

Abstract nature

Works by Zóbel with Miró, Tàpies and Hernández Pijuan

2.09 – 23.11.2021

Mayoral presents an exhibition which highlights the role of the landscape in the work of Fernando Zóbel linked to three great Catalan postwar abstract artists who were also particularly sensitive in their treatment of nature. Curated by Alfonso de la Torre, the show brings together 13 works produced during the period from 1962 to 1998.

Emphasizing the current context of climate emergency, the show relates the outlook of Miró, the position of Zóbel and that of two postwar abstract creators in Catalonia, Tàpies and Hernández Pijuan, starting from their interest in nature and the landscape, in many cases a significant theme in their work. These artists professed great love for nature and for everything in it which surrounds us. They made a fundamental contribution to the art of this period and, as occurs with all major artists, their creations continue to move us today.

After various figurative endeavours, Zóbel —who knew Jackson Pollock and who received a return visit at his 1965 exhibition at Bertha Schaefer in New York by the painter Mark Rothko whom he so admired— soon became abstract. In the words of Alfonso de la Torre: “[...] his shapes, installed in the space, seemed to be linked to the concept of time, on occasions appearing to be capable of abandoning their place on the canvas in order to truly aspire the surrounding space, signs, shapes like calligraphy evoking the oriental world, a dynamism of elements inherited from drawing, the movement of shapes like volutes, flights, waves, circles or traits appeared to be left in permanent *vibrato* on falling on the fabric, or at some time like constellations in the void, the appearance of his images rejecting any figurative reference”. Here the works *Anímula* (1962) and *La Palmera V* (The Palm V) (1975) refer us to these flights related by the exhibition curator. As Fernando Zóbel himself wrote: “In the end almost everything becomes landscape”. Many of his titles transport us to this landscape. In this exhibition we have the examples of *Gestos / Otoño* (*Gestures / Autumn*) (1978), *Orilla IX* (*River bank IX*) (1980) and *Orilla 76* (*River bank 76*) (1982). In *Cuatro*

semanas (Four weeks) (1982-1983), a painting from his “Autumn” cycle (1982), the canvas appears to observe the passing of the season through these four bands which, like sequenced moments, between October and November that year, express the passing of time and the change in the landscape of Cuenca.

The promoter of the Museo de Arte Abstracto in Cuenca, which opened in 1966, Fernando Zóbel contributed to the reparation of a world marked by the Franco dictatorship. The examples of freedom that many artists from this time saw in this context included the figure of Joan Miró. In relation to this creative freedom, the show includes a late, less well-known and experimental work by Miró, *Peinture (Projet pour une tapisserie)* (*Painting (Project for a tapestry)*) (1973-74), a very spectacular gestural painting which provides us with a view of his inexhaustible creativity. Here the lines of the hands, the palms, are symbols loaded with poetry, like a branch hanging from a tree.

Zóbel wrote that he perceived that our best artistic examples were from the 60s in foreign collections, which led him to collect works by the El Paso artists together

Fernando Zóbel
Cuatro semanas
(1983)
Oil on canvas
130 × 150 cm





Joan Miró
Peinture
(Projet pour
une tapisserie)
 (1973-74)
 House paint, oil
 and wool on wood
 197 × 122 cm

with those who emerged in the Catalan sphere, mainly in the context of the Dau al Set group. In 1967, at the initiative of Rafael Santos Torroella, the travelling exhibition “El Museo de las Casas Colgadas de Cuenca (Colección de Arte Abstracto Español)” (The Museum of the Hanging Houses of Cuenca (Collection of Spanish Abstract Art)) was presented in Barcelona, including works by Tàpies and Hernández Pijuan. An original catalogue from this exhibition, whose installation included the collaboration of Hernández Pijuan himself, can be consulted in this show’s selection of documentation. Here, the diptych *Dos espais horitzontals 1 i 2* (*Two horizontal spaces 1 and 2*) (1977) leads us to the

diptych *Horitzontals* (*Horizontals*) (1978), which forms part of the collection of the Museo de Arte Abstracto of Cuenca. According to Juan Manuel Bonet, “when he painted *Horitzontals*, a stripped and empty painting in which he plays with a minimum number of elements, Hernández Pijuan focused on the concept of landscape or, in his own words, on the search for ‘moments of a colour to define a landscape’”.

Robert Rosenblum (1927-2006) in “The Abstract Sublime” contemporarily established the well-known thesis which related the birth of pictorial abstraction to the spirit of the landscape, most especially the landscape of the 19th century and the Romantic tradition of northern Europe and America. For Rosenblum, the sublime could be applied to both art and nature: indeed, one of its chief expressions would be the painting, the representation, of sublime landscapes. These artists worked fully immersed in nature: Zóbel had a studio in Cuenca, opposite the Júcar gorge; Hernández Pijuan and the memory of the fields of Folquer; Miró and the landscape of Montroig or Mallorca; and Tàpies, in Campins, Montseny. In the 60s and 70s, the latter became especially interested in the subject of the everyday object, which he incorporated into the texture of the painting or which was alluded to in figurative terms. *Matèria amb cordes* (*Matter with ropes*) (1977) is an austere work characterized by the presence of these ropes, which play a central role, like a manifesto in favour of the most humble and insignificant objects. Tàpies, for whom the meeting with Miró was decisive, shared with him the interest not only in

poor materials and everything around us in nature, but also in poetry and the oriental world.

1. ARTnews59,
 no. 10, New York,
 11/1961, pp. 38-41.

The curator

Alfonso de la Torre is a specialist in the emergence of abstraction in the postwar period and the development of the Museo de Arte Abstracto and has curated various exhibitions to do with this: “El grupo de Cuenca” (Madrid, 1997); “El grupo de Cuenca” (Burgos and Pamplona, 1998) and “Cuenca: Cuarenta años después (1964-2004). La poética de Cuenca” (Madrid, 2004). He collaborated on the exhibition “La ciudad abstracta. 1966: El nacimiento del Museo de Arte Abstracto Español” (Cuenca, 2006). He is also the author of numerous monographic texts on Zóbel and the Cuenca Group. After compiling the

catalogues raisonnés of Millares, Rivera and Palazuelo, he has just completed the one devoted to the paintings of Fernando Zóbel, which will be published this year, 2021.

He has curated more than a hundred exhibitions, published essays and poetry, and given courses at different universities and institutions. For the Mayoral gallery he curated, together with Elena Sorokina, “Millares: Building Bridges Not Walls” (2017), in 2019, “Zóbel-Chillida. Crisscrossing paths”; and in March 2021, “Zóbel and the great post-war generation”. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA)

Mayoral

Gallery specialised in Post-War art founded in Barcelona in 1989. In November 2019, Mayoral opened a second gallery in Paris. The gallery articulates an exhibition programme focused on Informalism and Post-War art, both Catalan and Spanish, with artists such as Tàpies, Chillida, Millares, Saura, Guerrero, Zóbel, Canogar, Rivera and Francés. At the same time, the gallery also exhibits the work of key twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as Miró and Picasso.

It develops projects that are rigorously curated and grow out of an exhaustive process of research based on original documentation.

The gallery relies upon the support of the artists’ families, foundations and other institutions whose mission resides in preserving and publicising the legacy of the artists they represent. Likewise, it enjoys the complicity of many collectors and museums, both public and private, when it comes to accomplishing its mission. The gallery participates in art fairs such as Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Basel Hong Kong, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York and ARCOmadrid.