

Canogar

The Informalist Years

04.02 - 29.03.2021

Mayoral presents a solo exhibition on Rafael Canogar which examines the importance of the Informalist period in the creative development of the artist, one of the founding members of El Paso. Curated by Enrique Juncosa, the show brings together seven paintings produced between 1958 and 1963.

Continuing with the aim of broadening our knowledge of Spanish postwar avant-garde art, the exhibition reviews and rereads, from a present-day perspective, the Informalist period of Rafael Canogar (Toledo, 1935), a key moment in his artistic career. During this period, he attained international renown with a presence in the most important exhibitions of the time on Spanish art, including those organized in New York in 1960 in the Museum of Modern Art, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Pierre Matisse Gallery.

Canogar entered the world of abstraction early. After producing, in 1954, some initial works of an Expressionist nature influenced by the discovery of international avant-garde tendencies and by the work of artists such as Picasso, Braque and, above all, Miró, he submerged himself in an exploration of the creative possibilities of the matter proposed by Informalism. These new creations—including the works that we bring together in this exhibition—constitute what Enrique Juncosa considers to be “a defining moment in his career when, still at a very young age, he became a central name in Spanish plastic arts”.

In “Rafael Canogar: The Informalist Years” we find sober works loaded with intense gestures, indebted to the action painting of the New York School—especially Pollock and Kooning—, demonstrating their creator’s nonconformist and spontaneous spirit. Canogar worked with the canvases flat on the ground, applying liquid paint in dark tones which he then spread directly with his fingers, drawing graphic representations and furrows such as those which can be seen so well in *Raza (Race)* (1958) or *Pintura n° 78 (Painting no. 78)* (1961).

Pintura no 78
(*Painting no. 78*)
(1961)
Oil on canvas
97 × 130 cm



Through this artistic practice, Canogar succeeded in combining artistic experimentation with the need to express his state of mind in the context of Franco’s dictatorship. In this respect, the matter played a very important role since, in view of its organic and mundane nature, it broke with the traditional dichotomy between abstraction and figuration and enabled the creation of non-figurative art close to the viewer, as observed in the titles of the works *Dintel (Lintel)* (1958) or *Barbecho (Fallow)* (1962). Pieces like *Pintura n° 24 (Painting no. 24)* (1958) moreover reveal the characteristic interplay of lights and shadows through which the artist created figures full of drama. As he himself wrote in 1959: “In my paintings shape gives way to light, which bathes the protruding parts, creating images which emerge from the darkness. A light like steel bites my paintings, forming nightmare landscapes under a black and heavy sky¹⁷” The references to Spanish Baroque painting and to the black paintings of Goya and Solana are inevitable, and become all the more evident in the predominant

CANOGAR, Rafael: “Tener los pies en la tierra”. In: *Papeles de Son Armadans* (dedicated to El Paso). Year IV, vol. XIII, no. 37 (April 1959), pages 70-72.



Dintel
(*Lintel*)
(1958)
Oil on canvas
200 × 150 cm

use of black, a colour used in widespread fashion by Spanish postwar artists as a reference to the tradition of the great masters and, at the same time, a bleak symbol of the Spain in which they happened to

live. Canogar's Informalism thus combines the influence of international currents with a strong link to his Castilian roots.

Enrique Juncosa shows us how these Informalist works of art by Canogar existed in a Spanish cultural context in which filmmakers reflected a great desire for freedom and contempt for the regime of the time —such as Buñuel, with his controversial *Viridiana* (1961)—, and in which Spanish literature was already radiating a return to reality and to its problems, translating in a voluntarily objective manner positions of anger and fatigue with the repression and injustice. According to Juncosa, “a common characteristic between these literary works and the work of Canogar and the artists of his generation is tremendous respect for the medium with which they work”. These were undoubtedly turbulent times in which the political and social conscience was accompanied by a desire for formal innovation and a break with tradition, which culminated in the French May 68.

Canogar is vitality, commitment, consistency, denunciation and, therefore, fully relevant today. With this exhibition, we aim to contribute to a broader, global dialogue on the irrevocable links between art and life.

The curator

Enrique Juncosa (Palma, 1961) is a poet and a curator. He was director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art between 2003 and 2012, a task for which he was granted the Order of the Civil Merit. Before, he had been Deputy Director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid and Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM), Valencia. He has organized more than 70 exhibitions in museums all over the world, including Tate Britain, London; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Kunsthal Rotterdam; Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), Barcelona; Spanish Pavillion at the Venice Biennale; or Museo Guggenheim Bilbao. He has published eight collections of poems, the last one being *Estrella rota* (2021); a book of short stories, *Los hedonistas* (2013); and many art essays. He is co-editor of the magazine *-normal*. Currently, he is organizing a survey of Miquel Barceló's work for four Japanese museums and a show of Joan Miró for Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana (MASI), Lugano.

The artist

Rafael Canogar (Toledo, 1935) is a painter and sculptor. He became interested in painting at a very young age and studied abstract art thanks to Daniel Vázquez Díaz, allowing him to discover the avant-gardes. He took his first steps in abstraction in 1955 —the year in which he displayed his work in Paris and in the Spanish American Art Biennial of Barcelona— and he produced Informalist works, marked by a rebel and spontaneous spirit, with a predominance of matter and rough textures, and of shades of white, black, grey and brown. In 1957, he was a co-founder of the El Paso group in Madrid, and he defended the opening up of Franco's Spain on the international stage. In 1956, he participated in the Venice Biennale, where he also exhibited in 1958, in 1962 and in 1968 with a special room. In 1958, he took part in the Alexandria Biennale, and in the Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture. He alternated exhibitions at the gallery L'Attico in Rome with the most

renowned international Spanish group exhibitions, such as *13 peintres espagnols actuels*, held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris in 1959; *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* in the New York Museum of Modern Art, *Before Picasso; After Miró* in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and *Four Spanish Painters* at the Pierre Matisse Gallery of New York in 1960; including *Modern Spanish Painting* in The Tate Gallery of London in 1962. In 1963, he decided to concentrate his creation on a new narrative technique of political and social criticism, taking inspiration from the images of the media, although he returned to abstraction one decade later, in 1975, for a certain period of time.

He has received numerous awards for artistic merit. His work is present in highly prestigious international museums and in private collections worldwide.

Mayoral

Gallery specialized in modern and postwar art. Its exhibition programme focuses on artists such as Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, Manolo Millares, Antonio Saura, José Guerrero, Fernando Zóbel, Pablo Palazuelo, Rafael Canogar, Manuel Rivera and Juana Francés. 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, Art Basel Miami, Frieze New York, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York Fall and Spring and ARCOmadrid art fairs.