INTANGIBLES

Chillida
Blanchard
Delvaux
Gris
Magritte
Matta
Pablo Ruiz Picasso
Tàpies
Torres García

A DIGITAL EXHIBITION
BY THE TELEFÓNICA COLLECTION
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Internet, the social networks, smartphones, apps, selfies, virtual reality, big data, artificial intelligence... technology has changed the world, our vision of it and our vision of ourselves.

Art has changed too. Technology has expanded its possibilities, from access and knowledge dissemination to the way in which art is created and produced, shared, displayed and interpreted, and present-day viewing of a past creation should take into account this change of social paradigm. The project Intangibles. A digital experience by the Telefónica Collection aims to explore the possibilities and the impact of technology on art and how we look at it, feel it and interpret it. And how we learn about it, of course. Taking some of the key works in the Telefónica Collection as our inspiration, we have created a digital experience exhibition that will be showcased simultaneously for the next few months in Latin America and Germany. A digital experience of the selected artists’ works will give visitors to the exhibitions held in Madrid, Mexico City, Bogotá, Lima, Quito, Santiago de Chile, Mar del Plata, Montevideo and Berlin the chance to share and exchange their impressions in real time, via the Intangible World Map specially created for the exhibition.

The innovative nature of Intangibles lies not only in how it approaches and investigates new visual narratives for the Telefónica Collection...
In connecting eight different cities in real time, but also in the prominent role played by visitors, which was part of the project since the original idea was conceived. Opinions of potential visitors and experts in the field were incorporated via the tools and methodology used in its design, i.e. the Design Thinking method. A series of interviews and workshops involving different visitor profiles allowed us to define the experiences and technologies best suited to each artist and their works. A selection of the audiovisual material used in this process is on display in the exhibition hall.

A digital experience of a work of art can never fully substitute the original, and that is obviously not the aim of Intangibles. However, when technology is placed at the service of culture it can enhance the sensations created by art, arouse different emotions, challenge spectators and get them actively involved and, particularly, open up new channels of knowledge about the artists and their work, which is basically our goal.
Is it possible to have an art exhibition without the physical works of art? Is it possible to get excited without seeing the artistic object itself? What other kind of experiences can a digitally exhibited work of art provide?

These and other questions are the basis for Intangibles. A Digital Exhibition from the Telefónica Collection, an innovative and experimental project created as a response to the challenge arising from the digital revolution and its unstoppable changes.

History has taught us that the irruption of a new technology produces profound transformations at all levels, and art is no exception. In 1947, in his book “The Museum without Walls”, André Malraux already proposed a novel way of grouping together a set of photographic images of some works of art, in the form of a museum collection, establishing a series of relationships between different periods and styles.

Photography allowed Malraux to propose this interesting exercise to relate a version of the history of art which was different from the traditional one.

After more than six decades, “The Museum without Walls” comes into effect in the face of the global paradigm shift which has been generated by the digital revolution. The explosion of images and digital relationships which we are immersed in every day is causing changes in the world of art, museums and exhibitions. Without a doubt, a door has been opened to try out other visual narratives to approach the exhibition of an art collection.

Contemporary society, defined as VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex
and Ambiguous), challenges us to put forward new perspectives on the digital stage, in an unstable world with ever changing rules.

In this context, and through the selection of some of the most important artists from the Telefónica Collection, the *Intangibles* exhibition will not feature the real works of the artists, but rather a digital proposal designed specifically for each one of them. The aim of the exhibition is to reflect on how the digital revolution has impacted the way of becoming familiar with art, its physical and sensory limits, its almost ubiquitous possibilities of reproducibility, and the fragility of certain traditional criteria and values.

In addition to being disruptive in terms of its concept, the project is a global one and transcends the space/time framework, with one of its strong points being simultaneity. Visitors from Madrid, Mexico City, Bogotá, Lima, Quito, Mar del Plata, Santiago de Chile, Montevideo and Berlin will be able to enjoy the digital experiences based on the selected artists and share and exchange their impressions in real time through the *Intangible World Map*, specifically designed for the exhibition.

The innovation of *Intangibles* is not only limited to its way of approaching and investigating new visual narratives on the Telefónica Collection, and how it connects 9 cities in real time, but also to the leading role that has been given to the audience, who have been present in the process since the idea arose.

The methodology used in the field of design – called *Design Thinking* – incorporates the voices of visitors and experts in the field. Through a series of interviews and workshops with people having different profiles, the most appropriate digital experiences have been defined for each of the artists and their works. A selection of audiovisual material from this entire process can be found in the exhibition room.
On the one hand, the exhibition proposes a route in which, visitors can immerse themselves in a painting by Paul Delvaux, feel as if they were inside a sculpture by Chillida or surround a material work by Tàpies. On the other hand, the exhibition is more participative and allows visitors to interact with the Cubism of Juan Gris and María Blanchard, to participate by automatically painting like Roberto Matta and to interpret the visual icons of Torres-García.

A digital experience on a work of art can never replace the original, and obviously, this is not the objective of Intangibles. However, technology at the service of culture can amplify the sensations that art produces in the viewer, generate different emotions, challenge the audience to actively participate and, above all, open up new avenues to knowledge about the artist and their work which, in short, is our purpose.
In 1907, the Salon d'Automne (Autumn Salon) in Paris paid tribute to Paul Cézanne, who had died the previous year, with a retrospective exhibition of his work. The painter had developed a series of complex techniques that “would turn impressionism into something solid and lasting”. In addition to emphasising the geometric structure of the forms, Cézanne had given up the classical perspective in order to paint the elements of the same composition from different points of view. In his last work, the tables and objects were depicted in incompatible angles, the fruit of a multiple and simultaneous gaze.

Two young visitors to the exhibition, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, were deeply impressed by this new way of depicting reality and they took it to the extreme in the years to follow. Cézanne’s influence was evident in Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (The Young Ladies of Avignon) by Picasso (1907) and in the L’Estaque series painted by Braque in 1908 which, according to a critic of the time, “reduced everything, the landscape, the figures and the houses, to geometric patterns, to cubes”. Cubism had been born, a radical interpretation of the pictorial tradition: the painting was no longer just an image, a representation of something external; it was an autonomous object. From 1909 onwards, Braque and Picasso began to explore this
direction together, increasingly distancing themselves from the represented motif in order to meet the compositional and intellectual needs of the picture according to this new way of understanding painting. They began to fracture objects into facets that reflected distinct perspectives, even overlapping one another; they reduced the palette to variations of greys and beiges and even made an effort to represent movement and time according to the theories of the philosopher Henri Bergson, who dissolved the barriers between the past, present and the future. Cubism was the first conceptual movement in the history of art. For the first time, the representative function of the painting, its reference to reality, was subordinate to the artist’s ideas.

Georges Braque stated: “What attracted me in particular—and became the main direction in Cubism—was the materialisation of this new space that I perceived. So I began to paint chiefly still lifes, because in nature there is a tactile space, I would say almost manual space [...]. For me that expressed the desire I have always had to touch a thing, not just to look at it. It was that space that attracted me strongly, for that was the earliest Cubist painting – the quest for space. Colour only played a minor role”. Cubism was, in effect, a conceptual movement, derived or abstracted in some way from nature, which gave priority to form over colour. But not just to any form, but to one that explored new ways of representing the three-dimensionality of space, a far cry from the Renaissance perspective.
Cubism was a very intellectualised and technically difficult movement. Heir to the new perceptive psychology of the 19th century, it encompassed the contemporary questioning of our senses, a challenge to the reliability of our perception that was a main current of 20th-century philosophy and science: what the eye perceived was considered an optical illusion that could not entirely be trusted. The Cubist painter captured changing perspectives and depicted, for example, a table from above, from the side or from below, as if from the viewpoint of a man standing, seated and crouching were united in the same plane. Forms, flattened and deprived of volume, were decomposed and reassembled on the canvas in a forced and fragmented manner.

Between 1910 and 1912, Cubism developed its analytical phase and the objects depicted began to divide into smaller and smaller parts, much like the facets of a crystal. The result of this methodology was a multiple surface, painted in neutral tones in which objects seemed to explode into a space that surpassed their three-dimensionality by offering all possible perspectives simultaneously, thus incorporating a new factor in painting: time. The art critic Maurice Raynal concluded in his essay ¿Qué es el cubismo?, in 1913: “This is precisely the law that Cubists have adopted, extended, and codified, under the title of the fourth dimension”.

Analytic Cubism, centred on the observation of the object and the attempt to depict it in a more rational than illusionist way, gave way to a synthetic phase, in which objects were
once again recognisable, the colour palette was extended and spatial experimentation incorporated new techniques such as collage.
Surrealism was one of the greatest cultural revolutions in contemporary history, an attitude opposed to the establishment that, from literature and the visual arts of its Parisian epicentre, spread to places as distant as Egypt, Japan and Mexico and filtered into popular culture thanks to film and fashion. Its great discovery was to restore the creative power of imagination, the only possible link between reason and the subconscious. “The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface […] there is every reason to seize them […] then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason”, wrote the Parisian poet André Breton in his First Manifesto on Surrealism in 1924.

Surrealism was defined as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express […] the actual functioning of thought […] in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” It was linked to a previous radical avant-garde movement, Dadaism, which had already replaced decision-making within the creative process with automatism; it was also inspired by the literary and poetic tradition of the Marquis de Sade and the Count of Lautréamont but, undoubtedly, the discoveries of Sigmund Freud were decisive in the surrealist ideology.
The father of psychoanalysis considered that neuroses were caused by desires and memories relegated to the unconscious, and that resources such as the interpretation of dreams or the free association of ideas could liberate them. During World War I, André Breton had come into contact with psychoanalysis while volunteering on the front lines and believed in the potential of the unconscious to regenerate culture after the war. For him, it was surprising how little society paid attention to dreams, giving priority to events lived in a state of wakefulness. Through surrealism, Breton wanted to create a supra-reality capable of connecting the two states.

Thus, surrealist works were the product of the unconscious mind released from its bonds by means of diverse techniques, all of them inspired to a greater or lesser extent by automatic writing and the stream of consciousness. Max Ernst, René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico evoked desires repressed in scenes of dream-like, sometimes hallucinogenic realism; Salvador Dalí called his works “hand-painted dream photographs”; Joan Miró painted biomorphic forms instinctively, and André Masson poured sand onto his canvases. Roberto Matta set out to depict “psychological morphologies”, a direct translation of the product of his imagination.

In the words of the critic Maurice Nadeau, humour was the god who “Breton and his friends venerated”, an essential creative resource for expressing the dissidence of the
surrealist movement. The humour of the surrealists was dark, trying to reconcile their yearning for action and play with the constant expression of their opposition to bourgeois conventions. Examples can be found in the “idiots’ dinners” organised by the members of the movement, who competed to bring the stupidest guest to the evening.

Surrealism was a literary movement that reached its zenith in artistic expressions. The movement’s poets and painters had a common denominator: the free appropriation of language and the construction of new meanings governed by impulse and beauty, a counterpoint to the norm and coherence.
Informalism is one of the most ambiguous and widespread terms used in the art world since the second half of the 20th century. Its theoretical origins are to be found in the adjective used by the French artist Georges Mathieu to designate a form of painting capable of detaching itself from any form of meaning in order to give absolute protagonism to the material identity of the painting, to its plastic elements. Following an exhibition held in Paris in November 1951, the critic Michel Tapié coined the term “art informel” to describe the work of the artists on display: Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux, Georges Mathieu, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Jaroslav Serpan. Although not all of them resorted to abstraction, all of their works had a common denominator: the withdrawal of meaning and the placement of value on the medium and materials, of their capacity for expression, above and beyond the content, form or composition of the paintings. In the words of Tapié, “the point of departure point is the surface is to bring alive [...] and the first stroke of colour or ink that one lays on it: the resulting effect, the resulting adventure. It is this stroke, the degree to which one enriches it and gives it direction, that shapes the work”. Informalism therefore spoke to us of the predominance of matter over form, of chance and improvisation over intent.
This “informal” new trend arose after the enormous moral impact of the Second World War, which interrupted the artistic experimentations of the initial avant-garde. Starting in 1945, art sought subjective forms of expression to redefine the human condition, which had been forsaken after the conflict and the coming to terms with the Holocaust. If in the United States Abstract Expressionism came to a fore as an impulsive and subjective overhaul of European codes, on the other side of the Atlantic a non-figurative art triumphed, yet charged with depth and meaning through the use of the artist’s own materials, signs and gestures. If Abstract Expressionism was a new and independent art form, generated in a flourishing nation that came to capitalise the art world after the war, Informalism was the art of a Europe in mourning, well-aware of its collapse and clinging to a new philosophical framework: existentialism.

Informalism integrates a great diversity of material and gestural tendencies, such as French Tachism, characterised by the use of colour stains in a spontaneous and automatic way, or Italian Spatialism, interested in depicting movement and space, thus highlighting the three-dimensionality of the painting. In Spain, during the decades following the Civil War, new artistic trends arrived late, distorted or particularised by the historical-cultural conditions of the dictatorship. The reception of Informalism began in 1957 thanks to the writings of Juan Eduardo Cirlot, who included in its meaning any form of abstract art that did not have a standard-based, analytical or simply geometric character. In the Catalan context, with
figures such as Modest Cuixart, Albert Ràfols Casamada, Josep Guinovart and in particular Antoni Tàpies, Informalism opted for materials and symbols as the core focus of a way of painting that aspired to transmit the essence through primitive elements.
Chillida
Blanchard
Delvaux
Gris
Magritte
Matta
Pablo Ruiz Picasso
Tàpies
Torres García
I understand almost nothing and my movements are clumsy, but space is beautiful, silent, perfect. I understand almost nothing, but I share blue and yellow and the wind (...). Is the limit not the true protagonist of space, just as the present—also a limit—is the protagonist of time?

Eduardo CHILLIDA

Homenaje a la mar III

1984

51 × 69 × 100 cm

Alabaster
Eduardo Chillida is one of the greatest abstract sculptors in post-war Europe. Born in San Sebastian in 1924, he first was the goalkeeper of his football team, Real Sociedad, until an injury made him seek out new horizons. After having started a degree in architecture in Madrid, he went on to give up his studies to devote himself exclusively to drawing and sculpture from the 1940s onwards. During a stay in Paris, he would discover the pure lines and treatment of the void in the archaic sculpture of the Louvre Museum, and also strike up a friendship with the painter and sculptor Pablo Palazuelo. Both would influence his rejection of stone and figurative sculpture. Returning to his home town, in 1951 he began to work as an apprentice in a forge in the city of Hernani, a traditional ironworking town.
Artists such as Julio González, Pablo Gargallo and Picasso had managed to unite the old Spanish blacksmith tradition with the spirit of modernity. In 1930, González demonstrated with his *Don Quixote* that a figure could be constituted by enveloping the void in iron. A concept—the void opposed to volume—that was to be of utmost importance to Chillida from the 1950s onwards. Although there was a considerable amount of sculptural work in iron and steel in that period, notably from the likes of the American David Smith or the British Anthony Caro, Chillida revealed the expressive qualities of iron like no other sculptor in the twentieth century. The metal was melted and hammered, cut and welded; it was malleable, dynamic and resistant. Both its aesthetic characteristics and the rough gestures involved in working with it seemed appropriate in a time when Spanish and European society were seeking to rebuild their respective identities after the Civil War and the Second World War.

Between 1954 and 1966, Eduardo Chillida produced seventeen versions of *Anvil of Dreams*, a work that exalts a mythical and ancestral trade, that of the blacksmith, through the combination of the rough wood pedestal and the sharp forms and aerial volume of iron. The Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz said about this sculpture that “the anvil acquires the properties of a dream and […] is transformed into its opposite and thus becomes a vacant space again”.

In 1968, Chillida met the philosopher Martin Heidegger at an art gallery in St. Gallen, Switzerland. At that time, the German
theorised about the intrinsic relationship between the work and space, the concept that the Basque sculptor was putting into practice. The following year, they published together Art and Space, a philosophical and artistic response to the questions they shared: Is space the origin of the work of art? What value do the surroundings have? How do creations occupy the void? A review of this book, and the whole of Chillida’s work, make patent that the sculptor’s main purpose was always to make space visible.

The sculptures of The Wind Comb are placed so that they seem to emerge from the rock itself, forming part of it.
“I consider my work bound to this earth and, therefore, open to the universal; you have to be from somewhere and have deep roots into the earth in order to open up to the world”. Eduardo Chillida always felt a strong bond with his native Basque Country, a nexus he expressed through the materials, forms and the way he sculpted his works; an attempt to formulate an identity closely linked to his immediate surroundings, to later open it to the world.

Chillida Leku is a unique museum, created as a huge work of art in itself.
In addition to taking up the blacksmith tradition of his land and the materials native to it, Chillida maintained a constant dialogue with nature in the Basque Country, defined by the abrupt coastline of the Cantabrian Sea, its forests and a darkness that so contrasted with the light of the Mediterranean. In the mid-sixties, Chillida discovered the luminous qualities of marble sculpture and architecture in Greece, an inspiration that turned him to the use of a new material: “Alabaster is a material in which you can get light to incredibly manifest itself in its edges”. Chillida wanted to confront the “white light of the Greeks” with the “black light” of the Cantabrian. In *Homage to the Sea III*, the sculptor cuts through the interior space of an alabaster block. By digging the material, he creates cavities like small caverns on a cliff as white as foam.

In 1976, Chillida completed a series of works that brought monumental status to his exploration into the void and space, creating a direct relationship between sculpture and the Basque landscape. His famous combs of the wind are three sculptures located on a rocky outcrop of San Sebastián, which create a dialogue with the spray, wind and waves. In them, the void, the vision of the sea framed by steel, is as important as the poetic interaction of this material with the landscape. Nature becomes an element that intervenes in sculpture, becoming an integral part of it, making for one of the most outstanding achievements of Chillida’s work.
Chillida dreamt of emptying the magical mountain of Tindaya, in Fuerteventura, an ambitious, controversial and unfinished project that sought to put an end to his eternal confrontation between space and the void: “I had an intuition, which I
sincerely believed to be utopian. Within a mountain, create an interior space that could be offered to men of all races and colours, a great sculpture for tolerance”.

The relationship between art and nature was also fundamental in the project Chillida Leku, or the place of Chillida. The artist wanted “to find a space where my sculptures could rest and people would walk among them as if through a forest”. On this occasion, it was not a utopian dream. In 1983 in Hernani, a few kilometres from San Sebastián, he acquired a ruined 16th-century farmhouse surrounded by an eleven-hectare garden dotted with beeches, oaks and magnolias. He and his wife remodelled the place over the years to turn it into a space of true communion between art and the nature of their land. Today, the Chillida Leku is one of the most unique museums in Europe, in itself a great work of art. The sculptures are integrated into the landscape as if they had always been part of it, and Chillida under one of the magnolia trees in his garden.
DELVAUX

PAUL
My painting refers only to itself (…) any kind of interpretation can be projected on it (…) but don’t ask me if that’s what I set out to do (...). Don’t ask me, for example, if I wanted my characters to symbolise incommunication, or if the women – who certainly rule my work – have some kind of superiority (…) I don’t know (...) My motivations are, first and foremost, artistic.

Paul DELVAUX
L’Appel
1944
Oil on canvas
165.5 x 170.6 cm
In 1904, at only seven years of age, Paul Delvaux became captivated by the skeletons hanging from the walls of his primary school’s biology classroom, an obsession that never left him. Between 1940 and 1942, he had the opportunity to study the skeletons of the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels, turning them into recurrent figures in his unique pictorial iconography. The animated depiction of the skeleton, brought to life and acting as a counterpoint to the female figures that populate his paintings, represented a reworking of a classic motif, present in the medieval *danse macabre*, the Baroque *vanitas* or more carnival-like depictions of...
the expressionist painters that Delvaux admired, such as James Ensor. However, if we look for the origin of the main allegories and the strange atmosphere of Delvaux's scenes, it is undoubtedly worth mentioning the visit he made in 1930 to the Foire du Midi in Brussels, where he discovered the strange Dr. Spitzner museum. Delvaux himself accurately described this fairground attraction: “A hut draped in red curtains and on each side [...] a picture painted in around 1880. On one side was Dr. Charcot, who presented a hysterical woman in a trance before an audience of scholars and learned men. This painting was impressive because it was realistic. In the middle, at the entrance to the museum, there was a woman, the cashier; then, on one side, there was the skeleton of a man and a skeleton of an ape, and on the other side, a reproduction of a pair of Siamese twins. Inside, there was a rather theatrical yet horrific series of anatomical wax moulds depicting the trials and tribulations of syphilis, its deformations. And all that there, in the midst of the ongoing joy of the fair... I must say that it left a deep imprint on my life for quite some time”.

From this experience seem to emerge most of the iconic characters of Delvaux’s paintings: the skeleton, the scientist, the double and the woman, or rather, certain archetypes of woman that he would obsessively depict in his canvases: hieratic and sculptural figures, erotic idealisations devoid of their life breath that seems to have been usurped by the skeletons. In *L'Appel*, we see a half-nude Virgin in the foreground, framed by the depiction of what appear to
Replica of the Venus de Milo at the National Gallery of Slovenia.
be courtesans. On the left, the first nude Venus, perhaps inspired by the “hysterical” women studied by Dr. Charcot, extends her arms. The background of the painting combines two other classical depictions—a seated Venus and a Venus de Milo—with a disturbing group of identical women who burst in from the right in martial step. In the centre is a woman dressed in a black jersey (perhaps inspired by the costume worn by the actress Musidora in Louis Feuillade’s film Les Vampires, a true cult film for surrealists) and topped by a hat with feathers, a figure that the critics relate to Delvaux’s own mother. All these archetypal women pose or wander in a Neoclassical space inspired by the painter’s travels to Rome, under a metallic, unreal light. Delvaux’s painting is often associated with a “sinister” concept developed by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud: the horror, the shock caused by the things that swarm around us, those that are more familiar and that, suddenly, generate strangeness and escape our control.

—A BELGIAN SURREALIST

Paul Delvaux was born a year before René Magritte, the other Belgian classic surrealist. His encounter with him was as decisive as the one he had with the painting of Giorgio de Chirico, the greatest exponent of Italian metaphysical painting, a post-Futurism current that aspired to capture
melancholic, solitary and disturbing spaces: a response of stillness and silence to the dynamism of the futurists. De Chirico painted classical spaces inspired by the Italian past, in the squares of Ferrara, Turin and Florence, and populated them with sculptures, faceless figures and objects with no apparent meaning. At times, he painted trains, trams and stations, a reminder of his father, a train driver, motifs directly taken up by Delvaux in his works. Both René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico focused on repressed memories and desires, painting dreamlike works of a realism that was only apparent. Sexuality took on that sinister hue
described by Freud in his works, materialised in female-mannequins, masks and enigmatic and disjointed figures. Undoubtedly, the influence of both painters was decisive for Paul Delvaux and converged in his decision to create dream-like paintings that connected him with the surrealist movement, even though he did not officially belong to the circle created by André Breton.

Surrealism, founded by the French poet in 1924 and described as “pure psychic automatism” spread from France to the whole world and became one of the most radical and influential avant-garde movements of the 20th century. Heirs of psychoanalysis, surrealist writers and artists sought to access repressed mental territories and liberate the unconscious from logic and reason. From 1935 onwards, Paul Delvaux approached surrealism, but he developed a personal, absolutely idiosyncratic language, a search for estrangement and “poetic shock” based on the choreographed arrangement of unconnected figures in classically-inspired spaces in which air does not seem to flow. In 1936, Delvaux exhibited his works together with Magritte at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, and two years later he took part in the International Surrealism Exhibition organised by André Breton and Paul Éluard in Paris. Breton, likely fascinated by the Belgian painter’s female iconography, said: “Delvaux has made the universe the empire of a woman, always the same woman, who rules over the inner suburbs” of the heart. Delvaux’s women share with the muses of surrealism their distant sexuality,
disturbed and threatening, their objectification, their Freudian links with the maternal figure, their unattainable nature. Delvaux’s women are, in short, _femmes fatales_, a somewhat fearful depiction of the new woman who emerged after the First World War, a woman who is little by little becoming aware of her social role, her ability to work, her sexuality and her possible independence.
Cézanne made a cylinder from a bottle. I take the cylinder as a basis to create a special kind of individual object. I make a bottle—a special kind of bottle—from a cylinder.

Juan Gris, (1921), response to questionnaire circulated to the Cubists by Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, editors of L’Esprit Nouveau # 5 (February 1921), pp. 533-534
Juan GRIS

La chanteuse

1926

92 x 65 cm

Oil on canvas

Juan GRIS

La fenêtre aux collines

1923

Oil on canvas

73 x 92.5 cm
In 1907, the Salon d’Automne (Autumn Salon) in Paris paid tribute to Paul Cézanne, who had died the previous year, with a retrospective exhibition of his work. The painter had developed a series of complex techniques that “would turn Impressionism into something solid and lasting”. In addition to emphasising the geometric structure of the shapes, Cézanne had abandoned the classical perspective in order to paint elements of the same composition from different perspectives. In his last work, the tables and objects were depicted in incompatible angles, the fruit of a multiple and simultaneous gaze.

Two young visitors to the exhibition, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, were deeply impressed by this new way of depicting reality and they took it to the extreme in the years to follow. Cézanne’s influence was

—“ARITHMETIC VALUES MUST BE GIVEN TO THAT ALGEBRAIC EQUATION THAT IS THE PAINTING”
@JuanGris

Juan Gris selfportrait, 1912.
evident in Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (The Young Ladies of Avignon) by Picasso (1907) and in the L’Estaque series painted by Braque in 1908 which, according to a critic of the time, “reduced everything, the landscape, the figures and the houses, to geometric patterns, to cubes”. Cubism had been born, a radical interpretation of the pictorial tradition: the painting was no longer just an image, a representation of something external; it was an autonomous object. From 1909 onwards, Braque and Picasso began to explore this direction together, increasingly distancing themselves from the represented motif in order to meet the compositional and intellectual needs of the picture according to this new way of understanding painting. They began to fracture objects into facets that reflected distinct perspectives, even overlapping one another; they reduced the palette to variations of greys and beiges and even made an effort to represent movement and time according to the theories of the philosopher Henri Bergson, who dissolved the barriers between the past, present and the future. Cubism was the first conceptual movement in the history of art. For the first time, the representative function of the painting, its reference to reality, was subordinate to the artist’s ideas.

Although his contributions to Cubism were forgotten by the 1930s and were not properly considered until more recently, the Spaniard, Juan Gris was undoubtedly the movement’s third most important painter. Having settled in Paris in 1906, Gris began painting in 1911. After a brief Cezannian period, he took to Cubism with a very personal
vision, straying from the somewhat cryptic austerity of his counterparts. His compositions were as or even more severe as those of Braque and Picasso, but he did not want to give up colour, which he mastered, and he applied it with a lively and varied palette. In many of his works he used the golden ratio, a system of classical proportions, combined with a modular structure that lent greater geometric strength to the painting, without deconstructing the objects. Juan Gris remembered his frequent visits to the Prado Museum as a
youngster in Madrid as well as his time at the School of Arts and Industries, where he received a scientific education: the study of the old masters and an interest in mathematics converged in his particular implementation of the Cubist precepts.

If the canvases from 1910 to 1912 could be considered analytical, from 1912 and fundamentally thanks to the contributions of Juan Gris, Cubism instigated the development of its synthetic period. After decomposing reality into a puzzle of monochrome shapes, Cubist canvases regained their colour, reduced the number of facets and began to acquire volume thanks to the collage techniques (the incorporation of fabric, scraps of newspaper and mixed elements). In his 1924 discourse *De las posibilidades de la pintura* (On the possibilities of painting), Gris stated that “a picture is a synthesis, just as all architecture is synthetic” as opposed to analytical art, which he considered “the very negation of art”.

—THE ARTIST’S SURNAME, GRIS MEANS GREY BUT THERE WAS NOTHING GREY ABOUT HIM

One of the first theoreticians of Cubism, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, considered the work of Juan Gris as a version “too strict and lacking with regards scientific cubism” of
Picasso; a “profoundly intellectualist art in which colour has only a symbolic significance”. This view of Gris as an ascetic painter prevailed until more recent critics reviewed his pictorial evolution, his writings and his biography, which more than qualify Apollinaire’s statements.

Although it is true that the painter’s methodology had implacable accuracy, fruit of a mathematical and architectural conception of painting, in his writings Gris appealed to emotion, to play, to the spectacular nature of art: “a performance is comparable to a card trick. The cards are the elements that make up the trick. He who has been moved by performance has been so because the layout of the cards, of the elements, has changed for him.”

Gris was also a passionate defender of colour. His first Cubist incursions fled from the monochromatic tendency of Picasso and Braque, with pink, green and blue hues that subtly illuminated the compositions, as can be seen in the 1913 painting *Verres, journal et bouteille de vin* (Cups, Newspaper and Bottle of Wine). Over the years, he gradually liberated his palette until he reached the chromatic richness of the 1920s, which denotes a particularly audacious, even strident use of colour, as in the red dress of *La chanteuse* (The Singer). Both the vindication of colour and the use of certain motifs alien to the traditional still life, such as the open window, gave a breath of fresh air to the movement. Gris would say he used a “deductive method” which consisted not in making the bottle a cylinder like Paul Cézanne, but in
making a cylinder a bottle, that is, obtaining the figure from abstraction. His method, apparently scientific, incorporated a poetic resource which he called “plastic rhyme”, a pattern of movement that he applied to the contour of certain objects until they rhymed. In La fenêtre aux collines (Open Window
with Hills), the spiral shapes of the railing, the horizon line, the folds of the curtain, the relief of the glass and the strings of the violin merge into a rhythmic cadence that moves away from the strict cubist composition and to approach music. 

Musicality is another of the characteristics frequently related to Gris’s work, where musical instruments play a prominent role in no less than one hundred and fifty paintings. His art dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, even compared some of his works with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, defining his style as polyphonic and improvised. And, although it is true that the artist never recognised such inspiration, even going so far as to declare that he understood nothing of music, several of his friends were musicians and nobody in his group doubted his sense of rhythm, because he was an enthusiastic amateur of the dances in the Paris of the roaring twenties. Juan Gris and his wife Josette danced the foxtrot, the shimmy, the Charleston and the tango (the dances in fashion at the time) so well that they received awards for them.
TORRES GARCÍA

—JOAQUÍN—
The artist is a creator of symbols, because the symbolic form is not only something within a rational structure: it is also of the soul and of matter, and it arises already formed, as a single piece, acquiring a kind of magical value and acting on our spiritual sensitivity, directly and with no need for readings or interpretation.

Joaquín TORRES GARCÍA
*Constructivo en blanco y negro «TBA»*
1933
Oil on wood
57,7 × 33 cm
Born in Uruguay in 1874, Joaquín Torres-García is one of Latin America’s most important artists. Painter and illustrator, he was also a theoretician and professor, a dedication to the thought he systematised through his artistic production.

In 1891, the Torres-García family emigrated to Spain. Joaquín was educated in Barcelona, at the Academy of Fine Art and the Baixas Academy, but he soon embarked on an independent path, straying far from academicism and Neoclassical art. The artists’ gatherings of the Cercle de Sant Lluc and Els Quatre Gats and the inspiration of Toulouse-Lautrec, which led him to collaborate as an illustrator in several publications, were important in his self-education. By the beginning of the 20th century, Torres-García had become a prestigious painter and muralist, adhering to Catalan Modernisme and later recognised as one of the main representatives of Noucentisme. Together with
the architect Antoni Gaudí, he designed the stained-glass windows for the Palma de Mallorca Cathedral and the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

A commission in 1913 for the murals of the Sant Jordi Hall of the Palau de la Generalitat, vilified by critics, led him to move to Terrassa, where he built the villa Mon Repòs (My Rest) and created the Escola de Decoració, beginning his theoretical career with the publication of his Notas sobre arte (Notes on Art) and Diálegs (Dialogues). From then on, a more personal pictorial stage would begin, with geometric compositions that anticipated his later constructivist style. After a stay in New York, in 1928 he settled in Paris, where he met Piet Mondrian, who had a decisive influence on his work, and he founded the abstract and constructivist art group Cercle et Carré.

In 1934, after a sixteen-month period in Madrid during which he executed the work Constructivo en blanco y negro “TBA” (Constructive in black and white “TBA”), Torres-García returned to Uruguay and devoted the rest of his life to building bridges between the European avant-garde and Latin America thanks to the development of constructive universalism, a movement that gestated, theorised and developed through the Constructive Art Association and the Torres-García Workshop. The artist believed in a universal unitary order, governed by harmonic laws that he wanted to apply to art, whose function was to “build in accordance with a rule, in order to bring the work to perfect unity”. Constructive Universalism combines the influence of
European geometric abstraction and South American, pre-Hispanic cultures in an attempt to create a form of universal expression from a visual language systematised through two elements: geometry and symbols. The artist himself explained it this way: “For me, there can be no greater conviction than this: first the structure, then the geometry, then the sign, finally the spirit, and always geometry”.

His ideas about art as a language capable of expressing man’s understanding of the universe, with the cosmic order, are evident in two of the most important works of his later period, the Monumento cósmico (Cosmic Monument), a granite piece erected in Rodó Park in Montevideo, and the publication Universalismo Constructivo (Constructive Universalism), his largest and most important theoretical work.
—RENÉ MAGRITTE
(...) The conception of a painting— that is, the idea— is not visible in the painting: an idea cannot be seen by the eyes.(...)

René MAGRITTE
La Belle Société
1965–66
Oil on canvas
81 × 65 cm
In 1926, René Magritte created a figure that he would obsessively reuse in the 1950’s and would not abandon until his death in 1967, one year after finishing *La Belle Société*. It is a faceless gentleman dressed in a dark coat, white shirt and tie, topped with a bowler, the personal favourite of the painter himself.

This masculine figure, often considered Magritte’s *alter ego*, abounds in his interest in hidden, veiled or absent faces. It is a recognisable, constant and impersonal effigy, with which the observer first identifies, then becomes unnerved by. The figure is represented in a variety of ways: from behind, hidden behind a floating apple, cloned in the form of rain or as a mere silhouette: thanks to these essentially surrealistic strategies, the painter

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Charles Chaplin in the silent film *The Kid*, released in 1921.
dehumanises the character in order to turn it into a container open to new meanings. Once again, Magritte applies a poetic resource to articulate his particular language of images.

In *La Belle Société*, the gentleman with a bowler is a double and partially superimposed silhouette; a window opens to two disparate and incomplete landscapes. The man in a bowler hat is both the author and the observer, portrait and landscape; an unfinished circularity that offers no answers, but provides new territories for dreaming. The strangeness occurs in that playful sliding between the real, the apparent and the unusual.

Magritte’s gentleman in a bowler hat is rightly associated with Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*, an unfinished yet enormously influential novel after its publication in the inter-war period. Its main character, Ulrich, embodies the crisis of rationalism and the chaotic and paradoxical character of modernity: “A figure is also said to be an image. And one could also say that an image is a figure, but neither of the two is equal. And precisely because it belongs to a world ordered not according to equality, but according to figuration, one can explain the force of substitution, the imposing effect of dark imitations and few similarities...”. In the words of historian Philipp Blom, Ulrich is the “an impassive chronicler of the world’s follies and his own”. Although this educated reference offers a possible interpretation, it is likely that Magritte’s man without qualities was directly inspired by a cinematographic character who was enormously popular in his time, and
especially acclaimed by the avant-garde: The Tramp. For Dadaists and Surrealists, Chaplin’s character was an anti-bourgeois icon who, in addition to altering and ridiculing the standard attire of the gentleman (suit, tie, bowler hat, cane), was capable of generating extraordinary events from a desired or involuntary resistance to banality. The bowler was a perfectly identifiable attribute linked to the Tramp, undoubtedly the character who best spoke of the world’s follies through his own. In the same way, the bowler was a symbol of male orthodoxy that could be given new meaning by being closely linked to the imaginary and public image of a surrealist painter. Of all the elements that make up René Magritte’s iconography, the bowler hat is the most recognisable and represents an immediate link between the author’s idiosyncrasy and his iconography.

—“I LIKE THE SUBVERSIVE HUMOUR, THE FRECKLES, THE KNEES AND THE LONG HAIR OF WOMEN, THE LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN IN FREEDOM” @RÉNÉ MAGRITTE

The art historian Valeriano Bozal described irony as “the framework in which evidence is imbued with the best that modernity possesses: its ability to doubt”. By assuming art to be an autonomous language and not a mere imitation or substitution of reality, the avant-garde often incorporated doubt and query as the starting point for questioning the established order of things. Thus, irony, sarcasm and absurd or subversive humour became fundamental pillars of movements such as Dadaism and
Surrealism. By signing and exhibiting a urinal as a work of art, Marcel Duchamp ended up turning this irreverent action into such effective irony that it became one of the fundamental works of the 20th century.

In the words of the critic Maurice Nadeau, humour was the god who “Breton and his friends venerated”, an essential creative resource for expressing the dissidence of the surrealist movement. The humour of the surrealists was dark, trying to reconcile their yearning for action and play with the constant expression of their opposition to bourgeois conventions. Examples can be found in the “idiots’ dinners” organised by the members of the movement, who competed to bring the stupidest guest to the evening.

Magritte was a surrealist in his own right, admired and validated by the promoter of the movement, André Breton; however, the Belgian painter’s methodology was far different than that of his French counterparts. More systematic and cerebral, his sense of humour did not
seek to make an impact, rather provide visual shocks, the result of the unexpected encounter between things that have nothing in common. Magritte generated these illogical associations with a realistic but altered use of classical pictorial elements: figures, objects and backgrounds. Ambiguity, de-contextualisation and the permanent game between the referent and the loss they
produce in the observer of a subtle and longing confusion: whoever tries to understand one of Magritte’s works aspires to reveal its mysteries.

Magritte did not limit himself to the use of irony in the pictorial frame. His interest in poetic language culminated in a concrete, essentially surrealist action: it was not the painter but his friends who gave the works their titles. Another twist on his willingness to subvert conventional authorship and narrative. The “Beautiful Society” which the title of this work refers to can be interpreted in many ways, but also humorously: the adjective *haute* (high) is changed to *belle* (beautiful), and the painting no longer depicts high society embodied by the silhouette in a bowler hat, and begins to reflect the aspirations of evasion and beauty of the faceless man. Freed from its context and corset, the painter’s *alter ego* dreams of natural paradise.

Surrealism was a literary movement that reached its zenith in artistic expressions. The movement’s poets and painters had a common denominator: the free appropriation of language and the construction of new meanings governed by impulse and beauty, a counterpoint to the norm and coherence.
María BLANCHARD

*Nature morte cubiste*

1917

Oil on wood

90 × 80 × 8 cm
Her expression honours artistic value above all things, achieving great synthesis of form and great balance in her composition, although the main contribution made by cubism to her work is its transformation of her use of colour, enabling her to discover the ability to interpret moods.

María José Salazar, conservadora - jefe de colecciones en el Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.
Although the first Cubist exhibition took place in 1911 at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, the movement’s origins date back to the beginning of the decade. Led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, Cubism was inspired by the technique of the post-impressionist Paul Cézanne which involved including several points of view in the same composition. It was a radical avant-garde that nevertheless started from traditional genres such as landscapes or still lifes. Georges Braque stated: “What attracted me in...
particular—and became the main direction in Cubism—was the materialisation of this new space that I perceived. So I began to paint chiefly still lifes, because in nature there is a tactile space, I would say almost manual space [...]. For me that expressed the desire I have always had to touch a thing, not just to look at it. It was that space that attracted me strongly, for that was the earliest Cubist painting – the quest for space. Colour only played a minor role”.

Cubism was, in effect, a conceptual movement, derived or abstracted in some way from nature, which gave priority to form over colour. But not just to any form, but to one that explored new ways of representing the three-dimensionality of space, a far cry from the Renaissance perspective.

Cubism was a very intellectualised and technically difficult movement. Heir to the new perceptive psychology of the 19th century, it encompassed the contemporary questioning of our senses, a challenge to the reliability of our perception that was a main current of 20th-century philosophy and science: what the eye perceived was considered an optical illusion that could not entirely be trusted. The Cubist painter captured changing perspectives and depicted, for example, a table from above, from the side or from below, as if from the viewpoint of a man standing, seated and crouching were united in the same plane. Forms, flattened and deprived of volume, were decomposed and reassembled on the canvas in a forced and fragmented manner. Between 1910 and 1912, Cubism
developed its analytical phase and the objects depicted began to divide into smaller and smaller parts, much like the facets of a crystal. The result of this methodology was a multiple surface, painted in neutral tones in which objects seemed to explode into a space that surpassed their three-dimensionality by offering all possible perspectives simultaneously, thus incorporating a new factor in painting: time. The art critic Maurice Raynal concluded in his essay ¿Qué es el cubismo? (What is Cubism?), in 1913: “This is precisely the law that Cubists have adopted, extended, and codified, under the title of the fourth dimension”.

Analytic Cubism, centred on the observation of the object and the attempt to depict it in a more rational than illusionist way, gave way to a synthetic phase, in which objects were once again recognisable, the colour palette was extended and spatial experimentation incorporated new techniques such as collage. Maria Blanchard came into contact with Cubism in Paris in 1915 thanks to painters belonging to this more amiable phase of the movement, Juan Gris and Jacques Lipchitz. Her 1917 work Nature morte cubiste (Cubist Still Life) upholds an interest in the multiplicity of points of view, but the sieve, bottle and glass are recognisable and create a dialogue with one other and the space in which they are inserted thanks to an intelligent use of light and a colour clearly inspired by the palette of Juan Gris.
CUBISM IS NEITHER MASCULINE (NOR FEMININE)

In the Spanish version of the *Dictionnaire de la peinture moderne* published by Fernand Hazan in 1965 we can read the following: “Painter of children, María Blanchard casts a maternal spirit on their faces, at times interrogative, at times anxious, and none or very few of her canvases, despite giving the sensation of a calm and peaceful happiness, fail to betray a tenacious melancholy, whose roots, undoubtedly, are found in the painful life that the artist lived […]. Short, gibbous, in spite of her harsh destiny, María Blanchard knew how to avoid drowning in a desperate art; but her personal misfortune has given her the sentiment of grandeur and tragedy of everyday life, which, if it were not for her, would be almost totally absent in the art of her time”. In *Nature morte cubiste*, there are no children, no maternal spirit, no tenacious melancholy, nor does the "personal misfortune" of Blanchard seem to come through:
it is a Cubist still life. It would even be difficult to determine whether it was painted by a man or a woman, since the luminous palette of greys and pastels could be attributed to the influence of Juan Gris, although it is true that traditional critics considered that palette to be female, as opposed to the neutral and spare colours of other colleagues such as Picasso (the Picasso of his Cubist period, not the Picasso of his Pink period, who did use this supposedly female range of colours). The art history canon has omitted many artists, but when it has been impossible to omit them due to their relevance—especially when such relevance was endorsed by their professional colleagues, as was the case of Maruja Mallo or María Blanchard—their work has been approached from the exceptionalness of their feminine condition, attempting to interpret the plastic or conceptual qualities of their works from a biographical connection or looking for attributes of gender in the use of certain tonalities or in the search for values such as beauty or harmony.

María Blanchard, born in Santander and trained in Madrid by figurative painters of an academic tradition, moved to Paris in 1909 and discovered colour from her new masters, Hermonegildo Anglada Camarasa and Kees Van Dongen, and other relevant painters with whom she became friends, such as Diego Rivera. But it was thanks to Juan Gris, Jacques Lipchitz and particularly her mentor, the painter Maria Vassiliev, that Blanchard came into contact with Cubism, becoming interested in the experimental and cerebral character of this avant-garde movement.
According to the French philosopher Henri Bergson, women’s creative abilities were limited to biological reproduction; a woman could not abstract herself, making her unfit for the arts. In such an ideological context, Cubism, a movement with a strong theoretical bias, was considered eminently masculine, far removed from expressiveness, colour, emotion, delicacy and other qualities usually associated with femininity. Perhaps that is why Blanchard had to make great efforts not only to be admitted, but also to be respected and valued by her circle. Certainly, participating in an avant-garde movement in this period of collectivization in art was a good resource for women who wished to have access to an environment of exchange, stimulus, production, exhibition and recognition without their individual female condition preassigning them to failure. However, despite the prestige of her work, which was even exhibited at the famous Salon d'Antin in 1916, where Picasso unveiled *The Ladies of Avignon* for the first time, Blanchard fell into oblivion until she was rediscovered in 2012, thanks to two major exhibitions. Blanchard was not particularly fond of being seen in society and had few business skills. All this, added to the fact that her family decided to withdraw her work from the market after her death, condemned Blanchard to temporary oblivion, and to a excessively paternalistic reading of her work that should be revised in the twenty-first century.
MATTA

ROBERTO
I wish to express reality and everything that contradicts it within us, our inner life and its conflicts with the outside world, the distance that separates the inner self from the self that is seen, and I want to show the hurricane of doubts in our minds and the material evidence we relentlessly confront them with.

*Interview with Alain Jouffroy*, 1953, in the catalogue of the exhibition Matta, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 1983.
Roberto MATTA
*Psychological Morphology*
1938
Oil on canvas
71 × 91,5 cm
Surrealism was one of the greatest cultural revolutions in contemporary history, an attitude opposed to the establishment that, from literature and the visual arts of its Parisian epicentre, spread to places as distant as Egypt, Japan and Mexico and filtered into popular culture thanks to film and fashion. Its great discovery was to restore the creative power of imagination, the only possible link between reason and the subconscious. “The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface [...] there is every reason to seize them [...] then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason”, wrote the Parisian poet André Breton in his *First Manifesto on Surrealism* in 1924.

Surrealism was defined as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express [...] the actual functioning of thought [...] in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” It was linked to a previous radical avant-garde movement, Dadaism, which had already replaced decision-making within the creative process with automatism; it was also inspired by the literary and poetic tradition of...
the Marquis de Sade and the Count of Lautréamont but, undoubtedly, the discoveries of Sigmund Freud were decisive in the surrealist ideology.

The father of psychoanalysis considered that neuroses were caused by desires and memories relegated to the unconscious, and that resources such as the interpretation of dreams or the free association of ideas could liberate them. During World War I, André Breton had come into contact with psychoanalysis while volunteering on the front lines and believed in the potential of the unconscious to regenerate culture after the war. For him, it was surprising how little society paid attention to dreams, giving priority to events lived in a state of wakefulness. Through surrealism, Breton wanted to create a supra-reality capable of connecting the two states.

Thus, surrealist works were the product of the unconscious mind released from its bonds by means of diverse techniques, all of them inspired to a greater extent by the work of Sigmund Freud.
or lesser extent by automatic writing and the stream of consciousness. Max Ernst, René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico evoked desires repressed in scenes of dream-like, sometimes hallucinogenic realism; Salvador Dalí called his works “hand-painted dream photographs”; Joan Miró painted biomorphic forms instinctively, and André Masson poured sand onto his canvases. Roberto Matta set out to depict “psychological morphologies”, a direct translation of the product of his imagination.

—THE BRUSH OF THE PSYCHE

Born in Santiago, Chile and trained as an architect, Roberto Matta travelled to Paris in 1931 to work in the studio of the architect Le Corbusier. In 1934, during a stay in Spain, he met Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, on whose recommendation he was able to meet the leader of surrealism, André Breton. In 1938, he participated in the International Exhibition of Surrealism, a movement which he was linked with for ten years. That same year, Matta began experimenting with what he himself called “psychological morphologies”, a technique derived from automatism that he transferred to the painting to free the images of the subconscious beyond the dream-like depictions carried out by other counterparts of the movement such as Magritte and De Chirico.
Matta tried to explain his technique in the Parisian café Les Deux Magots, the usual meeting point for the surrealists, “with grandiloquent gestures and using the objects at hand”, before a dumbstruck André Bretón, who stated that he hadn’t understood a thing and asked the Chilean artist to write down his theories. In a subsequent text, Matta managed to formulate that “in the field of consciousness, a psychological morphology would be the graphic representation of ideas […]. A morphology of this type will be perceived when the eye and the conscience make the immediate and impulsive graphic images which the convulsive emotion of man will draw in a new art”. The theory was complex; it meant an attempt to depict on the canvas the most hidden images of the mind following the psychic automatism advocated by surrealism since his first Manifesto of 1924. Convinced,
André Breton, who had already taken an interest in the fantastic and subjective qualities of Matta’s previous drawings, came to define this way of painting as absolute automatism or abstract surrealism.

Matta’s morphologies are, in effect, a kind of figurative abstraction, illusory landscapes in which the organic and the inorganic intermingle, structured through vibrant strokes of colour in movement. His 1939 work *Psychological Morphology*, he contrasts the sky, cut by the horizon with a luminous colour space from which mysterious forms of saturated colours ascend. It is not possible to interpret the images clearly, although they do generate an organic sensation similar to that produced by real figures, perhaps internal organs of the human body distorted by a dream-filled mind.

—MORE THAN JUST SURREALIST, A REALIST FROM THE SOUTH

Roberto Matta left his native Chile in 1931. “Chile at that time was not the 20th century, it was more like the 17th or 18th century […]. Suddenly I left. I don’t know why I left; it would be ridiculous to think that I was aware of doing that. I left because felt like I needed air, so I disappeared». After his fruitful contact with Surrealism in Paris, his first host
city, in 1938 he moved to New York like many other artists did after the outbreak of World War II. In 1940 he held his first solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery, where he came into contact with young American painters such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell, who would later transform the avant-garde movement coming from Europe into new forms of expression. It is considered, in fact, that the influence of the Chilean painter was essential for the development of the so-called Abstract Expressionism. During 1941 he travelled to Mexico and got to know the work of the Mexican muralists, an inspiration that determined a change of format in his works, which became greater in size and grew monumental in character.

Starting in the 1950s, Roberto Matta began to get involved with political events and the social future of the world, a sentiment especially centred in Latin America, which intensified after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Matta participated in the 1968 Havana Congress of...
Culture, during which he announced his famous piece *La guerrilla interior* (The Inner Guerrilla). He also made an open commitment to the Chilean left-wing party, participating in various activities in support of the government of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s.

Deeply enthused by the possibility of giving art a “social function”, Matta stated: “What I want is an art that has been invented by society and is available for everyone to use […]. Art serves to provoke the intuition of the emotion latent in everything that surrounds us, and to show the emotional architecture that people need to exist and to live together.
I know that an artist will only be authentic if their work joins this two-way movement which consists of making and receiving from their people the consequence of the needs that they have detected in themselves and as an artist, and in giving this awareness of the intuition an essential notion that they use to expand their vision of reality."

In his work, Matta made his political commitment clear and his direct reference to contemporary events, deeply shaken by the effects of the Second World War and the Cold War. His canvases from this second stage revitalised surrealism by incorporating new forms, perhaps inspired by a modern technology that was capable of launching missiles or rockets into space. The human figure is surrounded by machines, tubes and capsules that in turn seem to come to life with apocalyptic visions of an uncertain future.
PABLO

RUIZ
PICASSO
The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from anywhere: the sky, the earth, a scrap of paper, a passing figure, a spider’s web (…)

Pablo Picasso was a painter, sculptor, ceramist, engraver, drawer. His creative activity extended over seventy-five years. His catalogue raisonné includes almost sixteen thousand works, although some researchers consider that his production exceeded forty-five thousand pieces. The proclamation of Picasso as the leading figure in modern art, as a cultural hero, extends over the entirety of his prolific trajectory, undoubtedly astonishing, but at times is something that prevents an accurate analysis of his creativity. Picasso probably embodies better than anyone the myth of the artistic genius, going back to the Renaissance through to modernity, a myth that he himself internalised and exalted in his work; a mythology (or mythomania) especially evident in his numerous self-portraits.

We can try to define Picasso’s work in its essence: all his production begins with the line, from the drawing; his mastery in this field is shown in all its splendour, and in real time, in the documentary film directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot in 1956, *Le mystère Picasso* (The Mystery of Picasso). His countless works deal with recurring themes and motifs: the painter, the woman as his model, bullfighting, mythological figures, bathers, still lifes, portraits and self-portraits. Despite being an experimental artist, responsible for the gestation of several avant-garde movements, Picasso
was first and foremost a renovator of tradition. His solid academic background and deep knowledge of the great masters of painting played a decisive role in his work. Creator of Cubism, the most radical of the avant-garde movements, he was also director of the Prado Museum, a temple of inspiration to which he constantly returned.

Throughout his creative stages, his Blue, Pink and Black periods, Cubism, Classicism, Surrealism and Expressionism, Picasso reflected on two great questions: art and self. That is why we can analyse his career by studying only his self-portraits, explicit or hidden behind metaphorical figures. Picasso painted his first self-portrait in 1896, at the age of fifteen, and the last one at the age of ninety, in 1972. Self-portrait is a transversal genre in Picasso’s work, beyond media (depicted on canvas, paper, ceramics, even in photography and cinema) and styles (Modernist, Primitivist, Cubist, Classicist or Expressionist). Precisely for this reason, Picasso transcended the limits of a classic genre such as self-portraiture to sublimate a key concept in art: self-depiction, or the artist as a metaphor; hence we find many self-portraits diluted in mythological figures, literary or artistic references (the Minotaur, the lover, the painter).

In the final years of his life, Picasso took an obsessive approach to the depiction of the painter and his model, and of the painter in his studio. From 1963 on there were hundreds of studies and paintings on an old subject, an absolute assimilation of his life’s work with the artistic
profession, an exercise of self-affirmation through the I, creator. *Le peintre au travail* (Painter at Work) reproduces a traditional composition: the painter’s self-portrait in the foreground, in profile, with the easel turned away from the viewer. His hat refers to two fundamental masters who also painted themselves in that guise: Rembrandt and Goya.

With this late painting, Picasso pays tribute to tradition with a great fanfare, placing himself as an artist in the line of the genius of the great masters and updating the canonical codes of painting thanks to his unique ability to paint with thought, rather than with vision.

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**THE LAST PICASSO**

In 1955, Pablo Picasso acquired the villa La Californie, a large bourgeois residence built on the hills overlooking Cannes, and he set up his studio on the top floor. During the years that followed, he painted numerous workshop scenes, depicting his workspace, the centre of his creative capacity. It could be said that, during the last twenty years of his life, Picasso painted painting itself. In addition to making extensive series of variations based on famous works in the history of art, such as *Women of Algiers* by Delacroix, *Las Meninas* (The Ladies-in-waiting) by Velázquez, Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (The Luncheon in the Grass) and *Bacchanal* by Poussin, Picasso concentrated on the depiction of his private sphere and returns time and again...
to the subject of the painter and his model. In this twofold exercise of reinterpreting the classics à la Picasso and reaffirming the creative self through the self-portrait in the studio, the artist reflects on his role and possible legacy. “What will the art world do when I am no longer? They’ll have to go over my dead body! They’ve no way of getting past it, have they?” Picasso said to the critic Pierre Cabanne.

Despite the return to the classics and the revision of his own work and his recurrent motifs, Picasso kept his avant-garde spirit intact and managed to generate a new aesthetic and formal revolution in his maturity.

In his book On Late Style, Edward Said asks a pertinent question: “But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction?”. Picasso seems to confront his old age with an unbridled vitality in his painting. His work in the last two decades of his life has all the characteristics of the late style, according to Said’s definition: the tendency towards simplification, concentration on the essential, total freedom with regard to form and style, a return to the immediacy of childhood, a certain freshness and a strong erotic charge. Presenting himself as an eternally young and vigorous artist, still capable of breathing new life into painting and satisfying his lovers, Picasso affirms his will to survive through his art.

Picasso, an artist of an advanced age and enormous celebrity, although retired from public life, developed a very dissenting position with respect to the art of his time,
in the midst of a process of change. In fact, the critics of that period, dominated by abstraction, conceptual art and formalist dogma, failed to appreciate the gross expressiveness and disinhibition of Picasso’s final stage. An amazingly fertile stage: 347 engravings between March and October 1968; 167 paintings between January 1969 and January 1970; 194 drawings between December 1969 and January 1971 and 201 paintings between September 1970 and June 1972. Of the twenty-three volumes in Christian Zervos’ catalogue raisonné, thirteen are devoted to the last twenty years of Picasso’s life.

The feverish activity of his final years, probably in connection with an important exhibition of his work at the Palais des Papes in Avignon in 1970, seems to respond to the urgency of an artist who is aware of the little time he has left. “I have less and less time and more and more to say” he stated the following year, shortly before he died.

—PABLO RUIZ PICASSO

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TÀPIES

— ANTONI
In my work, objects, garments, etc. appear with this half-Franciscan, half-Buddhist desire to give value to everything that is small, without seeking controversy. I have done this with the intention of providing the insignificant with a cosmic dimension.

Antoni Tàpies made this comment to the press in 1991 about his sculpture project entitled *Mitjó*. 
Antoni TÀPIES
Assemblage i graffiti
1972
Mixed technique on wood
208 × 190 × 35 cm
The artistic beginnings of Antoni Tàpies—born in Barcelona in 1923—can be traced to the Dau al Set group, which he founded in 1948. His first works are rooted in magical realism and surrealism, especially inspired by Joan Miró. After making some studies with collage and materials, his artistic production was encompassed within the international movement known as Informalism, dominant in the period between World War II and the end of the sixties. Tàpies’ visit to Paris in 1950, his participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials and various exhibitions in Europe and America, as well as his relationship with the gallery owner Martha Jackson and the art critic Michel Tapié, connected him with this movement and the Catalan artist ended up becoming one of its most faithful and idiosyncratic followers. But what is Informalism?

Informalism is one of the most ambiguous and widespread terms used in the art world since the second half of the 20th century. Its theoretical origins are to be found in the adjective used by the French artist Georges Mathieu to designate a form of painting capable of detaching itself from any form of meaning in order to give absolute protagonism to the material identity of the painting, to its plastic elements. Following
an exhibition held in Paris in November 1951, critic Michel Tapié coined the term “informal art” to describe the work of the artists on display: Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux, Georges Mathieu, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Jaroslav Serpan. Although not all of them resorted to abstraction, all of their works had a common denominator: the withdrawal of meaning and the placement of value on the medium and materials, of their capacity for expression, above and beyond the content, form or composition of the paintings. In the
words of Tapié, “the point of departure point is the surface is to bring alive [...] and the first stroke of colour or ink that one lays on it: the resulting effect, the resulting adventure. It is this stroke, the degree to which one enriches it and gives it direction, that shapes the work”. Informalism therefore spoke to us of the predominance of matter over form, of chance and improvisation over intent.

This “informal” new trend arose after the enormous moral impact of the Second World War, which interrupted the artistic experimentations of the initial avant-garde. Starting in 1945, art sought subjective forms of expression to redefine the human condition, which had been forsaken the conflict and the coming to terms with the Holocaust. If in the United States Abstract Expressionism came to a fore as an impulsive and subjective overhaul of European codes, on the other side of the Atlantic a non-figurative art triumphed, yet charged with depth and meaning through the use of the artist’s own materials, signs and gestures. If Abstract Expressionism was a new and independent art form, generated in a flourishing nation that came to capitalise the art world after the war, Informalism was the art of a Europe in mourning, well-aware of its collapse and clinging to a new philosophical framework: existentialism.

Informalism integrates a great diversity of material and gestural tendencies, such as French Tachism, characterised by the use of colour stains in a spontaneous and automatic way, or Italian Spatialism, interested in depicting movement
and space, thus highlighting the three-dimensionality of the painting. In Spain, during the decades following the Civil War, new artistic trends arrived late, distorted or particularised by the historical-cultural conditions of the dictatorship. The reception of Informalism began in 1957 thanks to the writings of Juan Eduardo Cirlot, who included in its meaning any form of abstract art that did not have a standard-based, analytical or simply geometric character. In the Catalan context, with figures such as Modest Cuixart, Albert Ràfols Casamada, Josep Guinovart and Antoni Tàpies himself, Informalism opted for materials and symbols as the fundamental axes of a way of painting that aspired to transmit the essence through primitive elements.

— Antoni Tàpies

FROM THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Antoni Tàpies was plagued by a delicate state of health throughout his career, which began at the age of eighteen, during a convalescence at the Puig d’Olena sanatorium. Tàpies took refuge in drawing, music and the literature of Ibsen, Nietzsche and Thomas Mann. From that point until his death, his art was closely bound to a particularly nurtured and sensitive inner world, to a spirituality quite uncommon in Informalist art. The critic and poet Juan Eduardo Cirlot,
also akin to symbolism and the spiritualist tradition, described Tàpies’ art as a two-way street “towards the extreme appreciation of plastic effects and towards an in-depth exploration into the abysses of the spirit”.

Son of an anticlerical father and a Catholic mother, Antoni Tàpies developed a personal spirituality fundamentally inspired by Eastern philosophies and religions. For Tàpies, art could serve to delve into the essence of the human being; an aesthetic experience would resemble a mystical revelation. He remarked: “Today we know as never before that important works of art have certain effects […] which, in some cases, can bring about contemplative states where one identifies with a profound reality, very similar to those of certain religious experiences. After all, both religious and artistic sentiments come from that power inherent in human nature to confront the mystery of existence”. Influenced by the painting of Zen Buddhism—authors such as Hakuin Ekaku, Sengai and Torei Enji—Tàpies set out to express the immaterial and to lead the observer to a contemplative state
through the physical and material qualities of the canvas, almost always reduced to austere, recognisable elements, not at all sophisticated or embellished.

In his work, in addition to his choice of materials for their physical and aesthetic qualities, symbols take on special importance, an iconography that becomes the nexus for his particular vision of art, a link between spirit and matter. Among them is the oft-repeated cross, a universal sign which he appropriates, the interpretation of which he clarifies in the article “Crosses, Xs and other Contradictions” included in the book *El arte y sus lugares [Art and Its Places]*: “My interest in the cross is a consequence of the wide variety of meanings, often partial and apparently different, that have been given to it: crosses (and also x’s) as spatial coordinates, an image of the unknown, a symbol of mystery, a sign of a territory, a mark for holding sacred different places, objects, people or fragments of the body, a stimulus for inspiring mystical feelings, for remembering death and, specifically, the death of Christ, an expression of a paradoxical concept, a mathematical sign, for erasing another image, for expressing disagreement, to negate something...”
TEXTS:
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