
ESPAIS Contemporary Art Centre – Fundació ESPAIS : THE ARCHIVES

In March 1987, the ESPAIS Contemporary Art Centre opened, a new 300 square metre private space located on Carrer Bisbe Lorenzana, 31-33, in Girona, which, with the first exhibition presented, "Fashion/Antifashion", set the scene for what would be a long, cross-disciplinary journey through different artistic disciplines. As those responsible for it said at the beginning of this adventure, "ESPAIS does not want to share clichés and its different rooms aim to dynamise communication with the public, to produce useful pieces of work, to link the traffic of ideas, between the works and the public (...) We have the responsibility to think, to help the artist to build exhibition structures suited to his or her thinking - to bring the public closer to the work". As can be seen, the desire to develop a point of convergence between the arts and the public has been a constant throughout the two decades of operation and has left a strong cultural impression on the city.

In 1997 it became the Fundació Privada ESPAIS until its closure in 2008. In 2001 it changed its location and moved its exhibition space and all its services to Carrer del Pou Rodó, 7-9. After a brief reopening under the management of Bonart and Ricard Planas, the Fundació ESPAIS was closed definitively in April 2010, a few months before the transfer by its founder and Chairman, Mr. Jordi Vidal Boris.

Paradoxically, a few years later, the Bòlit, Contemporary Art Centre of Girona was opened in the same location on Carrer del Pou Rodó, 7-9. A reminder of this site can still be seen on the façade of the building, where the original sign is preserved.

From the outset, the people in charge of ESPAIS were very aware that their work had to be a tool for information and documentation for all those interested in artistic events in the city of Girona. The production of exhibitions generated exceptional documentation on the artists, and the same happened in the organisation of activities in other cultural areas, which is why we can now recreate in detail what their long artistic journey over more than two decades was like. We can also recover its exceptional trajectory, thanks to the persevering will of those responsible for it to consider documentation as a tool for the present, designed to build the future. Today, a large part of what was the library and documentation centre can now be consulted, both at the Girona History Museum and at the Bòlit building.

ARTISTS, EXHIBITIONS AND ART FUNDS

Since its beginnings, ESPAIS has been a centre for artistic dissemination, at first more dedicated to forming part of the artistic market, but later developing clear functions as a public art centre. Although it has always focused its attention on artists from Girona, the fact is that it has never ceased to expand its exhibition programmes, both in terms of individual and group exhibitions, with Catalan artists and artists from the rest of Spain, as well as some international proposals. There are numerous exhibitions in its programme dedicated to following the most local artists, such as: Torres Monsó, Gabriel, Montserrat Costa, M.A. Feliu, Anna Manel·la, Enric Ansesa, Jaume Faió, Quim Corominas, Lluís Vilà, Pep Camps, Alex Nogué, Pep Admetlla, Carme Sanglas, Antoni Salvaggi, Joaquim Serrano Bou, Narcís Coderech, Mim Junca, Pere Vicens, Pere Noguera, Jordi Mitjà, etc.

There was also, however, a desire to offer an exhibition programme that would bring some of the most prestigious names with long artistic careers to Girona, such as, for example: Antoni Saura, Antoni Clavé, Joan Josep Tharrats, Moisés Villalón, Arranz-Bravo, Bartolozzi, Albert Ràfols-Casamada, Joan Hernández Pijuan, Alfons Borrell, Joan-Pere Viladecans, Xavier Corberó, Joaquim Chancho, Marcel Martí, Antoni Llena, Francesc Abad „Zush”, and even an outstanding exhibition dedicated to the graphic work of Joan Miró in 1992.

At the same time, they showed an enormous interest in making the work of young Catalan artists known, while closely observing a very particular phenomenon of Catalan art during the eighties and nineties, namely the importance of sculpture. We have already mentioned Gabriel, but many other names would play an important role in the ESPAIS programmes: Susana Solano, Isabel Banal, Jordi Canudas, Ramon Farramon, Riera i Aragó, Domènec, Ramon Guillen Balmes, Pedro Saralegui, Tom Carr, Toni Giró, Jordi Cuyàs, Lluís Hortalà, Salvador Juampere, Manel Llauradó, Margarida Andreu, Mais, Natividad Navalón, Pep Dardanyà, etc. And without leaving aside what was happening in the rest of Spain, they also presented renowned names such as Néstor Basterretxea from the Basque Country, and the Valencians Carmen Calvo and Ricardo Cotanda. But not only is an interest in sculpture shown, painting also had a continuous presence in the programmes, with painters such as Silvia Gubern, Niebla, Vicenç Viaplana, Aureli Ruiz, Francesca Llopis, Begoña Egurbide, Isabel Esteve, Assumpció Mateu, Florentino Díaz, Néstor Sanmiguel, Miguel Àngel Campano, María Gómez, Jordi Martorell, Lúlia Porcar, Marina Núñez, Jaume Barrera, Enric Mauri, Elena del Rivero, etc.

A particular characteristic of ESPAIS in its early days was the collective exhibitions based on very different themes, such as the aforementioned "Fashion/Anti-fashion" contrasting artists and designers, or "Urban Landscape" (1987) (specifically one

of the paintings by Vicenç Viaplana shown in this last thematic exhibition, which is one of those that we are presenting today at the MHG), or by making two artists dialogue, as was the case of "Volums" that same year, in which sculptures by Torres Monsó coexisted with those by Gabriel, both accompanied by the discourse of the art critic Manel Clot, one of the most significant figures in the sculptural debate of the moment.

The current exhibition aims to showcase its important work and also how ESPAIS developed into an "interdisciplinary multi-purpose centre", as Glòria Bosch called it, who was one of the people in charge of it at the beginning, and as a result, a selection of the numerous activities carried out in the fields of performance, sound art and poetry are collected in the original audiovisual material that has been preserved and digitised for this occasion.

As can be seen, the exhibition displays a small selection of the 965 works currently owned by the Ajuntament de Girona. In 2017, the acquisition of its legacy would come to an end, after some years in its custody, after the Fundació ESPAIS ceased to operate in 2010. Today, the archives, the documentary collection, catalogues, books, magazines and this significant collection of works of art now form part of the Girona City Council art heritage collection. From the exhibition now on display at the Girona History Museum and the work carried out to document, order and conserve this legacy, this heritage collection will be made available to the public. This cultural collection also opens up a path of great opportunities for making both the importance of the Fundació ESPAIS in the dissemination of contemporary art and an artistic and intellectual legacy that will undoubtedly be of great importance for future art historians and critics.

A selection of works from the Art Collection is on display in the temporary exhibition room of the Museum of the History of Girona, and visitors will also find works from this collection distributed throughout the Museum's rooms, establishing a dialogue with the spatial characteristics of the Museum and its museological discourse. Given the continued dedication that ESPAIS has shown towards performance and live arts, dance, experimental poetry, sound art, etc., this exhibition includes a selection from its audiovisual archive, which highlights the relevance that creators such as Carles H. Mor, Esther Xargay, Joan Casellas, Lluís Alabern, Borja Zabala, José Manuel Berenguer, Clara Garí and so many others, who had the creative "transversal view" that their promoters defended so much.

PAPERS D'ART, the magazine

In March 1987, the year ESPAIS began operating, the first issue of the magazine *Papers d'Art* was published, coordinated by Glòria Bosch and Carme Ortiz. The first twenty-five issues were published as a free supplement to the newspaper *El Punt* and from 1989 the magazine became an independent, subscription-based publication. Its periodicity varied and became more and more intermittent until 2008, the year in which its last issue was published, number 93. In the early stages the magazine was used to disseminate the activities of the centre itself, but very soon it developed into a publication of art theory and criticism which, as well as continuing to disseminate its activities, offered critical information on exhibitions at both national and international level, monographs on subjects of current interest, interviews with artists, etc. The publication's intention from the outset was so transversal and open that the list of contributors is so long that it numbers close to a thousand, and the nearly 93 issues published make up an extraordinary panorama of what was to be two decades of contemporary art. In fact, the enormous amount of information it gathers has made university researchers interested in the publication, and moreover, to coincide with this exhibition, Girona City Council has digitised all the issues in order to disseminate it to a much wider public.

ESPAIS Award for Art Criticism

In January 1988, the first edition of the Espais Award for Art Criticism was held with the intention of publicly recognising the work carried out by art critics, art historians, museologists, etc... That is to say, those professionals who, in addition to being artists, deserve to be highlighted for their key role in the visual arts sector. Throughout the nineteen-eighties, numerous initiatives through biennials and prize competitions helped to raise awareness of the work of artists, especially emerging artists. Those in charge of ESPAIS believed that it was necessary to recognise the work of theorists because, often, they added specific weight to the work of artists with their historical and critical contributions and with their exhibition proposals.

Nevertheless, the call for entries for these awards brought together the contributions of both protagonists: art theoreticians and artists, given that the prize they would be offered was a sculpture resulting from a commission with an artist close to the activities of ESPAIS. Thus, the first prize was a sculpture made by Gabriel, to which names such as Francesc Torres Monsó, Moisés Villalón, Marcel Martí, Alex Nogué, Francesc Abad, Toni Giró, etc., were added, until reaching nineteen awards, which are all shown in the exhibition.

Carme Ortiz, Magdala Perpinyà and Jordi Font were the most regular editors of the two phases of the publication, although many of ESPAIS' internal collaborators also played an important role, such as Glòria Bosch in the first issues, Anna Capella, Assumpta Bassas, Pilar Sanz, M. Rosa Fraxanet, etc. Also from the first issues, it is possible to guess the names of trusted collaborators such as Carles H. Mor, Esther Xargay, Manel Clot, Pilar Parcerisas, Jaume Fàbrega, Teresa Grandas, Joan Casellas, Marta Pol, Susanna Portall, Fernando Castro Florez, Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes, and many others.

During the second stage of the magazine, the covers reproduced the original work of an artist specially designed for its format and contents, and ESPAIS printed a serigraph edition of 75 copies, as a further dissemination option, both for the magazine and for the collaborating artists and the interested public. In this exhibition, a selection of these serigraphs is also shown.

At the same time, the collection of new books published by ESPAIS is presented, because although prizes had always been awarded for already published texts from the beginning, from 1998 until 2007 a new award category was included for the "Publication of an unpublished essay", a recognition that included its publication.

The list of participating juries and prize-winning authors is extraordinary, both in terms of the number and prestige of the prize-winners, and confirms the importance that the awards acquired not only in Catalonia, but also in the rest of Spain, with awards going to authors such as Simón Marchán Fiz, Tomás Llorens and Juan Antonio Ramírez, and even international authors such as Gillo Dorfles, Pierre Restany and Robert S. Lubar, for their recognised prestige. The awards ceremony became a major cultural event in the city every year.