

# Spanish Painting during Developmentism

From 1960 on, Spanish art consolidated the ground it had gained over the previous decade, in which informalism had managed to make itself noticed on the international scene through official promotion and awards given to artists like Antonio Saura and Antoni Tàpies. At the same time, a more lyrical side emerged, which, along with other members of this generation of varied aesthetic options, would set Cuenca's Museum of Spanish Abstract Art in motion.



In the late Fifties and throughout the Sixties, Spain opened up to what lay beyond Franco's regime, so as to modernise the Spanish economy according to the liberal capitalism model, resulting in what were known as the Development Plans. One result of the end of Spain's isolation was a prolific period for Spanish art, which came into contact with the international scene for the first time. Artists began to have some success, participating in international biennials and exhibitions such as *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture*, at the MoMA and *Before Picasso, After Miró* at the Guggenheim, both in 1960. But it was not only about Spain spreading abroad; the borders were no longer hermetically sealed, which meant it was easier to find out about what was happening in places like France, Italy and the USA, proving that Spanish informalism could stand in its own right alongside its European equivalent as well as American abstract expressionism. This made it into the official show-window of the dictatorship for the outside world, transmitting an image of liberty and modernity that really did not correspond to the reality within, where artists were still the object of state intervention and censorship. The State, following the great successes of these artists in international exhibitions, created a useful institutionalisation of informalism as the preferred style of avant-garde art, coming precisely at a time when the first comments were being made about how the style had already run its course.

Along with ex-members of the El Paso group (which broke up in 1960), represented in this room by Antonio Saura (1930–1998) and Manolo Millares (1926–1972), who continued with what was called "veta brava" Informalism, international recognition was achieved by artists like Antoni Tàpies (1923–2012), who abandoned surrealist figuration in favour of a material informalism, Eduardo Chillida (1924–2002), an example

of informalist sculpture, and José Guerrero (1914–1991) Spain's representative of the New York School. Others such as Fernando Zóbel (1924–1984), Gustavo Torner (1925) and Gerardo Rueda (1926–1996), went on the form part of the central core of what was called the Cuenca Group, representatives of an abstract form that became known as lyrical. These three artists shared a sense of aesthetic perfection and purity of surfaces, producing reflective painting, with a very controlled feeling far from spontaneity, thereby producing something that could be called "fake informalism".

The group's was closely tied to the creation in 1966 of Cuenca's Museum of Spanish Abstract Art, the origins of which lie in Fernando Zóbel's idea of showing the work of Spanish artists from his generation, which he had been building into a major collection since his arrival in Spain ten years before. Both in his search for premises – which ended up being Cuenca's hanging Houses – and in completing the museographic project, he had the help and collaboration of Torner and Rueda, whom he made co-director and curator respectively. The museum became a broad, plural platform for art and one of the most original institutions on the whole Spanish museum scene, since it came about through the intervention and participation of the very artists who are represented in its collection.

The first catalogue published by the museum included artists like Antonio Saura, Manolo Millares and Rafael Canogar (1935), alongside Antoni Tàpies, Lucio Muñoz (1929-1998), Equipo 57, Eduardo Chillida, Pablo Palazuelo (1916-2007), Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003), Pablo Serrano (1910-1985), Martín Chirino (1925) and many others. Zóbel's collection and the starting of the museum served as a connecting point – both personal and professional – for a whole generation of artists who participated in what could be called the “Spirit of Cuenca”.

The museum's creation coincided with a cultural shift in the mid-1960s, becoming a meeting and discussion point for the new generations of artists. Rueda, Torner and other artists in the Cuenca orbit such as Jordi Teixidor (1941), Eusebio Sempere (1923-1985) and José María Yturralde (1942) were to have considerable influence in the geometric trend of constructivists like Elena Asins (1940) and Manuel Barbadillo (1929-2003). But connections were also made with artists of the new figuration, like Luis Gordillo (1934) and Carlos Alcolea (1949-1992), who were interested in creation as a process, and attracted by the 'Zobelian' intellectual atmosphere. They all saw that the teachings of the three driving forces behind the museum were still very much alive, and independently of their artistic interests, had become the glue that held Spain's “New Generation” together.

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## **Links**

[www.march.es/arte/cuenca/](http://www.march.es/arte/cuenca/)