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, Narrative Figuration in the expressionist style 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 exhibition’s point of departure.

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.

This room introduces us to all of these aspects, through a selection of materials of different types, with which the artist worked during his career: essays, poems and technical writings; documents (such as the patent for ‘diaphony’ and the film formats B1Standard and Intermediate); the prototypes of sound equipment (such as the Atril del Fonema Hispánico, Hispanic Phoneme Stand), photographs and collages. Some of the technical inventions, such as diaphony, the palpicolor, the TactileVision and the apanoramic image overflow, took part in the production process – in the 1950s – of his most important short films: *Aguaespejo granadino* (Water-Mirror of Granada) and *Fuego en Castilla* (Fire in Castile), which can be viewed in the adjacent rooms.

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.
Aguaespejo granadino (1953–55), 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. In the projection room this effect has been simulated and the best way to experience it is by sitting on one of the benches.

Fuego en Castilla (TactilVisión del páramo del espanto), 1958–60, was filmed in the former National Museum of Religious Sculpture in Valladolid (now known as the Colegio de San Gregorio National Museum) and in the Alonso de Benavente Chapel in the town of Medina de Rioseco. The artist gives a cinematographic interpretation of Holy Week and of the Baroque religious images housed in the museum and the chapel, looking especially closely at the Saint Ann sculpted by Juan de Juni and the Saint Sebastian by Alonso de Berruguete. Here the primary technical invention used is the TactilVision, which consists of the projection of a source of pulsating light against the surfaces in order to highlight their relief and material texture. The soundtrack features the tapping of the fingers and fingernails of the Valladolid–born dancer Vicente Escudero against the wood of an altar-piece in a church. Just as in Aguaespejo granadino, the film is screened with diaphonic sound. What is not reproduced here is the apanoramic image overflow, which in its theoretical form is presented in a glass case, because the original material no longer exists.

Bibliography


Links
http://www.valdelomar.com
Val del Omar
The Mechanical Mysticism of Cinema

The last rooms show the work-in-progress of José Val del Omar (1904 - 1982), the work he did not finish and which has meaning as a latticework of ideas and visual proposals that are related to and complement one another. Most of the selection comes from his PLAT laboratory (1974-1982) and consist of trials, tests, fragments, notes. Included here is his final elemental (elementary), entitled Acariño galaico (Galician Caress), since this piece was unfinished and, like the rest of the material shown, it forms part of a project with a heavily theoretical basis. In the case of the Acariño galaico, the basis is Tríptico elemental de España (Elementary Triptych of Spain).

Having finished the first two elementales (elementaries), when he started the shooting of Acariño galaico (De barro) (Galician Caress [Of Clay]) in 1961, Val del Omar expressed his intention to make a Tríptico elemental del agua, el fuego y la tierra (Elementary Triptych of Earth, Fire and Water) or a Retablo del Duende de España (Altarpiece of the Magic of Spain), but he did not complete it. In 1981 he returned to the project, calling it Tríptico elemental de España. The idea was to close the trilogy of elemental pieces, by editing the film about Galicia, and making a new, very short production called Ojala, which would serve as a vortex (a whirlwind) or appendix of the other three films. Again, the idea of endless is present, and in fact this is the final credit that closes both Aguaespejo granadino (Water-Mirror of Granada) and Fuego en Castilla (Fire in Castile).

During the production of the elementales (elementaries), Val del Omar reformulated the series as a diagonal line that crossed Spain, from west to east, through three regions: Galicia, Castile and Andalusia. Each region was associated with one of the elements of nature (earth, fire and water respectively) and a peculiar vision of Spain, charged with a heterodox form of mysticism, was thus created.

In Acariño galaico, the emphasis on technique is more relaxed, but this is not the case with the editing and montage of images, which feature jumps from negative to positive and the use of different distortion lenses. The sculptor Arturo Baltar and his work with clay, inspired Val del Omar to choose this element rather than air, a decision that led him to Galicia.

However, Val del Omar never finished the film. In an audio recording he mentioned his impotence in concluding the piece due to its “purely tragic” nature, because it contained a “negative statement that was impossible to convey.” The film was reconstructed and completed in 1995 by Javier Codesal, an artist, filmmaker and poet, using the notes and the attempts at montage and sound that Val del Omar had described before his death. The various versions of the script are shown in the glass case, along with four photographs from the shoot.

In his final years working and living in the PLAT lab, Val del Omar would imbue his writing with a general reflection about the meaning of his work and the fundamental themes such as time, culture and the media. The numerous collages that he made, which can be understood as another type of writing and at the same time as a montage of images and ideas, reflect this concern and are yet another part of this corpus of unfinished work.

Long term loan of María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga archive, 2011.

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The selection on display includes the works that revolve around 'mecha-mystics', technology, the media and the information society, the latter clearly indebted to the ideas of Marshall McLuhan. The last, *Sin título (¿Adónde va el castellano?)*, superimposes two images taken from the press and has a message in the form of a question: Where is the Spanish language going? These words take us back to the starting point of the first room: reflection on language and words, as transmitters of culture.

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**Links**

http://www.valdelomar.com
The PLAT (Picto Luminic Audio Tactile) laboratory, the recreation of which can be seen in this room, with the original objects comprising it, is the condensation of José Val del Omar’s final work, an unfinished process undergoing constant mutation. This is where the creator spent the last years of his life, working on a corpus of audiovisual variations, texts and collages that had remained in their original location until now.

Starting in the 1930s, Val del Omar (1904 - 1982) acquired a huge number of devices that he kept in the laboratories of the institutions in which he worked, such as the Experimental Electroacoustic Laboratory he founded for Spanish Public Radio (1948), or the lab he set up in the Research and Experimental Section of the Official School of Film (1963).

With the successive difficulties that arose in his relationships with both the film industry and institutions, his home in Madrid (in Colonia de los Cármenes, near Plaza de Castilla) ended up being the storehouse for these machines. Many he had acquired during his various trips abroad, which he had made in an attempt to obtain support for his patents and prototypes, something in Spain he did not find.

When his wife María Luisa died in 1977, Val del Omar moved to a studio on the ground floor of a building on Calle Isla de Arosa, in Ilustración, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. He would spend the last years of his life in this “garden of machines”, as he called it, until he died as a result of a car accident.

Picto Luminic Audio Tactile Laboratory
Partitioning off just a corner of the studio, as a place to sleep, Val del Omar set up an experimentation workshop in which devices, tools and work materials accumulated, underscoring his self-described condition of cinemist, an alchemist-artisan of cinematography.

The PLAT contains a wide variety of objects that speak of his entire trajectory. His cameras: from the one he used in the Pedagogical Missions undertaken by the Spanish Republic in the 1930s, to the video camera he used at the end of his life; objects he used when working with the cinematograph: such as the Debrïe film copier, the utensils necessary for cutting, splicing and viewing film tape, multiple super-8 projects, slides, adiscopes (tetraprojection devices transformed by Val del Omar over the years he spent at ENOSA, the National Optics Company); a great number of lenses and even a laser, one of the first to be marketed in Spain.

“La Truca” is the lab’s nerve centre. On one of the mobile shelves that Val del Omar made for himself, he set up a projection device connected to a mixing table from which he activated all the effect mechanisms, and this is what he called “La Truca”. The projectors and adiscopes simultaneously showed slides on a Fresnel rear projection screen. To alter these projections, Val del Omar put their light through filters, hand-painted glass and rotating optics with engines that he had designed.

Long term loan of María José Val del Omar & Gonzalo Sáenz de Buruaga archive, 2011.

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He also directed the projectors toward still-life arrangements that can still be seen (such as the pomegranates, plaster sculptures, seashells, mannequins and hand-painted panes of glass). The resulting images were filmed, photographed or recorded on video from the opposite side of the screen, which gave rise to double compositions and altered images, in short, experiments he performed for himself, in his attempts to perfect this PLAT unit that he had been working on for so long.

As a sample of the type of creations he did during this period, on the lab screen we can see a selection of super-8 fragments that he filmed starting in 1974. In the space that recreates the developing room, there is a video simulation — by Javier Viver — of the laser images, along with the recreation of the mechanism he used to create these effects, conceived of by Javier Ortiz-Echagüe and Javier Viver. In the cell a selection of phrases by Val del Omar, found in the PLAT, can be heard.

In the next room there is a series of elements from the PLAT, objects that Val del Omar gathered for use in his experiments with different effects, and also photographs of the PLAT at the end of the 1980s and the images and collages made based upon his work with the laser.

Of special importance is the short film Variaciones de una granada (Variations on a Pomegranate), ca 1979, another example of these “picto-luminic explorations” made in “La Truca.” This one combines different animation techniques and kaleidoscopic effects.

When Val del Omar died (in July of 1982, as the calendar on the wall shows) time stopped in this laboratory. Its conservation and presentation today allow us to have a glimpse of

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