

# José Guerrero

## The USA Influence

### Works from 1959 to 1967

09.09 - 19.12.2020

Mayoral presents *José Guerrero. The USA Influence*, a monographic exhibition on the artist from Granada which shows the role played by his experience in the United States and, above all the time spent in New York, in the development and consolidation of his work. Curated by Juan Manuel Bonet, it brings together eleven paintings created during a key period in his artistic career, from 1959 to 1967.

“It is here that my paintings begin to cry out; it is here where restlessness turns into paintings in which the paint and the anxiety open up a path for me.”<sup>1</sup> This is how José Guerrero often explained what it meant for him to emigrate to the United States and, more specifically, to New York City.

This exhibition displays the work of an already consolidated Guerrero, fully integrated in the artistic circles of the States, accustomed to the modernity of its postwar society, characterized by a feeling of freedom and by the rise of individuality, completely opposed to that of Franco’s Spain from which he came. This is why, as Juan Manuel Bonet states in his text for the exhibition catalogue, the artist from Granada became “a bridge between two worlds”.

The curator points out that 1958 was Guerrero’s “great American year”. In addition to receiving one of the prestigious grants of the Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts of Chicago and to being selected to participate in an event as important as *The 1958 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting*, it was also the year in which he became consolidated as an artist of American abstract expressionism since, from then on, his works began to have a regular presence in the group exhibitions linked to this movement which took place in several locations of the United States and abroad —one of the most noteworthy, during that same year, being *Action Painting*, held in the Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts.

It was also an important moment from a stylistic viewpoint. The works presented in the display entitled *The Presence of Black*, held at the Betty Parsons gallery in 1958, were free from all biomorphic references and demonstrated the predominance of gestural abstraction indebted to the action painting of the New York School. As announced in the title, the pieces in that exhibition showed a series of coloured pictorial surfaces in dialogue with black shapes and strokes in the style of those which can be seen in our current show, such as, for example, the work *Black and Yellow* (1959), which was displayed in that same New York gallery in 1960. Indeed, the works from the end of the 50s and beginning of the 60s were strongly influenced by two of the artists that Guerrero had had the occasion to meet at that time in the inaugurations and meetings of the Cedar Bar and The Club: Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline. Apart from his direct link to them through their shared use of the colour black (although for

**The Followers**  
(c. 1960)  
Oil on canvas  
106.6 × 122 cm



1. GUERRERO, José: “New York, New York o Historia del mequetrefe o el tentetioso”, n.d. Archivo José Guerrero, C-3/P-62-2.



**Cruce**  
(*Crossing*)  
(1962-1963)  
Oil on canvas  
76 × 91 cm

slightly different creative purposes), the references to Motherwell —one of the most important names in abstract expressionism who had been a reference for the painter from Granada since the beginning of the 50s— can be clearly seen in the trend toward round shapes and the use of large coloured surfaces, which can be observed so well in *Untitled* (1961), *Blue and Black* (1962) and *Rojo y negro (Red and Black)* (1964-1986), the last of which was displayed in the Museum

#### The Curator

**Juan Manuel Bonet** (Paris, 1953) is a writer and art critic. He has been director of the IVAM – Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), and of the Instituto Cervantes. The author of several books of poetry, brought together in *Via Labirinto*; of the *Diccionario de las vanguardias en España (1907-1936)*, completed with *Impresos de vanguardia en España (1912-1936)*; and of numerous monographs on 20th-century artists. He has curated exhibitions devoted to the painting of poets, ultraism, surrealism, Polish constructivism, avant-garde Argentinian literature, and the Spanish Republican exile, in addition to retrospective exhibitions on, among others, Picasso, Juan Gris, Giorgio Morandi, Tarsila do Amaral, Henri Michaux, Esteban Vicente, Manolo Millares, José Guerrero, Alex Katz and Helmut Federle.

#### The Artist

**José Guerrero** (Granada, 1914 - Barcelona, 1991) was trained at the Madrid School of Fine Arts, and he left for Paris in the 40s thanks to a scholarship. Subsequently travelled to several European countries until he ended up in the United States, where he settled with his wife, Roxane Whittier Pollock. There he found his own language and immersed himself in the local art scene. His first solo exhibition at the Galería Juana Mordó in 1964, in Madrid, the fact that he settled in Spain with his family for three years and his friendship with the informalist painters of the Cuenca group represented, in the mid-60s, Guerrero's decisive reencounter with his home country. He returned to the United States in the 70s, and his presence notably increased in the social and artistic circles of Spain. His work forms part of the collection of international museums as important as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York). The José Guerrero Centre was created in Granada in 2003 with the aim of conserving, displaying

of Fine Arts of Houston in 1964. On the other hand, the impact of Franz Kline —who Guerrero met, precisely in 1958— is clear in the gestures of long, thick and vibrant brushstrokes which cross some of his paintings, such as for example *The Followers* (c. 1960) or *El paño de Verónica (The Veil of Veronica)* (c. 1966), and, in some cases, such as *Cruce (Crossing)* (1962-1963), may also recall Willem de Kooning.

In one of the writings conserved in the Archivo José Guerrero, which is reproduced in the catalogue, the artist discusses Rothko's revealing visit to his first exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1954. The encounter was decisive in his abandonment of experimentation with the techniques of architectural painting and in his exploration of what he considered to be "pure painting", as can be seen in the artist's unpublished manuscript "New York", that we are presenting in the document display case of this show. From then until 1963, Betty Parsons, marchand for figures such as Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Clifford Still, regularly displayed his works, in both group and solo exhibitions.

and disseminating part of his private collection, in addition to promoting contemporary art and culture.

#### Mayoral

Art gallery specialised in Post-War Spanish art founded in Barcelona in 1989. In November 2019, Mayoral opened a second venue in Paris. The gallery articulates an exhibition programme focused on Catalan and Spanish artists such as Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, Manolo Millares, Antonio Saura, José Guerrero, Fernando Zóbel, Pablo Palazuelo, Rafael Canogar, Manuel Rivera and Juana Francés. At the same time, the gallery also exhibits the work of key twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as Miró and Picasso.

Mayoral 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 Hong Kong, Art Basel Miami, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York Fall y Spring, Frieze New York and ARCOmadrid.