: escritos de técnica, poesía y mística*. Madrid: La Central, Museo Reina Sofía / Centro José Guerrero, 2010.

Sáenz de Buruaga, Gonzalo y Val del Omar, María José. *Val del Omar sin fin + Tientos de erótica celeste*. Granada: Diputación de Granada / Filmoteca de Andalucía, 1992.

Links

<http://www.valdelomar.com>

Val del Omar: PLAT Laboratory.

The María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive

Across the breadth of his work, José Val del Omar expounded an open, poetic notion of documentary, and reflected on film as experience. His filmic activity pivoted around the invention of devices and film-making that championed a total experience, calling on all the senses and coalescing in what he called the Picto-Luminic-Audio-Tactile (PLAT) unit. The PLAT Laboratory (1974–1982), recreated in this room with original objects, condenses Val del Omar's final work — an unfinished and forever mutating process. He would spend the final years of his life in this Laboratory, focusing his attentions on producing a body of audiovisual variations, texts and collages, which were conserved in their original location until 2010, before being moved to the Museo Reina Sofía.



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

Archive coordinated by
Piluca Baquero
Archivovaldelomar@gmail.com

Val del Omar had been acquiring and conserving countless pieces of equipment since the 1930s, storing them in the laboratories of the institutions he worked at, for instance the Experimental Laboratory of Electroacoustics he founded for Radio Nacional de España (1948), or the lab he set up in the Department of Research and Experiences at the Escuela Oficial de Cine (EOC, 1963). His relationship with the film industry and institutions was blighted by a series of failures and disagreements that brought about the partial destruction of his laboratory in the EOC. In 1974 his daughter, M^a José, and son-in-law, Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga, gifted him his own workshop-laboratory in the Ilustración district in the north of Madrid, where he installed his “garden of machines” and other visionary projects from the PLAT Laboratory. Three years later, after the death of his wife M^a Luisa Santos, he moved in there for the rest of his days, until he died in a car accident in 1982.

Inside this space, Val del Omar put together a workshop of experimentation and life, where equipment, tools and work materials were amassed and modified. Inside PLAT we come across a large number of objects that speak of his career arc and which we can

see photographed and reproduced in his collages, for instance: his cameras, from the one he used in Misiones Pedagógicas (the Teaching Missions) in the 1930s, to the video camera he used at the end of his life; objects from his work with the cinematograph, the Debie film copier, the editing table with implements required for cutting, splicing and viewing film reels; multiple Super 8 projectors, slide projectors, adiscopes (tetraprojection devices transformed by Val del Omar during his time at ENOSA, the National Optics Company); dozens of lenses and even a laser, among the first to be sold in Spain.

The nerve centre of the PLAT Laboratory is the “Truca”, a complex table of trickery made by Val del Omar, from the structure to the projection device that was activated through a mixing table designed to control the mechanism. The slide projectors and altered adiscopes simultaneously projected images on a Fresnel rear projection

screen. To alter the appearance of these still images, Val del Omar passed the beam of light through different filters, hand-painted glass and optics rotated with an engine he designed. He also aligned projectors towards still-lives of everyday objects that can still be found in this workspace (pomegranates, plaster sculpture pieces, seashells and mannequins). The resulting images were filmed, photographed and recorded in video from the opposite side of the screen, giving rise to double compositions and altered images; that is, experimental essays he made for himself in his bid to obtain the PLAT unit he sought in this period.

To demonstrate the kind of creations he developed in this era, on the main screen are projections of a selection of Super 8 fragments, filmed after 1974 and assembled by Eugeni Bonet. In the darkroom space there is a video simulation of laser images, together with the recreation of the mechanism he used to attain those effects (created by Javier Viver and Javier Ortiz-Echagüe). And in the cubicle, a selection of Val del Omar's voice recordings found in PLAT can be heard.

Bibliography

Bonet, Eugeni (et. al.). *desbordamiento de Val del Omar*. Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía / Centro José Guerrero, 2010 [cat. exp.].

Duque, Elena (ed.). *Val del Omar. Más allá de la órbita terrestre*. Buenos Aires: BAFICI (Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente), 2015.

Tranche, Rafael. *La pantalla abierta: aproximación a la obra de José Val del Omar*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1995.

Viver, Javier. *Laboratorio Val del Omar: una contextualización de su obra a partir de las fuentes textuales, gráficas y sonoras encontradas en el archivo familiar*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2010.

Liks

<http://www.valdelomar.com>

Val del Omar: *Fuego en Castilla* (1958-1960).

The María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga Archive

For José Val del Omar the 1960s began with the screening of his film *Fuego en Castilla* (Fire in Castile) at Cannes Film Festival — in that 1961 edition, his film and Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* would win the Technical Prize and Palme d'Or, respectively. Both film-makers set out different ways of understanding film: Val del Omar from more personal experimentation and cinema understood as a revealing instrument of mechanical mysticism; Buñuel from the iconoclasm of the French Surrealism with which he staged his devotion to the avant-garde.



Fuego en Castilla (*TactilVisión del páramo del espanto*) (Fire in Castile [Tactile Vision of the Wasteland of Fear]) was shot between 1957 and 1959 in the former site of the National Sculpture Museum of Valladolid and the Benavente Chapel in Medina de Rioseco. The artist carried out his filmic interpretation of Holy Week and the religious baroque imagery conserved in the museum and chapel alike — zooming in on Santa Ana de Juan de Juni and San Sebastián de Alonso de Berruguete — and to create the film, he would use as conduits “tactile” elements, which for him came in through the eyes, and fire as a natural element with an ambivalence signifying both destruction and light. “I wanted to transmit the fire to my brothers. Instil in them the pleasure of the harmonic panorama that the fire in my blood has allowed me to see and feel,” he said. The film, which Val del Omar deemed an “elemental” documentary — alluding to the elements of nature he foregrounds — could be understood as a dramatic audiovisual poem on death, rooted in the mystical ecstasy of the baroque, to which he would allude time and again in his work. To assemble this poem, the artist put into practice some of his technical inventions, created to implement his idea of film as the artform which appeals to all the senses and demands a proactive attitude from the viewer. The most salient of these is the lighting system used in the sculpture scenes: *TactilVisión*, patented in 1955 and involving the projection of a pulsating light source on surfaces to emphasise their relief and materic

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

Archive coordinated by
Piluca Baquero
Archivovadelomar@gmail.com

texture. “The light makes us feel with the retinas”, he would say in the theoretical formulation of his work. For the sound, he used his diaphonic system, patented in 1944 and employed in his previous film, *Aguaespejo granadino* (Water-Mirror of Granada). The system used two sound channels placed in front of and behind the screen, whereby the latter gives off a subjective sound of echoes and reflexes that enter and leave at specific points in the film to stress what is seen and heard on screen. The soundtrack registers finger-clicking and heel-tapping to the rhythm of *siguriya* flamenco by Valladolid-born dancer Vicente Escudero, with whom he worked in the rooms of the Valladolid Museum to record scenes and sounds among altarpieces and baroque images, mixing the sound with fragments of Spanish Renaissance works, Igor Stravinsky and mambo jazz.

For the screening of this film, Val del Omar brought in the *Desbordamiento Apanorámico de la Imagen* (The Apanoramic Overflow of the Image), presented in Turin

in 1957 and put into practice at Cannes Festival, as evidenced in the correspondence on view in the display cases. This technique entails projecting off-screen abstract images on the walls and ceiling of the room, in a similar fashion to diaphonic sound but with images, thus creating an immersive experience to expand the viewer's perception. Unfortunately, we do not have these images available and they are not reproduced in this room.

Bibliography

Gubern, Román. *Val del Omar cinemista*. Granada: Diputación de Granada, 2004.

Romero, Pedro G. *Exaltación de la visión. Dientes y vertientes distintas para la lectura de "Fuego en Castilla" de José Val del Omar*. Barcelona: Mudito & Co., 2014.

Sáenz de Buruaga, Gonzalo (coord.). *Ínsula Val del Omar. Visiones en su tiempo, descubrimientos actuales*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas / Semana de Cine Experimental de Madrid, 1995.

Val del Omar. Elemental de España. Edición especial de 5 DVD con filmes de y sobre Val del Omar. Barcelona: Cameo Media, 2010.

Links

<http://www.valdelomar.com>