

'CREATIVE' PHOTOGRAPHY IN CATALUNYA (1973-1982)



This exhibition presents the rise of a generation of photographers who demanded that 'creative' or fine art photography be accepted as an art in its own right by the institutional and artistic system during the 1970s and early 1980s. It ranges from the opening of Spectrum, the first gallery in Spain to specialise in photography, inaugurated in Barcelona in 1973, to the Primavera Fotogràfica (Springtime of Photography) held in Barcelona in 1982.

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[LA VIRREINA]
CENTRE
DE LA IMATGE

Ajuntament de
Barcelona



The 1970s were a very important period for photographic culture in the Spanish and Catalan context. During those years, a new generation of photographers emerged who defended the acceptance of photography as an art in its own right and argued for its inclusion in the institutional and artistic system (museums, galleries, the critics and the world of publication). The term *fotografía creativa*, like its English equivalent ‘fine art photography’ or, in German, *Fotokunst*, was used to refer to this production and to distinguish it from that of utilitarian or applied photography.

Following the example of what was happening in other European countries, especially France, which itself followed the American model, people soon understood that its legitimisation called for the existence of a market, specialised critics and a historiographic basis, as well as the inclusion of photography in university courses and the involvement in all this of the cultural and artistic institutions. In Catalonia, like the rest of Spain, there was a total vacuum and it was the photographers themselves who took the initiative.

The magazine *Nueva Lente*, published in Madrid from 1971 on, in which Catalan photographers were constantly present, drove this new photographic discourse in its early days. The specialised galleries—among them Spectrum, a pioneering establishment inaugurated in Barcelona in 1973, along with other exhibition spaces that also appeared during that period—made a decisive contribution to publicising a new generation of photographers, at the same time making known the main international trends of the time. The proximity to France facilitated the presence of Catalan photographers at the *Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie* held in Arles every summer. This international forum allowed contact and exchanges with specialist foreign galleries and magazines and helped disseminate the work of Catalan photographers.

In addition, the emergence of groups and strategies through which an institutional framework could be built up was enormously important for the development of a renovated photographic culture that led to the organisation of the *Jornades Catalanes de Fotografía* (Catalan Photography Conference) at the Joan Miró Foundation in 1980, the formation of the Col·lectiu Català de Fotografia (Catalan Photography Collective) and

finally the *Primavera Fotogràfica* (Springtime of Photography) held in Barcelona in 1982.

CONTEXT

ROOM I

The magazine 'Nueva Lente'

Nueva Lente brought a breath of fresh air to photography in the cultural context of the Franco régime. The first issue was published at the end of 1971 in Madrid, under the editorship of Pablo Pérez Mínguez and Carlos Serrano, whose aim was to ‘break with the formalism and the empty, rhetorical documentary approach that dominated the photography coming out of photographic associations and camera clubs’. During its lifetime it went through various stages reflecting the idiosyncrasy of its art editors, Pablo Pérez Mínguez and Carlos Serrano, on one hand, and Jorge Rueda, on the other.

Nueva Lente rejected the pictorialism and the Neo-realist photography that were common in the world of camera clubs and it also defended an eclectic photography characterised by its frequently somewhat naïve transgression, resorting as it did to appropriation, experimentation and staging. It also advocated photography done using simple means, as opposed to excessive formalism and mastery of technique, opening the way to spontaneity and creative freedom. Photography as a testimony of reality was brought into question; reality, in the words of Pablo Pérez Mínguez, became ‘the object to be used’ which photography transformed. After 1975, under the editorship of Jorge Rueda, the magazine paid special attention to more dreamlike, anti-documentary photography, in keeping with what Lorenzo Merlo, director of the Canon Gallery in Amsterdam, called ‘fantastic photography’.

'Quinta Generación'

The August 1974 issue was a special number which, under the title *Quinta Generación* ('Fifth Generation'), set out to showcase the work of photographers born after 1950 whose approach was opposed to those of the 1960s. According to the magazine’s editors, the work produced by this ‘fifth generation’ was characterised by

its creative approach and by its concern for expression—outside of professional photographic categories—and the desire to internationalise its work. The Catalan photographers involved were Josep Rigol, Joan Fontcuberta, Pere Formiguera, Lluís Pradissa and Josep Salgot.

Four years later, Fontcuberta, a regular contributor to *Nueva Lente*, wrote in number 76–77 ‘Apología de la quinta generación’ ('The case for the fifth generation'), a piece in which he stressed the work of that ‘orphaned generation’, deprived of history, critique and institutional backing, in its aim to create a market for the photograph as a work of art, a generation whose greatest virtue had been ‘to produce imaginative photography, when imagination has had to replace technology, lack of resources, research...’.

GALLERIES AND PREMISES DEVOTED TO PHOTOGRAPHY (ROOMS 2 – 9)

ROOM 2

Sala Aixelà

Directed by Josep M^a Casademont, who was editor of the magazines *Imagen y Sonido* and *Eikonos*, the Sala Aixelà (1958–1974) was an exhibition space that broke away from the hobbyist photo clubs. It was located in the basement of a commercial establishment of the same name near Plaça de Catalunya. Aixelà became one of the most important channels for the dissemination of the photographic production of the 1970s. Casademont, like the photographers of the 1960s, did not see self-expression as the main object of photography, but felt that photography was an ‘alimentary problem’ and defended the professional photographer whose field of action was the visual communication media. In spite of that, he found room in his exhibition programme for some of the young photographers who defended ‘creative’ photography, such as Toni Catany, Manel Esclusa and Joan Fontcuberta.

Spectrum Gallery / Grup Taller d'Art Fotogràfic / Centre Internacional de Fotografia Barcelona

Spectrum was the first gallery in Spain to specialise in the exhibition and sale of photography. Located at number 86, Carrer

Balmes in Barcelona and run by Albert Guspi and Sandra Solsona, it opened its doors on 18 October 1973 with a show about Tony Keeler. To accompany the exhibition, a book was published with the title *Ibiza a dream...?*, which was the first from the Spectrum Group Portfolio Editions imprint. Albert Guspi had seen the gallery as an art space from the outset, specialising in the exhibition and sale of photography. He managed in record time to make contact with foreign galleries and position himself on the incipient photography market. He not only exhibited the most significant international photographers of the time, he also attracted that new generation of photographers who had found in the pages of *Nueva Lente* the possibility of disseminating their images.

In 1975, Guspi set up the Grup Taller d'Art Fotogràfic (Photographic Art Workshop Group), a school of photography whose team of teachers was made up of the gallery's photographers, such as Manel Esclusa, Humberto Rivas, José I. Galindo and the Chilean Lucho Poirot. The school was active until 1978, when Guspi opened the Centre Internacional de Fotografia Barcelona (CIFB, Barcelona International Photography Centre) in Carrer de l'Aurora, in the heart of the Raval. The CIFB was the culmination of the various initiatives driven by its director until it closed in 1983.

In 1976, following the signing of an agreement with Focica S.A., the gallery changed its name to Spectrum-Canon and became part of the European circuit of Canon galleries, a move that helped disseminate the work of its photographers abroad. At the same time, through agreements with galleries in other Spanish towns and cities like Zaragoza, Alcoy, Madrid and Girona, Guspi set up a network of Canon galleries.

Publication of portfolios

The publication of portfolios—numbered limited editions of original signed photographs—was one of the strategies adopted for selling ‘creative’ photography both in Europe and in the US, where Lee Witkin had opened the first photography gallery in 1969. Spectrum was also a pioneer in this sphere. Each portfolio came complete with an explanatory leaflet about the collection, illustrated with a couple of pictures, as well as with

publication details. By way of example, there was ‘Cachos’, by Pedro López, portfolio of 13 original photographs, numbered and signed by the photographer, limited edition of 20 prints, image size 10 × 15 cm, a portfolio of 13 original photographs, numbered and signed by the artist, a limited edition of 20 10 × 15 cm copies in 40 × 40 cm window mounts in a wooden box.

Arte Fiera 77 and the photography market

The incipient photography market in Europe was reflected in the art fairs that began to be held in the early 1970s. The first was Art Basel, whose inaugural edition took place in 1970. They were attended mainly by European galleries, but also by some from the US and Canada, countries where the market in photography was more developed. However, photography’s presence was limited and for this reason the Spectrum-Canon stand at *Arte Fiera 1977* in Bologna, which had begun in 1974, was especially important as an international showcase. Thanks to the sponsorship from Canon, the galleries on the European circuit—Canon Geneva, Il Diaframma-Canon in Milan and Canon Amsterdam—were also present in Bologna. Spectrum-Canon not only presented the work of some of the gallery’s young photographers, it also exhibited reprints by Tomàs Montserrat, whose archives had been rescued by Toni Catany, another Majorcan photographer.

In January 1976, publication began of the magazine *Print Letter*, published in German in Switzerland by Marco Misani, with summaries in French and English. Its aim was to consolidate the photography market in Europe by offering information about prices, auctions, exhibitions and publications.

ROOM 5

Tau Gallery in Sant Celoni (Barcelona)

Inaugurated in the summer of 1976, Tau was an initiative by a group of local photographers headed by Miquel Nauguet and Quim Reberté that worked as a cooperative. They established close collaboration links with the Spectrum gallery, which provided most of their exhibitions. Alongside the names of already recognised national and international photographers, the members of the Grup Tau also exhibited their own photographs.

Fotomanía Gallery

In July 1977, the Fotomanía Gallery was inaugurated at number 26, Carrer de Ganduxer in Barcelona. Its owner, Asunción Rodés, a photographer specialising in portraiture, restored a large premises which she split up into four clearly separate areas: the first area was the entrance to the establishment, where photographic material was on sale; next, taking up almost the whole of the surface area of the premises, came the gallery; at the back was a small office and a photographic studio; and in the basement were the stores and the mounting room. Fotomanía opened with an exhibition by Toni Catany. In November Cristina Zelich took over the post of artistic director and was in charge of programming until 1983. The ultimate aim was to sell photographs, but from the start it faced the need to draw up an attractive programme which would showcase the different approaches there were to photography at the time, and also to help retrieve past photographers whose work was significant from a historical point of view. Fotomanía managed to maintain a steady programme of exhibitions for seven years and became a key space for both local and foreign photographers. It kept in touch with other galleries specialising in photography, especially in France, Holland and Belgium, and regularly attended the encounters in Arlés.

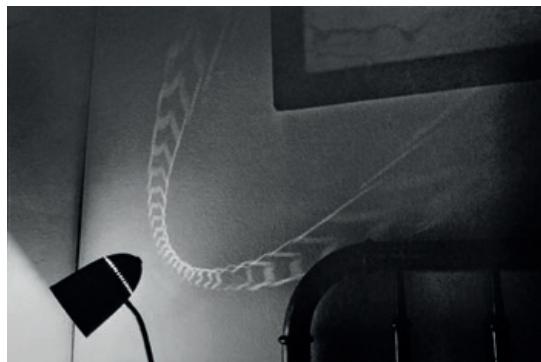
ROOM 7

Other galleries and premises specialising in photography

Beginning in the mid-1970s, we see a proliferation of premises and galleries devoted to photography. Although most of them were short-lived and their programmes irregular, they helped disseminate ‘creative photography’, but more than anything they encouraged meetings, debate and the exchange of information. One that stands out among them was the Nikon gallery and school of photography run by Jaume ‘Pete’ Sans; the Procés Gallery, run by the photographers Josep Rigol, Manel Ubeda—artistic directors—and Idil·li Tàpia—technical director—; the Institut d’Estudis Fotogràfics de Catalunya (Institute of Photographic Studies of Catalonia)—a teaching centre that opened in 1973 in rooms at the Escola Industrial (Industrial College) in



Tony Keeler, *Dreams on a Sabine tree*,
from the series ‘Ibiza a dream...?’, c. 1973



Pere Formiguera, *untitled*, from the series «La meva amiga com un vaixell blanc» ('My friend like a white boat'), 1975



Manel Esclusa, *untitled*, from the series
«Els ulls aturats» ('The eyes detained'), 1978



Jordi García, *Volkswagen, Barcelona*, 1977



Lluís Bover, untitled, 1981



Marta Povo Audenis, from the series «Oficis urbans» ('Urban trades'), 1982



Maria Espeus, *Adolfo Fernández, arqueólogo* ('Adolfo Fernández, archaeologist'), from the series «Hola Barcelona» ('Hello Barcelona'), 1982



Poster Primavera Fotogràfica a Barcelona
(‘Springtime of Photography in Barcelona’), 1982

Carrer Urgell under an agreement with the Diputació de Barcelona (Barcelona County Corporation)—, which, under the direction of Miquel Galmes, in 1979 refurbished the hall of the building as an exhibition room; La Virreina, a municipal premises, which among other types of exhibition also made room for photography; and the Forvm Gallery in Tarragona, founded by David Balsells, Chantal Grande and Jordi Ortiz and inaugurated in 1981, which played a key role in the 1980s and 1990s.

In the sphere of amateur photo clubs, *Fotomostra*, organised by the Societat Fotogràfica de Lleida (Photographic Society of Lleida) and directed by Toni Prim, played a special part with its wish to bring ‘creative photography’ closer to the general public as from its 1979 edition, discarding the photography salon approach and instead organising various exhibitions accompanied by conferences and talks.

ROOM 8

Photographic collectives

If there is one thing that characterises this period of ‘creative photography’ in Catalonia, this is the collaboration between photographers to get their projects seen. This materialised in the formation of various collectives. The first was set up in 1974 as part of the Foment de les Arts Decoratives (FAD, Fostering the Decorative Arts) with the name FOTO-FAD. In 1976 the Grup Tau was formed, a photographers’ collective that ran the Tau Gallery in Sant Celoni. Their letter of presentation was a collective exhibition held in the Spectrum gallery. That same year two other collectives were formed: the Grup Alabern and the Col·lectiu Captació Imatge 3 Peus. The Grup Alabern, originally made up of Manel Esclusa, Joan Fontcuberta, Pere Formiguera and Rafael Navarro—the last of these lived and worked in Zaragoza, but exhibited in Spectrum and Fotomanía—, joined in 1978 by Mariano Zuzunaga, Toni Catany and Koldo Chamorro, was set up with the object of working together to promote each other through exhibitions and publications, taking advantage of the contacts each member of the group had. For its part, the Col·lectiu 3 Peus, based in Banyoles (Girona), one of whose most prominent members was the photographer Joan Colomàt, was founded with the object

of showcasing the ‘creative photography’ of the time through exhibitions, talks and workshops held at the Llotja del Tint in Banyoles.

Though short-lived, these collectives are an example of the search for answers before the lack of institutional infrastructures and channels for the dissemination of ‘creative photography’.

ROOM 9

Papel Especial

In 1978, the inaugural issue of the magazine *Papel Especial* appeared in Barcelona, edited by Josep Rigol, Pete Sans and Jordi Sarrà. There were already two periodical publications of the same type on the European scene, *Contrejour*, published in Paris by Claude Nori since 1975, and *The Village Cry*, edited in Basel by Beat Presser and Rolf Paltzer since 1976.

Papel Especial shared features of both these publications, both in its design and in its content, favouring the dissemination of work by young photographers and inviting intellectuals of recognised prestige to reflect on still imagery and the media. Though short-lived—only three issues were ever published—it is an interesting example of the type of initiative and strategy undertaken by photographers themselves to try and get a place for photography in contemporary culture, attracting the attention of critics, philosophers and writers.

ART SPACES AND PHOTOGRAPHY

(ROOMS 10-12)

ROOM 10

The Joan Miró Foundation (Barcelona)

The Joan Miró Foundation, inaugurated in 1970, played a defining role in the dissemination of the international avant-garde and, in Catalonia, it acted as a vehicle for conceptual artists and for young and experimental art, largely making up for the mission no other museum institution was performing at that time. The presence of photography in its programme marked the medium’s acceptance as an art in its own right.

The support for Catalan ‘creative photography’ on the part of the Joan Miró Foundation materialised later when it housed

the *Jornades Catalanes de Fotografia* and the exhibition of the Sam Wagstaff collection—at that time one of the most important private collections of photography, with work by the great international masters—around which the first Primavera Fotogràfica (Springtime of Photography) took shape in Barcelona in 1982.

ROOM 11

Legitimating photography as an art inevitably involved getting it included in and disseminated by establishments exhibiting and selling art. During this period, art galleries showed little interest in photographic work.

Since photography had a lot in common with the conventions governing the graphic art market, it’s not surprising that the first gallery in Catalonia to include photography in its offer should have been the Eude Gallery, inaugurated in Barcelona in 1975 and initially specialising in original graphic work by leading 20th-century avant-garde artists. On the occasion of the Man Ray exhibition, the gallery published a portfolio with the title ‘Homenatge a Man Ray’ (‘Homage to Man Ray’), consisting of seven photographs by Catalan photographers—Jaume and Jordi Blassi, Toni Catany, Manel Esclusa, Joan Fontcuberta, Ferran Freixa, Manolo Laguillo and Humberto Rivas—with accompanying text by Francesc Miralles, in an edition of 25 copies.

At the end of the 1970s, other art galleries, like the Lleonart Gallery, Rosa Bisbe, Salóncito Dos i Una, the 491 Gallery, the Ciento Gallery, all in Barcelona, and El Setze in Martorell, began to include photography in their exhibition programmes.

ROOM 12

The Sala Vinçon

Located in the commercial establishment of the same name at number 96, Passeig de Gràcia, the Sala Vinçon started its exhibition activity in 1973, centring on design, installations, painting and sculpture. It also put on exhibitions of photographic work in line with conceptual art and graphic experimentation. Among others who exhibited there were Bigas Luna (his *Polaroids* series),

Juan José Gómez Molina (large-format photographs with manual interventions) and America Sánchez (the series of photo-montages *Iconografía moderna*).

JORNADES CATALANES DE FOTOGRAFIA / COL·LECTIU CATALÀ DE FOTOGRAFIA

ROOM 13

In view of the fact that the Congrés de Cultura Catalana (Congress of Catalan Culture) held between 1975 and 1977 made no mention at all of the state of photography, a group of photographers and other professionals with links to photography decided to organise the Jornades Catalanes de Fotografia under the heading ‘La fotografía com a fet cultural’ (‘Photography as a fact of culture’). The aim was to set up various working parties to review the situation and pinpoint the shortcomings in the sphere of photography as well as undertaking the necessary measures to resolve them.

Two preparatory meetings were held to decide the final structure of the *Jornades*, which centred on four talks:

- The creation of a working collective.
- The recovery of Catalonia’s photographic past and the possible creation of an archive and a museum of photography.
- Analysis of the current state of photography in Catalonia. A study of the immediate past, of the present, of channels for disseminating photography, of the question of photography as art, etc.
- Outlook for the future. Teaching systems, schools, influence of photography in society.

The *Jornades* was finally held in May 1980 in the assembly room of the Miró Foundation and the talks, as well as the contributions by the public, were published in a dossier.

The first result of the conference was the creation of the Col·lectiu Català de Fotografia, which recognised photography as an instrument for generating culture and defined its activities on the basis of three points:

1. The dissemination of photography intended as creation and produced with a sense of personal expression by the members of the Col·lectiu.
2. The promotion of creative photography and photography of historical interest in general.
3. The study from a humanist—that is, historical, sociological, psychological and aesthetic—perspective of the phenomenon of photography—that is, reflection on the different facets photography adopts or can adopt.

THE PRIMAVERA FOTOGRÀFICA IN BARCELONA, 1982 (ROOMS 13 – 15)

The collective work on the process to legitimate photography as an art and get institutional recognition for it culminated in 1982 with the *Primavera Fotogràfica* (Springtime of Photography) in Barcelona. Modelled on the *Mois de la Photo*, a biennial festival whose first edition was held in Paris in November 1980, the promoters of the *Primavera* turned to the Generalitat (Catalan government) for the same sort of political and financial support.

A total of 30 exhibitions were presented at the *Primavera Fotogràfica* of 1982. Half of them were held in private galleries and the rest in public museums and premises, foundations, foreign culture institutes and schools and colleges. As per the conclusions of the *Jornades*, the festival was to showcase the production of national and foreign contemporary photographers as well as recovering the Catalan photographic heritage.

THE DISSEMINATION OF CATALAN CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

ROOM 16

As well as the exchange of exhibitions with other galleries abroad and in the rest of Spain by the Spectrum-Canon gallery and Fotomanía and the work of the collectives to disseminate their work outside Catalonia, there were other important initiatives in this sphere that had a considerable impact:

- The presentation in 1978 at the *IX Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie* in Arles of a selection of Spanish photography presented by Jorge Rueda, who at that time was artistic director of the magazine *Nueva Lente*. The Catalan photographers selected were Toni Catany, Manel Esclusa, Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera.
- The *Exposición Límite* (Limit Exhibition), organised in 1979 from *Nueva Lente* (now renamed *Nueva Nueva Lente*) by Carlos Serrano and Pablo Pérez Minguez, as evidence, in the words of the organisers, of ‘the high quality reached by a large number of photographers whose average age is around 29’. After it was presented in Madrid, the exhibition travelled to New York. The Catalan photographers taking part were Sergi Capellas, Toni Catany, Enric de Santos, Manel Esclusa, Joan Fontcuberta, Pere Formiguera, Ferran Freixa, Josep Rigol and Manel Úbeda.
- The exhibition *Vision Urbaine* (Urban Vision), conceived by the Col·lectiu Català de Fotografia and presented at the *II Rencontres d'Art Photographique et Diaporamique* held in Montpellier in May 1981.

Also undeniable is the valuable contribution Joan Fontcuberta made during this period, not only to the dissemination of Catalan photography but of Spanish photography in general. The articles he published in *Contrejour*, *Camera*, *European Photography* and *Afterimage* were decisive in this work.

**Curator: Cristina Zelich,
with the collaboration of Pep Rigol**

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