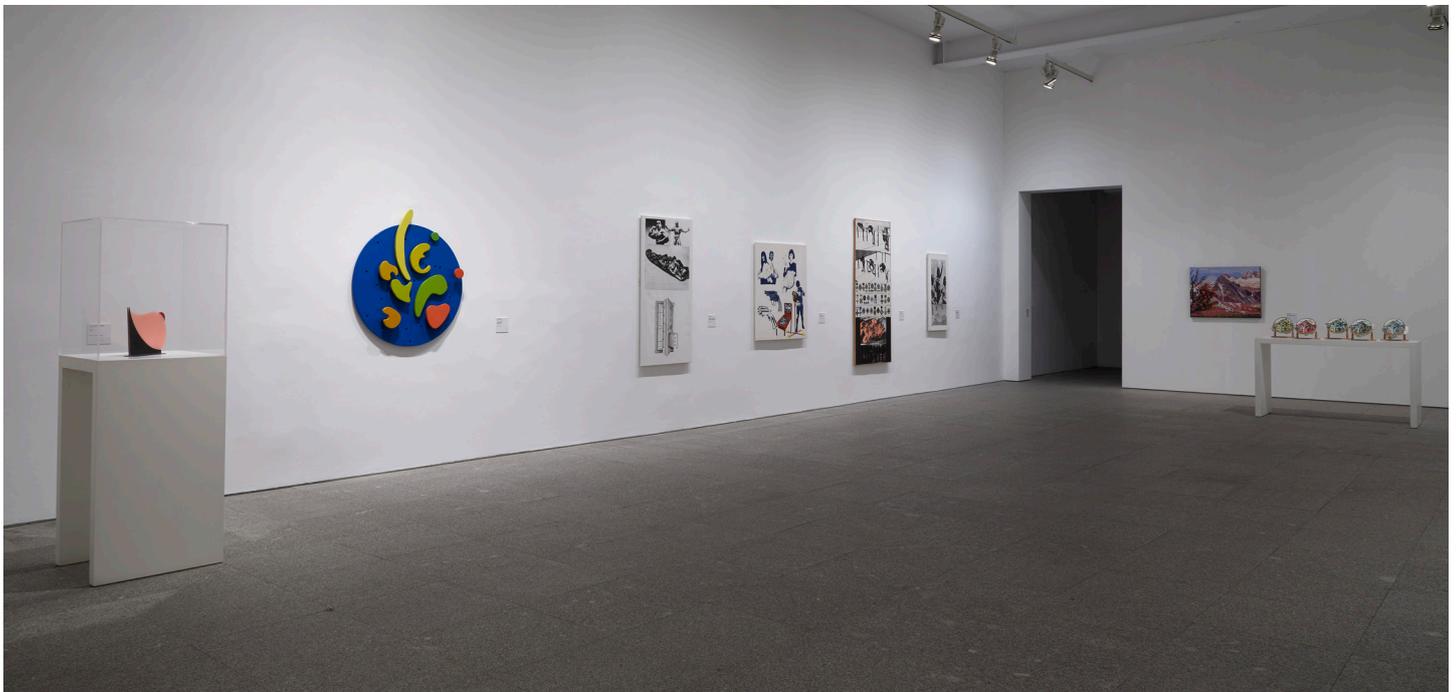


## Outside the Canon. Women Pop Artists in Spain

At the end of the 60s and during the following decade, second-wave feminism became a sort of international lingua franca that worked as the core idea in the work of many women artists. In Spain, Francoist dictatorship notwithstanding, these activist discourses offered many an interesting proposal under the umbrella of Pop Art, provided with a local inflection and an anti-Francoist discourse. If the work of male artists was widely distributed within as well as without the Spanish borders, this was not the case with their female colleagues. In spite of belonging to the same generation, these women have had to wait until the latest research for their forgotten works to gain visibility.



Beyond the often quoted British and North American oeuvre, Pop Art was a movement of a global nature that took on particular features in correspondence with the specificities of the political areas in which it was produced. Still under a nationalistic and catholically ultra-conservative dictatorship during the 60s and the 70s, Spain went through a re-politicisation of the public sphere whose main creators were active in the political underground. The so-called "indifference" of North American pop paintings – Duchampian in origin – was utterly impossible in Spain, a country where its own background saturated everyday life with political connotations. Spanish pop artists tried to create awareness and in many cases to wake political consciousness by means of irony and a somewhat colder painting style, more distant. At the same time, these artists not only employed mass media icons but also the imagery historically associated to Spanish art and culture. These anti-Franco artists enjoyed great popularity at the time, including the renowned works by Equipo Crónica, Equipo Realidad, or Eduardo Arroyo: painters whose works are included elsewhere in this collection. In consequence, we should wonder whether Spanish Pop Art was exclusively produced by male authors.

*Outside the Canon. Women Pop Artists in Spain* shows works by several women whose artistic trajectories began in the 60s and 70s. After being forgotten in the great narratives, they have been brought to light thanks to recent research. In this fashion, two main focal points of feminist art production have been identified: Barcelona – whose works were imbued of conceptual tenets – and Valencia. These women artists added to the usual anti-Franco discourse and social critique their own attack on the representation of women. On the one hand, these images were thoroughly objectified in mass media; on the other hand, this "female" imagery was also present in the pop work of many of the male artists of their generation.

In Barcelona, Mari Chordà carried out a series of works between 1966 and 1967, titled *Vaginals* (Vaginal) and *Autoretrats embarassada* (Self-portraits while Pregnant), which highlighted the point of enunciation in a representation of the body and female sexuality utterly devoid of voyeurism. These series had some common aspects with the works produced in Valencia by Angela Garcia Codoñer in the next decade, a 1973 series titled *Divertimento* (Amusement), which depict pleasure and enjoyment in the act of discovering her own body. Some time later in her career, Chordà links her production to the ethics of self care, also producing works that promote free and playful learning for children, as can be seen in *Joguet per l'Angela* (Toy for Angela), from 1969.

The works by Eulàlia Grau denounce discrimination against women by means of the typical imagery of beauty and submissiveness shown in the magazines and advertisements of the time, which the artist appropriates by using photomontage strategies in order to provide a new context for that imagery, and all within a context closely linked to the everyday life of the vast majority of Spanish women of the time (*De dia i de nit. Etnografia* [By Day and by Night: Etnography, 1973] or *Discriminació de la dona* [Discrimination of Women, 1977].) The 1973 work, almost a political statement, can be linked to the discourse developed by García Codoñer in the same period. To wit, *Foto de familia* (Family Portrait, 1974) criticised beauty pageants and mixed that with a tirade against of the tools employed by the Francoist regime in order to control and “educate” Spanish women since childhood: the teaching of needlework and the like (which apparently would be highly useful in adulthood in order to fulfil adequately their tasks as wives, mothers, and homemakers.) Also from Valencia, Isabel Oliver shows in *De profesion: Sus labores* (Occupation: Housewife, 1972–1974) that needlework and embroidery usually implied a common-place ideology: the notion of docile and hard working women at home. Nevertheless, and unlike García Codoñer, Oliver legitimates these practices when mixing them with painting.

Oliver had carried out a series of feminist paintings at the beginning of the decade, *La mujer* (The Woman, 1970–1973), perhaps stylistically the closest to the brand of Valencian pop produced by Equipo Crónica. These paintings criticised with wholehearted irony not only the lack of feminist awareness among the vast majority of Spanish women, but also the alienation which they suffered when trying to reach the sublimated stereotype handed out by the mass media. In a similar vein of liberation, Cecilia Bartolomé shot a film in Madrid while she studied at Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía, *Margarita y el lobo* (Margarita and the Wolf, 1969.) It was a musical medium-length film in which the filmmaker from Alicante hilariously derided some of the most highly regarded institutions of Francoism, such as the administration of justice or the armed forces. It was vetoed by Spanish censorship, something that made impossible for her to direct films during late Francoism and the early years of the Spanish transition to democracy.