

Spanish Art of the mid-20th century

The years directly following World War II were pivotal for the plastic arts throughout Europe. The development of a gestural and abstract style that found its epicenter in Paris responded to the atrocities and trauma of war by focusing its creative energies away from previously naturalistic, figurative and geometric traditions. This pictorial movement known as *Art Informel* would quickly become the most influential artistic trend and therefore the *lingua franca* of its time.

At the end of the 1950s, Spain was just beginning to emerge from a period of social and cultural seclusion which had brought about a conservatism reflected in its artistic practices. Access to the study of experimental movements and concepts were not readily available in the academies at a time when the *avant garde* was just beginning to be tolerated and perhaps not yet quite encouraged. But through the efforts of a handful of artists, many presented here, Spanish Art found a way to realign with the progressive ideas that were developing in the rest of the Art world. Instead of relying on traditional avenues of learning, many created their own creative circles, forming artist groups like the *Dau al Set* in Barcelona and the *El Paso* in Madrid. Many of these artists, a number of them self-taught, also traveled to Paris and even further on to the United States, seeking out the inspiration they would bring back to Spain to develop their own evolved artistic style in line with the tenets of *informalism*, but one which simultaneously honored the great traditions of Spanish art as exemplified by Goya and Velázquez, and therefore ushering an autochthonous Spanish visual language into broader international discourse.

So influential were these creators that by the end of the decade, Spanish Art would become highly recognized and celebrated internationally, with highlights of these successes acknowledged with numerous accolades at important artistic events such as the Biennale of Sao Paulo (1957) and the 29th edition of the Venice Biennale (1958), and the presentation of the seminal exhibition “New Spanish Art” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1960). Playing an important role in the reopening of Spanish cultural and societal avenues to the rest of the world, these artists had built the bridges that would define new paths for Spanish Art for the generations to come and recognition beyond their regional appreciation.

The works presented in these galleries give an overview of the output of these influential artists beyond the 50’s and 60’s with works from the following decades, highlighting the creative diversity that developed by means of individual and independent contributions within a unified effort to contemporize Spanish Art.

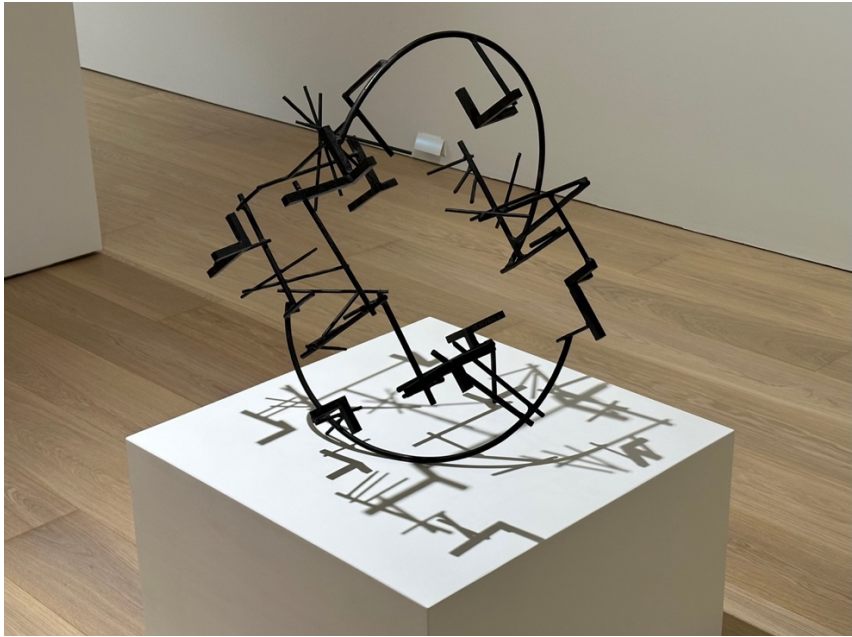
Rooms I and II: El Paso

In 1957, the artists Antonio Saura, Manuel Rivera, Rafael Canogar, Juana Francés, Martín Chirino, Luis Feito, Manuel Millares and Pablo Serrano, along with art critics and artists Manuel Conde and José Ayllón signed a manifesto that defined their activity. Shortly thereafter, Manuel Rivera joined the collective and the following year, Manuel Viola.

El Paso only existed for three years (1957-1960), but it was prolific and influential as a unified force in promoting their cause. And just as its members founded it with their independent styles, they continued their individual creative careers in the decades that followed. (*Artetrama, Madrid, 2015*)

MANIFESTO, Summer, 1957

“El Paso” is an “activity” that aims to create a new state of mind within the Spanish artistic world. “El Paso” was born as a result of the grouping of various painters and writers who, through different paths, have understood the moral need to carry out an action within their country. “El Paso” aims to create an environment that allows the free development of art and the artist, and will fight to overcome the acute crisis that Spain is going through in the field of visual arts (its causes: the lack of museums and collectors, the absence of responsible criticism, the radical separation between the different artistic activities, the artificial solution of artistic emigration, etc.). We believe that our art will not be valid until it contains a concern that coincides with the signs of the time, making a passionate contact with the most innovative artistic trends. We are moving towards a revolutionary art -in which our dramatic tradition and our direct expression are present, which historically responds to a universal activity. Aware of the uselessness of the discussion on the terms “abstraction-figuration”, “constructive-expressionist art”, “collective-individual art”, etc., our purpose is to present an authentic and free work, open to experimentation and research without borders, and not subject to exclusive or limiting fees. We advocate a strong and deep, serious and significant art. We fight for an art towards the salvation of individuality, within the sign of our time. We are heading towards a great plastic transformation in which to find the expression of a “new reality”. And towards an anti-academy, in which the spectator and the artist become aware of their social and spiritual responsibility. The action of “El Paso” will last as long as the aforementioned conditions remain in our country.



Pablo Serrano

(Crivillén, Spain, 1910 – Madrid, Spain, 1985)

In his early years in Spain, Pablo Serrano presented the Irons, sculptures in which he composed waste material (iron, nails, metal mesh ...) that he found or collected in dumps and scrap yards and that he grouped together in space creating abstract shapes, using the assembly technique. A short time later, Serrano reflected on another fundamental theme, space. He started from the occupied space to reach the empty space in sculptures recalling the presence of that which no longer exists, that is, freed from his physical body. These works are marked by the void, by the nothingness that has been generated from gestures in the air or the fire inside the cube. For Serrano, sculpture is a vehicle for ideas and a transmitter of communication. Communicating is a constant desire and sculpture, through matter and form, its language. (*Pablo Serrano, Instituto Aragonés de Arte y Cultura Contemporáneos*)



Antonio Suárez
(Gijón, Spain, 1923 – Madrid, Spain, 2013)

The development of the painter Antonio Suárez towards abstract art is already evident around 1955, when the artist carried out a series of works on paper with which he indicated this direction. Although the monotypes that he executed the following year reaffirmed this, it was not until 1957, with his participation in the foundation of the El Paso group, that his work definitively embraced this new form of expression, revolutionary in the context of postwar Spanish art.

Faced with the gravity and fierceness of the abstract expressionism of his El Paso colleagues, Suárez's work has always been characterized by a search for elegance and chromatic refinement. An intuitive painter, always reluctant to carry out any kind of preparatory study or sketch for his paintings, the work of Antonio Suárez has made play with matter and color, beyond the figurative anecdotes that may sometimes appear in his work, the true center of his work. (*Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias*)



Antonio Saura

(Huesca, Spain, 1930 – Cuenca, Spain, 1998)

Saura was never afraid to deal with what might be called “life’s crucial subjects” in his paintings. On the contrary, he consciously confronted them, finding substance for his work in themes such as death, religion, sex or violence. Formed as a surrealist, Saura’s discovery of the possibilities of action painting coincided with the realization that he was not interested in absolute abstraction. On the contrary, he was interested in the preservation of certain figurative motifs as the foundations of his work.

A great admirer of (Jackson) Pollock, Saura basically learnt two things from American abstract expressionism: the use of very large surfaces that allowed for the total liberation of pictorial expression and a fast and nervous way of applying the paint on the canvas, a technique which in reality had its origin in surrealist automatism.

The other foundation of his working method was traditional Spanish art, through which he acquired a certain darkness in his color range—especially that of well-known, easily-recognizable painters such as El Greco, Juan de Valdés Leal, the Ribera of *Mujer barbuda* [Bearded Woman, 1631] and, above all, Francisco de Goya’s *Pinturas negras* [Black Paintings, 1819–1823]. (*Juan Manuel Bonet, Museo de Arte Abstracto Español, Cuenca, Fundación Juan March, Madrid, 2016*)



Juana Francés

(Alicante, Spain, 1924 – Madrid, Spain, 1990)

In 1945, Juana Francés enrolled in the Real Academia de Artes de San Fernando (Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando) in Madrid obtaining her diploma in 1950. Towards the middle of the 1950s, in a change of direction that was as rapid as it was radical, Francés made the move to abstraction. The shift coincides chronologically with that of other Spanish painters of her same generation, such as Tàpies, Cuixart, Saura or Millares, who had begun doing a kind of more or less Miró-style surrealist painting and who during those same years also began producing abstract painting.

In the development of Juana Francés this transitional phase was a brief one. The definitive change came in 1956 when Juana Francés met the sculptor Pablo Serrano with whom she joined the small group who were preparing the creation of the El Paso group. From that moment on her interest was focused exclusively on the international avant-gardes that were emerging with greater strength during those same years: European Informalism and American Abstract Expressionism.

Spanish Informalist painting of those years oscillated between two opposed poles: matter and gesture. Juana Francés was firmly situated in the camp of matter, and she did so with a purity and a radicalness with the rejection of all iconic reference and the concentration on the most extreme tactility. (*“Juana Francés: 1957-1962” (excerpts), Tomàs Llorens Serra, Mayoral Magazine*)



Manolo Millares

(Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Spain, 1926 – Madrid, Spain, 1972)

Millares played an important role in revamping artistic languages in Spain during the fifties and sixties, both as part of the Canary Island group LADAC (the Archers of Contemporary Art), founded in 1950, and with his participation in the creation of the *El Paso* group (1957-1960).

In 1955, once settled in Madrid, Millares' career started to become tied to exhibiting with and the theories of the *El Paso* groups until the end of the decade. His shift towards Informalism can be seen in his pictorial experimentation with the mediums and aesthetic and expressive qualities of the materials (sackcloth and wooden frames) as they undertook the artistic practice as a process of exorcism from which giving new meaning to technique and materials. The use of sackcloth, sewn, torn and mended to *become* the piece itself, and the use of stripped-down colors – blacks, whites and reds – turn the crisis of the fabric into the only possible support for the painting. The associations of the sacking with a shroud – the idea of the material death of man and his reminiscences (graves and tombs) – became the focal point of his work. (*Manuel Millares – Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, January 9 – March 16, 1992*)



Manuel Viola

(Zaragoza, Spain, 1919 – San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, 1987)

At the time, Viola was regarded as the most vehement of Spain's abstract expressionists, although in reality he was a far more cultured painter than his boisterous arguments and fondness for folklore might suggest. His paintings contain frequent tributes to the poets, thinkers and mystics of the tradition to which he belonged—in this he differed from his former companions of his French period.

Viola was not satisfied limiting himself to works of a purely introspective nature, as is proven by his incursions into areas where other painters did not dare to venture, such as bullfighting, flamenco, cock fighting or the Cuban Revolution. In this subject he was very Spanish, and even more so in his predilection for a certain color range. The critic José María Moreno Galván described his work as “the ghost of tenebrism, or better still, that of seventeenth-century Spanish realism.” (*Juan Manuel Bonet, Catalog Museo de Arte Abstracto Español, Cuenca, Fundación Juan March, Madrid, 2016*)



Manuel Rivera

(Granada, Spain, 1927 – Madrid, Spain, 1995)

With a strong will to experiment, Manuel Rivera developed a new grammar by using wire mesh as a means of expression, which shortly thereafter became an accepted form of aesthetic medium. His work received early recognition at the Sao Paulo (1957) and Venice (1958) Biennials, exemplifying the triumph of the disintegration of traditional values and painting principles like the use of brushes, canvas, rules of composition, etc.

Rivera's work is based on the relationship between space and light that he created with wires. By increasing the depth of the support, he composed on two planes and implemented his spatial concepts. Utilizing screwed-in pivots enabled him to create additional planes without over filling the surface. It is the light – the optical vibrations that cause a moiré effect and chiaroscuro (light-dark) glazes – that creates the shapes. Despite the three-dimensional effects, Rivera worked without sculptural intensions and insisted that all are derived from the properties of light and material. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)



Rafael Canogar

(Toledo, Spain, 1935 – Madrid, Spain, currently)

After the Spanish Civil War and a period of transition, Rafael Canogar and his family took up residence in Madrid in 1944. He began his training with painter Daniel Vázquez Díaz, with whom he mastered a figurative language inspired by the work of Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró. In 1954, Canogar began to experiment with abstraction and informalism, motivated by Michel Tapié's call for a collective art phenomenon. His canvases, increasingly monochromatic, sought to achieve a balance between form and matter, between formal and informal painting. (*TATE, Sofia Gotti, September 2015*)



Luis Feito
(Madrid, Spain, 1929-2021)

Luis Feito began his formal training at the Escuela superior de bellas artes de San Fernando (now Real academia de bellas artes de San Fernando), Madrid, in 1950. He worked briefly in a figurative style before he discovered Cubism, but in 1954 he presented his first solo show of nonfigurative works. Thereafter, Feito remained committed to painting in an abstract mode.

In 1953, Feito relocated to Paris where he resided for nearly 25 years. While in Paris, he had the opportunity to view work by his international contemporaries and became acquainted with several Art Informel artists. He was also introduced to automatism and began to incorporate other materials, most notably sand, into his paintings. Feito nonetheless maintained close contact with the Spanish avant-garde and was a founding member of the Madrid-based group El Paso. (*Guggenheim Museum*)



Martín Chirino

(Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 1925 – Madrid, Spain, 2019)

Martín Chirino's career began in the 1950's. Heir to the Spanish sculptural avant-garde of the first half of the twentieth century, following the tradition initiated by Julio González and Pablo Gargallo, he adds his particular interest in Aboriginal Canarian culture (Guanche).

Chirino's work is based on two principles: wrought iron; the main material used in his sculptures, and the spiral; a symbol and formal solution recurring throughout his career. Here the foundations of his work have been synthesized: the notion of folding and unfolding, the horizontal and vertical formation in space and the curvature of material that, in his hands becomes pliable, resuscitating the tradition of forging. Chirino's sculptural production develops and is grouped chronologically according to specific intentions, the references of which are always and ultimately found in nature and the real world, focusing on them for extended periods of time until he exhausts all of their expressive possibilities. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)

Room III: Dau al Set, Grupo Silex, and independent movements

Dau al Set

Preceding the movement of art towards Informalism, the Dau al Set (1948-1953) was founded in Barcelona in 1948 by young artists open to French and universal trends. The initial figures were the poet Joan Brossa and the painter Joan Ponç, who were joined by Arnau Puig, Tàpies, Tharrats, Cuixart and the writer Juan Eduardo Cirlot. They proposed to link with the surrealism what had been interrupted by the civil war, and the figure that served as an example for all of them was Joan Miró.

They recognized the influence of Klee, Max Ernst and Picabia and were in line with magical surrealism. They did not have a manifesto, but they created a magazine also called Dau al Set, which was their means of expression. They dedicated their works to these artists; Dalí, Magritte, Francis Picabia, dadaism, psychoanalysis or magic. Through it they promoted artistic and cultural renewal. The group played a major role in bringing the vanguard forward and paved the way for Informalism in Spain. (*Arte España*)



Antoni Tàpies
(Barcelona, Spain, 1923 – 2012)

Tàpies began his successful career in Barcelona closely linked to Catalan surrealism, but in 1950 he left for Paris and entered fully into *Informalism*, starting to paint in a very material style, incorporating recycled objects and detritus, with strings, papers, sand, straw or marble dust being typical. For this reason, Tàpies' paintings are almost like bas-reliefs.

Among his main influences were Nietzsche, Catalonia and Buddhism, which served in some way to create his impressive compositions that would almost become like walls on which signs (crosses, moons, asterisks, letters, numbers, geometric figures) could be distinguished. The colors of his works are usually austere, cold or earthy.

Another characteristic of Tàpies' work is that of a rapid and conscious destruction. This decomposition is a perfect reflection on the passage of time. (*Miguel Calvo Santos, 09-27-2016*)



Joan Brossa
(Barcelona, Spain, 1919 – 1998)

A libertarian poet, critical, defiant, Joan Brossa has produced a body of work that transcends classification. Time and again in books, exhibitions and stage works, his pieces have fired direct shots into the conscience of the spectator, while critics and curators have often tiptoed around the transcendence of the message. *Nogueras Blanchard (excerpt)*

“Of the books with Tàpies, it is worth highlighting “*Novel·la*” (1965), a book dominated by Brossa’s argument – the biography of an anonymous man who makes himself known by his bureaucratic documents – and the existential narrative that gives him the treatment of the thirty-one lithographs by Antoni Tàpies from an informal poetics, with ripped, torn, holed pages, and a bundle of string on the cover, like a bundle of newsprint.” *Manuel Guerrero, “Brossa or the poetic revolt”, Fundació Joan Miró, 2001*



Joan-Josep Tharrats

(Girona, Spain, 1918 – Barcelona, Spain, 2001)

Joan-Josep Tharrats studied at the Escola Massana, Barcelona, in the mid-thirties, before the Civil War. After almost four years compulsory military service, in 1942 he resumed his artistic activity. Initially close to Impressionism, he quickly gravitated toward abstraction. In the late 1940s, he founded the innovative group *Dau al Set* and the homonymous magazine, alongside Joan Brossa, Modest Cuixart, Joan Ponç, Arnau Puig and Antoni Tàpies. Together they championed the artistic avant-garde at the height of the Franco regime, and a good part of the magazine *Dau al Set* was printed on the press in his own studio. Tharrats was leader of the Catalan avant-garde in the post-war period with an oeuvre that evolved from a linear abstraction derived from Surrealism to a textured, colourful and free-form Informalism. (*Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona*)



Modest Cuixart

(Barcelona, Spain, 1925 – Palafrugell, Spain, 2007)

Self-taught, Cuixart's early paintings are the result of a fertile dreamlike imagination and experimentation in parallel worlds. They were meticulously drawn and included a keen sense of symbology. In the mid-fifties, with his stays in Paris and Lyon, he gravitated towards Informalism, exploring textures and reliefs, and new materials such as gold pigments, silver and metal emulsions, using new techniques such as drip painting. (*Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona*)

Grupo Sílex

The Grupo Sílex was formed at the end of 1955 with some former members of Inter Nos (Alcoy and Hernández Pijuan) and the painters Planell, Rovira Brull, and Ll. Terricabras. They did not have a specific aesthetic and they did not launch theoretical proposals, they simply insisted on the connection of contemporary art with primitive art and, at some point, they began to insist on expressionism and abstraction. The group made many exhibitions and established connections, although it was not until 1957 that they exhibited in Barcelona. (*"The Artistic Politics of Francoism: The Milestone of the Hispano-American Biennial: Post-war Spanish Art"*, Miguel Cabañas Bravo (excerpt))



Joan Hernández Pijuan
(Barcelona, Spain, 1931 – 2005)

Joan Hernández Pijuan studied at the Escola d'Arts i Oficis de la Llotja and the Escola de Belles Arts, Barcelona, and in 1957 moved to Paris, where he studied engraving and lithography at the École des Beaux-Arts. His early work was close to gestural expressionism, but soon after he adopted a geometric figuration dominated by color fields and by the presence of solitary objects such as fruit, glasses, eggs and scissors. (*Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona*)



Carlos Planell Viñals
(Barcelona, 1927 – 2008)

An autodidact, he began his work in art around 1948, and until 1954 he remained interested in figuration. At the end of that year, he was introduced to abstract language and in 1955, together with the artists Alcoy, Hernández Pijuan, Rovira-Brull and Terri, he founded the Grupo Sílex. Around 1957-1958, his abstract painting entered a serene and personal informalism in which he united matter and painting. Later, he incorporated various elements such as rope, rice, etc, in his paintings, and later introduced perforations on the canvas as an essential expressive factor. (*Real Academia de la Historia*)

Abstract thinkers

Although much emphasis is put on the importance of the formation of artist collectives in the development of Spanish art towards Informalist aesthetics, one cannot overlook the notable contributions of Luis Gordillo, Francisco Ferreras, Lucio Muñoz, César Manrique and Esteban Vicente, who have been equally influential independent of these early connections.



Gustavo Torner
(Cuenca, Spain, 1925)

Torner belongs to the so-called Cuenca group which emerged in the 1950s and is close to artists from the El Paso group, and exemplifies the possibility of an art that never abandons the reference to the real world as motive and foundation, from an apparently plastic abstract vocabulary. In all of his works, a strong sense of construction and spatial composition dominates since he starts from the idea of collage to elevate it to that of assemblage. At the foundation of this artistic concept is his desire to rethink the physical essence of the work of art and to give meaning to each fragment of which the work of art is made up.

In his paintings, since the late fifties, along with oil he has used other non-artistic materials (sand, feldspar, hemp, latex, aluminum). He creates a rigid compositional structure in his paintings by dividing the pictorial surface into two fields; in the upper, a larger portion, he develops a color field; in the lower, he concentrates on material experimentation and exhausts the expressive resources of the materials used. Both for the processes and for the incorporation of chunks of reality into his work, Torner approaches the international currents of Informalism and New Realism. "*Gustavo Torner: Retrospective 1949-1991*", 1991, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (excerpt)



Francisco Ferreras

(Barcelona, Spain, 1927 – Madrid, 2021)

We will never find in Ferreras' work the automatism underlying the abstract work of former surrealist painters nor the *Generation of '98's* violent passion for history. His is a subtle, carefully constructed pictorial world in which almost nothing happens and in which nothing is organized in plastic terms. As far as Ferreras is concerned, "new materials" were simply a launching pad towards the more balanced art of collage. In 1959, he discovered the plastic possibilities of silk paper, which became the principal element of his work from then on. (*Juan Manuel Bonet, Catálogo Museo de Arte Abstracto Español, Cuenca (excerpt), Fundación Juan March, Madrid, 2016*)



Lucio Muñoz
(Madrid, Spain, 1929 – 1998)

Lucio Muñoz belongs to a generation of Spanish artists from the Fifties and is considered one of the pioneers of abstraction in Spain. The artist started out working with landscape, a prevalent genre at the time in Spain, particularly among those considered disciples of Benjamín Palencia. In 1955, Muñoz' first semi-abstract paintings are exhibited with visible influences of Paul Klee, Rufino Tamayo, Ben Nicholson and Joaquín Torres García, among others.

In Paris, he declared his firm commitment to Abstract Expressionism, and on his return to Spain defined his established style and work, securing his place among the Spanish avant-garde. An Informalist aesthetic takes a firm foothold in Lucio Muñoz's work via the amalgamation of traditional materials with other more non-habitual ones such as soil, paper and cardboard. His most decisive years are 1958 and 1959 when he starts to explore the expressive potential of wood, a material traditionally considered non-pictorial, working with plywood in particular which he unsystematically carves, scratches, burns and chips. His far-reaching influences in this period include Francisco de Goya's black paintings, Diego de Velázquez, Gregorian chants, Castilla, flamenco and Alberto Durer's engravings. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)



Fernando Zóbel (Manila, Philippines, 1924 – Rome, Italy, 1984)

Of Spanish nationality, although born in the Philippines, Fernando Zóbel trained and developed his work in countries as diverse and distant from each other as the United States, the Philippines and Spain. In the latter he settled definitively in 1961, founding the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art in the city of Cuenca, which constituted an important intellectual and artistic nucleus of the post-war Spanish avant-garde.

Thus, diverse influences such as American informalism, Spanish abstract expressionism or oriental calligraphy converge in Fernando Zóbel. All of them had a decisive role in the consolidation of the style and technique that Fernando Zóbel developed starting in 1956. It is at that moment when the artist fully commits to abstract art, eliminating the superfluous from his paintings, and capturing the traces that the observed reality left in his calm mind. (*Galeria Cayón*)



César Manrique

(Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain, 1919 – 1992)

César Manrique was born in Arrecife, Lanzarote, an island on which his art was to leave an indelible mark. After finishing his studies at the San Fernando Fine Arts Academy at Madrid (where he lived from 1945 to 1964), he exhibited his work on a regular basis both in Spain and abroad. In the early nineteen fifties, he ventured into non-figurative art and studied the properties of matter, concerns that would predominate in his compositions, bonding him to Spain's contemporary *Informalist* movement. (*Fundación César Manrique*)



Esteban Vicente

(Segovia, Spain, 1903 – New York, USA, 2001)

In 1921, Vicente enrolled in the Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid with the intention of becoming a sculptor, but he soon decided to devote himself to painting. His Madrid period is marked by his contact and friendship with writers and artists such as García Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Alberti, Luis Buñuel, Juan Bonafé, Boreas and the Pole Wladislaw Jahl. His esthetic proposals mark him as a member of the group later classified as the “painter-poets”, in that their work was the artistic counterpart of the group of poets known as the Generation of 1927. In fact, he published his first drawings in two literary reviews: Verso y Prosa and Mediodía.

In 1940 he became an American citizen and then began a period of creative crisis that would lead to his encounter with Abstract Expressionism. In his dialogue with it over a period of two decades, Esteban Vicente gradually consolidated his own uniquely personal style, based on vibrant chromatic harmonies on top of vaguely geometric structures, sometimes evocative of inner landscapes. The exploration of these channels brought him the friendship of members of the New York School. (*Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia (excerpts)*)



Luis Gordillo

(Seville, Spain, 1934 – Madrid, Spain, currently)

Luis Gordillo started his career during the fifties when he travelled to Paris and got acquainted with the European art of the time, in particular with artists such as Wols, Dubuffet, Michaux and Fautrier. In his first works, the influence of surrealism and Tàpies can be appreciated to which an early seventies Pop art associated iconography would be incorporated in later years. (*Galería Joan Prats*)

Room IV: The Sculptors

The legacy the Spanish sculptors of this period have left continues to be of great importance and influence to Spanish art today, deeply ingrained in contemporary visual language.



Julio González

(Barcelona, Spain, 1876 – Arcueil, France, 1942)

Julio González is considered the father of iron sculpture and one of the key artists in the development of twentieth-century art. González, with an artistic vocation, trained as a craftsman in his father's artistic metalwork workshop in a modernist Barcelona, where he learned how to forge and cast iron. His move to Paris influenced his artistic production. There he learned industrial technique, autogenous welding, which was decisive for the subsequent renewal of his iron sculptural language. The artist experimented on the two-dimensional plane with his embossed reliefs and the exploration of volume until in 1928 Picasso, used to working with metal, asked for his help. In producing a memorial to his friend Apollinaire with transparent and emptied forms, in order to materialize the idea of "a solid statue of nothing", inspired by *The Poet Assassinated* written by Apollinaire in 1914. Thanks to this collaboration, González's advice to Picasso allowed him to test the feasibility of his sketches, while Picasso gave his friend the impetus to develop his work based on the synthetic capacity of the drawing. González's sculptures, until then limited to delicate iron and small dimensions, are reinforced to the point of becoming imposing and complex figures that would lead him to be internationally recognized. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)



Jorge Oteiza

(Orio, Spain, 1908 – San Sebastián, Spain, 2003)

Oteiza's sculptures examine the relationship between volume and space brought about by early avant-garde movements, particularly Constructivism, whilst also sharing a distinct penchant for abstraction, spirituality and humanism with other artists. In 1935, he traveled to Latin America, where he exhibited in various cities while also working as a teacher and carrying out research into Pre-Columbian sculpture.

Following his return to Spain in 1948, he embarked upon the ongoing experimentation with what he himself defined as "*the aesthetic nature of the Statue as a purely spatial organism*" whilst also tackling the sculptures of the Sanctuary of Aránzazu, an enormous project planned in 1953 and carried out between 1968 and 1969. In this project, religious motives are depersonalized, the figures emptied, but as they open out into space they become full of spiritual content. Between 1958 and 1959, he conveyed the previous formulations in his work; for instance, the emptiness of the cube in his *Cajas vacías*, perhaps the best representation of the conclusions from his experimentation. From these conclusions, he developed new essays that culminated in his pre-minimalist compositions. During this period, he also associated the void found in his work with the cromlechs from Basque prehistory, and, as he reaches the experimental conclusion that, '*it is no longer possible to add sculpture, as expression, either to man or the city*', Oteiza relinquished his sculptural work.

In the Sixties he focused on aesthetic and linguistic research, particularly Basque culture, and became actively involved in the political and social cause. He later returned to sculpture between 1972 and 1975. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)



Eduardo Chillida
(San Sebastián, Spain, 1924 – 2002)

With a varied and pioneering practice that spans small-scale sculpture, plaster work, drawing, engraving and collage, Spanish artist Eduardo Chillida is best known for his prominent monumental public sculptures, mostly displayed in Spain, Germany, France and the USA. Throughout his career, Chillida drew on his Spanish heritage combined with a fascination for organic form, as well as influences from European and Eastern philosophies, poetry and history, to develop an artistic voice that communicated and resonated with a continent undergoing rapid transformation.

Chillida was born in San Sebastian, Spain in 1924. He conducted preliminary studies to enroll in architecture at the University of Madrid before turning his attention to drawing which he studied at *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in Madrid. In 1948 Chillida was awarded a scholarship to attend the *Cité Internationale Universitaire* and travelled to Paris. On his return to Spain in 1951, he began experimenting in materials that resonated with the Basque region's industrial heritage such as iron, wood and steel. Chillida settled in Hernani and, in 1952, he set up an iron foundry, learning techniques from a local blacksmith. During this period, he continued to make engravings and collages and this core practice was to continue throughout his career, allowing him to explore form and line by cutting into paper. This technique arose from the concept of the collage in the mid 1980s (gravitations did not replace collages) by a new development, 'Gravitaciones' (Gravitations), in which Chillida eliminated the adhesive from his collage, allowing the work to be suspended in space. (*Hauser & Wirth*)



Martín Chirino

(Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 1925 – Madrid, Spain, 2019)

Martín Chirino's career began in the 1950's. Heir to the Spanish sculptural avant-garde of the first half of the twentieth century, following the tradition initiated by Julio González and Pablo Gargallo, he adds his particular interest in Aboriginal Canarian culture (Guanche).

Chirino's work is based on two principles: wrought iron; the main material used in his sculptures, and the spiral; a symbol and formal solution recurring throughout his career. Here the foundations of his work have been synthesized: the notion of folding and unfolding, the horizontal and vertical formation in space and the curvature of material that, in his hands becomes pliable, resuscitating the tradition of forging. Chirino's sculptural production develops and is grouped chronologically according to specific intentions, the references of which are always and ultimately found in nature and the real world, focusing on them for extended periods of time until he exhausts all of their expressive possibilities. (*Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*)

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