

dialogues of the gaze

ENGLISH

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In its most essential meaning, looking is defined as the act of setting the gaze on some object, person or space. Yet when we speak of looking in the context of art, we have to go further than that. If we consider the creation of the work of art as a way of relating to the world, as a link between what is real, imaginary and symbolic, and as a fact taking on meaning in the act of communication, looking also implies understanding, comprehending and feeling.

In this exhibition the Fundació Suñol presents a selection of work from its own collection, with the goal of once again addressing the importance of the gaze in art. While it is evident that the spectator gazes upon the work of art, it is less clear that the artwork is looking at us as well. By means of a multitude of languages and a great variety of signs and codes, artists communicate experiences, thoughts and emotions in creations that reveal subjectivity, providing a reciprocal gaze that turns into a three-sided active dialogue: the work of art condensing the artist's gaze; the spectator enquiring about the work from his or her own individuality; and the immensity of the world, understood as an unfathomable vessel where art constitutes an effort to put it all in order.

The history of art is full of examples where the artist makes manifest this triangular relationship: Velázquez with *Las Meninas* and Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* are proof of this. The mirror is a device that allows us to perceive the presence of the artist, making it possible for the spectator to become aware that what is being contemplated is a subjective point of view. Yet we do not have to use a mirror to show the implication of artists in their own work and demonstrate their communicative will: any work of art calls out to us, challenges us, obliging us to wonder what we are looking at. In effect, all works of art place a mirror before us.

We should keep in mind that art arose from the human need to express what perhaps can only be explained through imagery. This explains why artistic language can be complex and even provocative, as art sends disruptive waves into visible order, helping us imagine the world and widen our experience of it. If reality is a set of arbitrary details, art can open us up to other perspectives.

This exhibition features work by Luis Gordillo, Man Ray, Zush, Richard Avedon, Luis Frangella, Carlos Pazos, Jaume Plensa, José Luis Alexanco, Ramon Guillen-Balmes, María José Lacadena, Christo, Jordi Colomer, Claudio Bravo, Ferran Freixa, Ignasi Aballí, Antoni Tàpies, Juan Genovés, José María Sicilia, Alberto García-Alix, Joan Rom, Jaume Xifra, Robert Llimós, Idroj Sanicne, Sergi Aguilar, Federico Guzmán, Manuel Millares, Pello Irazu, Max Bill and Miquel Mont. The work is grouped into various sections, corresponding to seven different subject areas: gazing; reading; covering up; value; walking/resting; holes; and the colour red. The heterogeneous nature of the subjects chosen demonstrates the variety of recurring concepts in art, each

in its own way drawing the attention of artists so as to be interpreted through the form of new languages, multiplying their possibilities. For this reason the works in each section dialogue amongst themselves while inviting us to participate in an open, multidirectional conversation that has not been previously scripted, even while awaiting our reply.

Gazing: do we see or are we seen?

From the doubling up of a face in the painting by Luis Gordillo and suggested in the drawings of Zush, to the front and centre engagement in photographs by Man Ray and Richard Avedon, the work in this section refers to the play of gazes implicit in the artwork's creation and reception. For one we see the interior gaze, the subconscious defending subjectivity and multiple personalities. On the other hand we are witness to the direct gaze, trapping the spectator and requiring him or her to enter into the work. Here the eye is the receptacle of information, the entrance way and filter for the other senses, the apparently infallible experience of fathoming the world, as Zush seems to affirm in his work *Sabina Eyeya*, where this motif multiplies.

Reading: from the object book to the book-object

The book has always been an object for transmitting culture, and is the subject that gives cohesion to the work in this section. On the one hand, pieces by Manuel Millares and José Luis Alexanco direct us towards the most essential and primary features contained on a written page, calligraphic signs, recalling an equally essential truth: the drawn line is the common foundation of both writing and drawing. In the same way, Zush creates his own book

where the drawings and fabricated calligraphy set out his personal visual diary. Carlos Pazos, for his part, presents us with a less conventional use as part of an installation that is at once evocative and nostalgic. In contrast, Jaume Plensa reinterprets the concept of the book as an object by transforming it into an artistic piece that makes other ways of reading possible: a book with transparent pages where the poems of Antoni Tàpies Barba merge with the artist's silkscreen prints.

Covering up: hiding to make it visible

Covering up to make a new reality visible could be the leitmotif of the *Wrapped Monuments* series done by Christo and Jeanne-Claude throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Wrapping up an emblematic monument gives the destined object a powerful yet mysterious presence. Indeed, all images have a part that is hidden, and it could be said that what is visible is an unstable fact. These ideas abound in many works in the section, from the corporeal prostheses by Ramon Guillén-Balmes, designed on commission to respond to a wish revealing the inner workings of the person who wanted them, to the majestic curtain of the Ferran Freixa photograph, witness to the frontier between reality and fiction, entrance way into the imaginary world. In this way the wrappings express the promise of an image, which regardless of its recent appearance is enormously powerful. This is seen in the hyperrealist work of Claudio Bravo, concealing an enigmatic object within a package painted in a truly virtuoso manner.

Value: from the poetical to the political

Appearance is the state of any visible fact. Yet it is not enough to look at things on the manifest level they appear to us for them to reveal their meaning and essence. At first view, the work of Ignasi Aballí proposes the negation of representation through a piece that is abstract and monochrome. In fact, however, it is a composition created with the remains of various banknotes from the Spanish Mint, shredded by the artist and reused in a process that rejects the money value of the material used so as to carry it over for visual revaluation. Poetry and politics, art and social critique: these concepts also converge in Evrugo Mental State, the "imaginary, contradictory and real" state founded by Zush (now known as Evru) in 1968. It is conceived as a space of freedom where everything is possible, but where (as occurs in any other political state) its own symbols are used to guarantee order: language, an alphabet, a flag, a hymn, a passport and a currency, in this latter case represented by *Tucares*. Both works are radical gestures of destruction and creation, making manifest the arbitrary nature of the concept of *value* in our society, strengthening the relationship between art and life without renouncing what is poetical.

Walking-resting: visions along the ground

Feet are a symbol of the action of walking as a practice enabling us to move forwards. Still, they are not a particularly noble part of our anatomy, and are often forgotten. Feet feature in Antoni Tàpies' painting and the photographs of Alberto García-Alix. The photographer captures views from ground level, often portraying marginal individuals. In this case, however, the photographs are powerfully aesthetic in their treatment of women's high heel shoes as erotic, fetish objects. Shoes are prostheses humans need to get around with; in the work of Joan Rom they are transformed into an artificially absurd corporeal

prolongation. If the walk is a long one, they will have to stop and rest, to sit down. A chair can become a symbol of contemplation, pause and meditation. Even so, on a physical level a chair is an ordinary and even banal object that has nevertheless been a catalyst for powerful tendencies in artistic transformation: from the chair of Vincent Van Gogh to the Joseph Kosuth's object-chair, what is everyday becomes material, an ongoing stimulation for a variety of positions taken up by the artistic avant-garde.

Circles or holes: ambiguity of the point of view

The circle is a geometric shape that has been endowed with powerful meanings: it alludes to unity, the absolute and perfection. Perhaps this is the reason Luis Gordillo fills his *La piscina del Espíritu Santo* [The Pool of the Holy Spirit] with circular shapes. Nevertheless, thanks to modern science we know that space is not an immovable structure that is stable and rigid; nor can it be seen as an intrinsic condition. Rather, space is more like a parameter that is useful to us for organizing our existence. In this sense, the pieces by Idroj Sanicne and Federico Guzmán invite us to reflect upon our own perception of reality. In the first case, the circles are holes, geometric incisions into a leather cushion where the gaze delves with no chance of getting any sort of image back: at the bottom of the holes there are mirrors so small that they lose all their reflective function. For his part, Federico Guzmán presents us with a multiplicity of blurry targets we cannot aim our shots at, used to negate all centres and multiply all points of observation.

Red: image and matter

A warm, primary colour, red is also the colour of blood and so the allegorical hue of passion, flesh, violence, danger and political utopia. This idea resonates in the violently ripped burlap by Manuel Millares, who together with the avant-garde group El Paso advocated an energetic rupture with traditional structures. Juan Genovés, for his part, chooses red to dramatize a scene of fleeing individuals, here represented from a cold and distant point of view. In contrast, other pieces seek to expand painting's limits, such as the work of Miquel Mont. Here the many connotations of the colour red are done away with so as to show it to us as a naked feature, an essential material fact and object-based reality in and of itself. A different take is offered by Pello Irazu and José María Sicilia, artists who move freely between minimalism, geometric abstraction and *art informel*. For these artists there is a balance between two ways of understanding the colour red, one derived from its use as an evocative image, finding its referents in nature, and another speaking to us of red as a pure colour, an essential material which is ultimately transformed into an object.

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