

Rivera - Millares

Ethics of Reparation

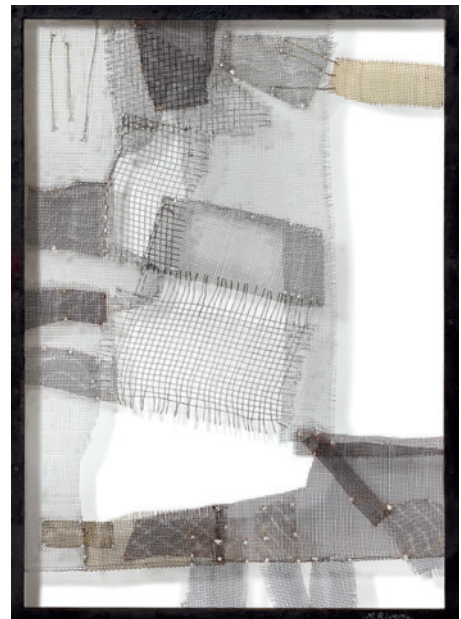
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Mayoral presents an unprecedented and topical dialogue between Manuel Rivera and Manolo Millares. The show, curated by Carles Guerra, brings together 10 works produced between 1957 and 1972, highlighting the connections and unique characteristics of these two great postwar artists who expanded the limits of the painting beyond two-dimensionality.

There are numerous links between Manuel Rivera (Granada, 1927 - Madrid, 1995) and Manolo Millares (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1926- Madrid, 1972), going from the aesthetic and political aspect to their artistic and professional career. Following the ideal of El Paso, a group of which they were both cofounders in 1957—together with other artists such as Rafael Canogar and Juana Francés, to which we recently dedicated two monographic exhibitions—, their works seek the realization of “revolutionary fine arts” which started from the poetics of abstraction to express their discontent with the reality of the postwar period and of the Franco dictatorship that they had to endure.

The creations of Rivera and Millares shared a uniqueness which granted them a genuine, differentiated modernity, thanks to the use of unusual materials in the world of art: wire mesh and wire, in the case of Rivera, and the burlap of Millares. The use of these materials involved the development of original, non-pictorial techniques, similar to those of artisan weavers: with yarn and wire, Millares and Rivera combined, respectively, the fragments of burlap and of wire mesh. With this sort of reparative act, close to closing a wound with stitches, both artists embarked on a “healing” process, a metaphor for release from the forces of evil.

Manuel Rivera
Composición 8
(Composition 8)
(1957)
Mixed media
(wire mesh,
wire and metal)
on wood and
metal stretcher
100 × 72.5 cm



The use of these industrial materials—close to ready-made— and the way in which they worked on them meant that their works allowed you to see the wall on which they were displayed, as observed in some of the pieces brought together in this exhibition, among which we can highlight *Composición 8 (Composition 8)* (1957), by Manuel Rivera, and *Cuadro 186 (Painting 186)* (1962), by Manolo Millares. As Carles Guerra points out in his text for the catalogue, awareness of this fact led them both to hang the creations further away from the wall than what tends to be usual, thus

“Is it as if the tears, the darning, the stitching and the wires –all these terms being interchangeable between the works of Millares and Rivera– were the sublimated gestures of this violence inflicted on civil society.”

Carles Guerra, exhibition curator

favouring the appearance of shadows of different intensities on the wall and, consequently, incorporating the empty space into the painting itself. In this way, the works spread beyond the frame and the traditional two-dimensionality of the pictorial surface.

Guerra compares this way of creating with the works of two of the most emblematic artists of postwar art in Italy: Burri's sacks and Lucio Fontana's *Concetti Spaziale* (Spatial Concepts). As occurred with these Italian artists, the gestural brushstroke typical of the different abstractions of the time was replaced in Rivera and Millares with direct work with the medium itself, meaning that “the relationship between figure and background [is] cancelled for the benefit of the medium. The prominence of the medium increasingly allows them to free themselves from the legacy of canonical gestures”. The curator continues



by saying that we are faced with “a new type of painting, one which he even doubts can continue to be called painting. [...] This debate could be extended to the ‘specific objects’ of Donald Judd who, by the way, wrote a critical note starting from the works of Rivera and Millares displayed in 1960 in the Pierre Matisse Gallery of New York”.

This sculptural character was emphasized in their next works: in the case of Rivera, as observed in *Metamorfosis (Máscara)* (*Metamorphosis [Mask]*) (1961), this occurred through the introduction of a metal or wooden base on which the artist mounted his experimentations in wire mesh and yarn. As for Millares, the three-dimensionality was stressed by the introduction of fragments of objects, as occurs in *Objeto (Object)* (c. 1963), or with some folds of clothing even more full of lumps, such as those that we find in some of the exhibited works.

In the context of a Spain in which all freedom of expression had been repressed, our artists found, in these object-paintings, a way to create an apparently inoffensive art in the eyes of the Spanish authorities, who “were incapable of appreciating metaphor and poetry”, as noted by Alfonso de la Torre, the critic and specialist in Rivera and Millares. At the same time, these creations revealed great critical strength when shown outside Spain, in juxtaposition with the exponents of *art informel*, *arte povera* or abstract Expressionism, in the context of the major international group exhibitions of the end of the 50s and beginning of the 60s.

Thus, in shows such as the IV Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1957); the mythical 1958 Biennale di Venezia or *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture*, held in the MoMA of New York in 1960, Rivera and Millares succeeded in giving visibility to a “critical Spanishness” which fled the artistic instrumentalization of the Franco regime for the creation of a “Spanish art” and in coming to the attention of two of the most important gallerists of the time: Daniel Cordier and Pierre Matisse. Through their galleries in Paris and New York, the works of these two artists became consolidated internationally and entered numerous public and private collections worldwide.

Manolo Millares
Cuadro 186
(*Painting 186*)
(1962)
Mixed media on
burlap
130.2 × 97.8 cm

The Artists

Manuel Rivera (Granada, 1927 – Madrid, 1995). A Spanish artist who, after an initial figurative period in which he was commissioned to produce portraits and murals, started out in abstraction. In 1956 he made the leap to the characteristic wire mesh, first framed in wood and subsequently aluminium. He later incorporated a wooden board with pivots which supported the metal fabrics. Concerned by the concepts of space and light, he added empty spaces between the fabrics, colour began to appear and his work took on a more constructive form thanks to superimposing and to the creation of volumes. He was a cofounding member of the El Paso group in 1957, which defended the opening up of Franco's Spain in the international sphere. He participated in the São Paulo Biennial in 1957, in

the Venice Biennial in 1958 and in the group exhibition of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris in 1959. In 1960, he took part in the three major exhibitions of Spanish art scheduled in New York City: *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* at the MoMA, *Before Picasso; After Miró* at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and *Four Spanish Painters: Millares, Canogar, Rivera, Saura* at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. The Pierre Matisse Gallery hosted two of his solo exhibitions during the 1960s. He moreover participated in the exhibitions organized by the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh in the years 1961, 1964 and 1967.

Starting from 1967, he began a new pictorial stage highly influenced by oriental art and an intensification of colour.

Manolo Millares (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1926 – Madrid, 1972). A self-taught Spanish artist who, after an initial stage marked by considerable interest in archaeology and Surrealism, adopted his own style characterized by the use of burlap — an evocation of the fabric in which the Guanche mummies were wrapped in the Canary Islands that became an expression of existential anguish — and an artistic language which alternated tormented, lyrical and gestural moments. He was the main promoter of the LADAC (The Archers of Contemporary Art) and his first solo exhibition in the peninsula took place in the Galeries Jardí of Barcelona in 1951, the year in which he exhibited at the I Biennial of Hispano-American Art in Madrid. He was a cofounding member of the El Paso group in 1957, which defen-

ded the opening up of Franco's Spain in the international sphere. He participated in the São Paulo Biennial in 1957, in the Venice Biennial in 1958 and in 1960 in the three major exhibitions of Spanish art scheduled in New York City: *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* at the MoMA, *Before Picasso; After Miró* at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and *Four Spanish Painters: Millares, Canogar, Rivera, Saura* at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. In that same year, he had solo exhibitions also at the Pierre Matisse and at the Daniel Cordier gallery in Paris. With consolidated international recognition, from 1960 to 1972 he used burlap as the central element of his composition, basically using the colours black, red and white.

The Curator

Carles Guerra (Ampostà, 1965) has pursued a career in art criticism, teaching and research. He has been director of Primavera Fotogràfica, director of the Virreina Centre de la Imatge, chief curator at MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and, from 2015 through 2020, executive director at Fundació Antoni Tàpies. His main line of research has often delved into dialogical practices, in the field of both art and visual culture. Critical pedagogies, documentary practices and the working conditions of cultural production under Post-Fordism have been a predominant

subject in his many publications. He has been associate professor at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and faculty member at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. On top of a vast number of monographic exhibitions devoted to individual artists, he has curated projects like *1979. A Monument to Radical Instants* and *Antoni Tàpies. Political Biography*. These last two projects responded to an ongoing commitment to rethink the legacy of modernism from a perspective that urges us to articulate a potential history of our past.

Mayoral

Gallery specialized in modern and postwar art. Its exhibition programme focuses on artists such as Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, José Guerrero, Manolo Millares, Juana Francés, Manuel Rivera, Antonio Saura and Fernando Zóbel. The gallery also exhibits the work of some of the great avant-garde masters of the twentieth century as Miró, Picasso and Dalí.

Mayoral, which opened a new space in Paris in November 2019, carries out projects that are rigorously curated and which are

the result of a thorough research process. The gallery works in collaboration with the families of the artists, foundations and other institutions whose aim is to preserve and promote the different artists' legacy. Likewise, it enjoys the support and confidence of museums and collectors, both private and institutional. The gallery takes part in: Art Basel Hong Kong, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York Fall and Spring and ARCOmadrid art fairs.