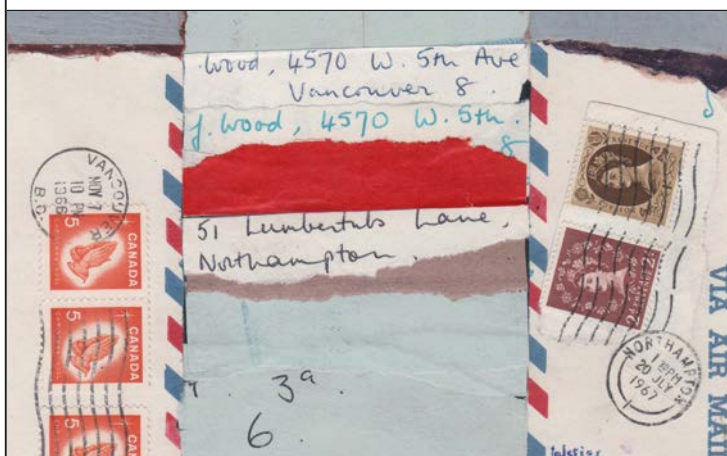


# Josep Iglésias del Marquet

## POETRY, TYPOGRAPHY AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Josep Iglésias del Marquet (Artesa de Lleida, 1932 – Barcelona, 1989) was a painter, art critic, visual poet and journalist, as well as a pioneer of concrete poetry and mail art in Catalonia. This exhibition presents collages that have never been exhibited before and printmaking that reflect his interest in typography and new systems of communication.



16.11.2024 – 30.03.2025



Ajuntament de  
Barcelona

[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
DE LA IMATGE

Untitled, 1964

## ART, JOURNALISM, CONCRETE POETRY AND GRAPHIC ARTS

*Eduard Escoffet*

Josep Iglésias del Marquet (Artesa de Lleida, Segrià, 1932 – Barcelona, 1989) was a painter, art critic, visual poet and journalist. He is a key figure for understanding the emergence of concrete poetry in Catalonia, and was a pioneer of mail art during his period as a university professor in Scotland and Canada, from 1961 to 1966. After he returned to Barcelona, he promoted and participated in various collective exhibitions of experimental poetry, founding the publishing house Lo Pardal with Guillem Viladot. He was especially active in the 1970s, creating a large quantity of collages and visual poems that reflect two of his main interest areas: typography and mass communication. Both are essential for understanding the polyhedric poetics of this foundational creator, who is nevertheless unknown to the broader public.

Situated on the cusp between art, journalism and poetry, Iglésias del Marquet was an inquisitive observer of the arts and new communication systems, while also being particularly knowledgeable about graphic arts and the history of books. A declared devotee of the Chinese precursors of the printing press, Gutenberg and everything emerging from moveable type over the centuries, he was one of the first Catalan artists to include printed traces of consumer society in his works, distributing them through alternative channels. While he would never stop painting entirely, it was in experimental poetry and mail art that he found an international circuit set apart from the market, which enabled him to experiment and reflect on societal changes in the second half of the 20th century.

This exhibition explores the working methods of Iglésias del Marquet, featuring the reutilisation of both his own materials and those created by others, without establishing any differentiation between creative disciplines and his activity as a publisher and printer, or as a journalist and disseminator. In line with this, on the walls of this exhibition space various

themes, techniques and periods are set alongside each other and intertwined, in an attempt to reflect a very particular array in a non-linear manner. The exhibition presents collages that have never been exhibited before, mainly from the family archive, as well as printmaking, work for other poets and indications of the terrain he delineated between text and image.

### *The International Gaze*

It is difficult to provide a precise sketch of Josep Iglésias del Marquet's profile. Along with the few traces he did leave behind—a few published works, many articles signed pseudonymously, a plethora of anonymous contributions—we might add his early death and the inability of specialists to clearly situate this creator and distributor, who moved across various fields, playing every role available to him. He was a practitioner of art and poetry, a disseminator of new artistic tendencies and a researcher into publishing, combining these tasks with his work as a journalist, which is how he made his living. His character was fundamentally inquisitive, and he was able to absorb and transmit all kinds of tendencies, whether local or international.<sup>1</sup>

His obsessive artistic activity began as soon as he left his home town to study in Barcelona. He arrived in 1951 to study Law, and immediately began to organise activities promoting art at the residence where he lived. He would even take on responsibility for the design and printing of the residence's communication programme, and turned his own room into a gallery for his artistic work. In 1961, once he had finished his degree, he moved to Scotland to teach at the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Glasgow. It was in this period that pop art and collage appeared in his work, along with the abstract art that typified the Barcelona scene. This

<sup>1</sup> For a full profile of his personal and artistic career (including his pictorial work, which is not dealt with here), see the complete article by Ramon Salvo in the catalogue *Josep Iglésias del Marquet (1932-1989). Pintura. Collage. Poègrafia*, Lleida, Museu d'Art Jaume Morera, 2007.

was also the time his work underwent a major transformation, which accelerated when he went to work as a Spanish Instructor in the Faculty of Arts of the University of British Columbia in Victoria and Vancouver, from 1964 to 1966.

During these periods abroad (to which we would have to include various trips to Paris from 1959 on, and a brief stage in Paris when he was based in Glasgow, in 1962, as well as a visit to New York in 1966, before returning to Barcelona), he shifted from the legacy of abstraction and geographically-familiar points of reference, with a minimal use of his own creative language, to a burst of modernity that was visually plethoric, rigorously executed and conceived in depth, while he associated himself with new international currents in experimental poetry. This was also when his taste for typography, concrete poetry and collage settled into his artistic language.

His creative path can be followed through the postcards he created and sent during these years to his fiancée Paulina, in what was one of the first manifestations of mail art in Catalonia.<sup>2</sup> Nine of them are included in the publication *Postals nord-americanes per a una noia de Barcelona* [North American Postcards for a Girl from Barcelona] (Lo Pardal, 1972) (in the publication note we read that from 1964 to 1966, he sent 174 postcards to Paulina Colomer).<sup>3</sup> In these postcards, as he had done earlier with those sent from Glasgow, he reacts to the stimuli of these respective cities. We see a modern society dominated by consumerism and the mass media, with pop artists, broad iconographical diversity and, all told, a contrast that led him to evolve from abstract painting to more direct ways of working with reality. He had his most prolific moment during his North American stage, which was also when it became clear he was shifting towards visual poetry, with an interest in communication. In the postcards and collage work,

2 "While it is true that in 1963 and 1964, in Glasgow, he was already doing postcards and the essential features of his collages were present, it was not until his period in Canada, from 1964 to 1966, that Iglésias would develop his specific style of pop collage, with a conscious and continuous use of the postcard as a means of communication." Ramon Salvo, *op. cit.*

3 "These postcards are part of a series of 174 that the author made from 1964 to 1966, and sent from Canada and the United States to a young woman in Barcelona."

he encounters a small-format creative space that adapts to his reality (unlike with his painting, which he would gradually leave behind), based on recycling materials, mobility (his own, the movement of the works and that of the materials used) and an important aesthetic shift: now it would be the objects themselves being shown, not their re-creation, and letters would become an autonomous aesthetic and semantic feature.

After his return to Barcelona in 1966, and especially with the birth of his son Marc in 1971, he travelled less frequently, although he would never renounce his open perspective on the arts and the world. In any case, he participated in international encounters taking place in Barcelona, and continued to correspond with creators as diverse as Felipe Boso (resident in Germany) and the Uruguayan Clemente Padín. He also played an essential role in the activation of experimental poetry in Catalonia. Defined by Maria Lluïsa Borràs as “the man of enthusiasm”,<sup>4</sup> he organised exhibitions and encounters and wrote articles that sought to bring the reality of experimental poetry, both national and international, to a broader public. Furthermore, every time he did travel, he collected all kinds of printed material that he would keep for future works, putting together a kind of archive. Because of this, the echoes of Glasgow, Paris, Vancouver and New York continued to resonate in his work even when he was back in Barcelona.

### *Mass Communication and Consumer Society*

The realm of printing and the graphic arts played a fundamental role amongst the many interests of Iglésias del Marquet. It is an area worth studying (as seen by his personal library, and his work as chief editor of the magazine *Press/Graph* from 1974 to 1979) and a source of inspiration for his work. Yet Iglésias de Marquet was not simply an enthusiast of the prodigious

<sup>4</sup> Maria Lluïsa Borràs, prologue to the catalogue *Primera mostra de poesia visual catalana a Barcelona*, Barcelona, Escola Eina, 1973.

amount of printed production in consumer society, for he was also interested in popular graphic output from an older period. Be that as it may, behind all he does is an unflinching passion for all things printed, for the way that ink is run across paper.

Like other experimental poets of his time, he included all kinds of components in his work (and these pieces were in turn reused to make still other works). Finding further inspiration in semiotic studies of the period, he set up a critical dialogue with the propagandistic and advertising capacity of capitalist societies after World War Two. Picking up on what Arrigo Lora-Totino has observed in reference to Italian *poesia visiva*, his visual proposals can also be taken as a kind of reverse advertising.<sup>5</sup>

While some creators from the early avant-garde had introduced similar graphic traces of the industrial era, in the second half of the 20th century poets had to adapt to the system imposed by communications technology. That is, in order to have a voice in the present and influence it, they had to go into the street and create poems that share in the sheer velocity and overlaying of languages we have all become accustomed to—this is one of the key features of concrete poetry, especially from Brazil. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that Iglésias did not differentiate between popular art and high art, nor between historical and modern graphics:

As for the selection and division of popular art and cultivated or intellectual art, it is quite difficult. For example, to use a personal case, I personally love popular printing from the 19th and 20th century, or from earlier times, Épinal prints as they say in France, or cordel literature as we say here, and black and white xylography, not even using colour. Is

5 “[La] poesia visiva [...] consistente nell’acostamento e rapporto tra parola e immagine (da giornali, rotocalchi, ecc.) e conseguente critica nei confronti del banale quotidiano quale compare e domina sui giornali, rotocalchi, televisioni, eccetera: in sostanza una forma di pubblicità in negativo” [*Poesia visiva*. . . consisting of the combination and rapport between word and image (in newspapers, printed magazines, etcetera) and the consequent critique of banal, everyday life that appears in newspapers, magazines, on television and so on—in essence, a kind of reverse advertising]. Arrigo Lora-Totino, “Nota del curatore”, in *Poesia concreta*, Mantova, Editoriale Sometti, 2002, p. 34 (cited by Clementina Greco in *Declinazioni europee di poesia totale*, Arezzo, Edizioni Helicon, 2018, p. 63).

that popular art or exclusive art? When these images first appeared, they were a very popular art form, presented on very inexpensive sheets. Nowadays they are a subject of academic study.<sup>6</sup>

Nor does he set out the limits between various forms of artistic expression:

The sections of art cannot be systematically separated from each other in any sort of solid, definitive way. Let's not forget that life is a complex set of circumstances. So everything is art, everything is not art; anything is art, anything is not art. Then, in all that, communications media plays its part. There are magazines, there's cinema, a thousand impacts, a thousand incitements, our society bubbles up and boils over with visual imagery, it is incredibly rich in it . . . So that each aspect influences all the others.

The collection and study of all kinds of printed materials led him ineluctably to collage, which implies recycling, the addition of everyday and ordinary components, the juxtaposition of components that would normally be contradictory, and a technique that can be done in a small work space (making it possible to be done while spending periods abroad). It also involves recycling components that are teeming with life, as well as reason to reflect on semiotics and communications in the society of his time, key aspects appearing in his work from the mid-1960s on. What do advertisements and slogans then say when we isolate them, when we join them up with dissonant materials?

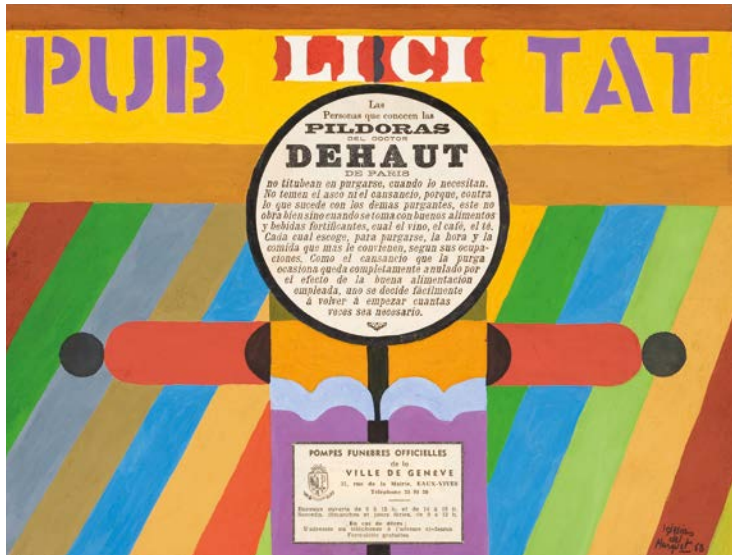
Furthermore, Iglésias del Marquet was extremely knowledgeable about the possibilities of collage. He was aware of historical references, from Braque, Gris and Picasso (the first artists to add everyday life taking place in cafés and in newspaper stories to art) to surrealist collage, including the Soviet

<sup>6</sup> Fragment of the interview with Antoni Muntadas for the project *Between the Frames*, included in the display presented in this exhibition. The following fragment is also from the same interview, which is commented upon below.





Untitled, Vancouver, 1964



Untitled, 1968



Untitled, 1970



Untitled, 1970



Untitled, n. d.



Josep Iglésias del Marquet in Glasgow, ca. 1962

photomontages of creators such as Rodchenko, El Lissitzky and Telingater in the 1920s and 1930s (making it possible, for their part, to produce posters to be again inserted into urban spaces) and Dadaist collage, like that of Jean Arp and Hannah Höch. In the collage work of Iglésias del Marquet, we can also find resonances of Max Ernst and Joseph Cornell, who clinically reutilised illustrations from older books and newspapers; or those of Kurt Schwitters, who with his rougher technique would combine graphic residues from life in the city. Iglésias, however, was also well aware of new tendencies emerging in Europe in the area of collage and experimental poetry, with the exploratory work of creators like Jiří Kolář, Franz Mon and the Italian *poesia visiva*, including poets such as Adriano Spatola,<sup>7</sup> Lucia Marcucci, Lamberto Pignotti and Eugenio Miccini. There were also theoretical contributions like those of Max Bense, key in the development of concrete poetry in Germany, and Marshall McLuhan, who was fundamental for understanding the role of the mass media in the 20th century.

The artist from Artesa set about working in collage diligently, with a solid grounding and plenty of patience. He remade aspects of dynamic consumer society, all the while employing the technique of a classical artist, with great refinement and pulchritude. In the end, Iglésias del Marquet saw himself more as a worker than an inspired poet, just as the early avant-gardes saw themselves, beginning with the “technical” manifestos of the Futurists. This was surely one of the reasons that led him to sign his works with a rubber stamp, with his name in typography: lead font, standardised letters. On the one hand, collage represented an extension of his work as a journalist, a kind of intermediate space where the components of one world would contaminate the other, and vice versa. Various collages feature newspaper headlines—most especially from cities he had visited—and

<sup>7</sup> In 1967, Adriano Spatola visited Barcelona as part of the contingent of Gruppo 63, a heterogenous group of authors who were interested in semiotics and the study of the sign (amongst other areas of interest), like Iglésias himself. Also in the delegation were Nanni Balestrini and Umberto Eco. Spatola, for his part, was one of the most important disseminators of Joan Brossa in Italy.

in some cases, taking advantage of having access to newspaper production workshops, he created fictitious front pages, like the one he dedicated to the birth of his son.

Nevertheless, the aspect that distances him from the collage tradition in the world of art is that his montages are meant, for the most part, to be reproduced in series. That is, that the original collage is more like the musical score for the final piece, as occurs with Joan Brossa's *Poemes habitables* [Habitable Poems] from the 1960s, being simply the basis for the final visual poem. Whether using a photolith or a photocopy, the work is a printed image. This is an aspect that links him directly to the world of concrete poetry and visual poetry in general, and which more decisively sets him apart from the logic of art and its obsession for the original.

### *Concrete poetry and poemographs*

The name of Josep Iglésias del Marquet has been associated with excess frequency to the exhibition *Poesia concreta*, which was held in Lleida in 1971, on his initiative. For many, this would be the sole, well-known highlight from the career of this artist from Artesa; Joan Brossa and Guillem Viladot, who accompanied him in the venture, had better fortune making their work known. Still, if that modest and to a degree rudimentary show has become a historical milestone, it is thanks to the efforts of Iglésias, who was convinced about publishing a catalogue. He also took it upon himself to do the entirety of the graphics, including the exhibition logo, which has become iconic. His insistence on doing publications, therefore, has made it possible for information about the exhibition to continue to be fully germane.

From 1970 to 1977, furthermore, Viladot and Iglésias were the driving forces behind the publishing house Lo Pardal, although the first collaboration between them was *Sopes amb pa torrat* [Bread Crumb Soups] by Guillem Viladot (“Maquette, visual production and original illustrations by Josep Iglésias del Marquet”, as the volume explains), from one year earlier. Lo

Pardal published various books by Viladot, with Iglésias doing the design and layout, including *Poemes de la incomunicació* [Non-Communication Poems] (1970), *Entre opus i opus* [Between Opus and Opus] (1972), *Home llum llim zero/d'un en un* [Light Man Zero Silt/One by One] (1972) and the various version of *Poema de l'home* [Poem of the Man] (1973–1974). It was, in fact, the strongest period for Viladot, where his own perspective was aligned with clean, modern graphic design, something he would relinquish when he distanced himself from Iglésias and found himself alone at the head of Lo Pardal. *Poemes de la incomunicació*, with a look that is quite evidently associated with Iglésias del Marquet, is one of the most important books of concrete poetry published in Europe, despite not being one of the better known.

The few books published by Iglésias del Marquet are also with Lo Pardal: *Postals nord-americanes per a una noia de Barcelona* (1972), *Les arrels assumptes* [Assumed Roots] (1972), *Persistència del cercle* [Persistence of the Circle] (1972) and *Imatge enllà* [Image Beyond] (1973). *Imago mundi* was left pending publication, although we do have a version in poster format in this exhibition. While *Persistència del cercle* and *Imatge enllà* reflect his interest in semiotics and analysis of the image, in a near-aphoristic format, *Les arrels assumptes* is his most important book, an ambitious compendium of various formalisations that he advances in the field of visual poetry,<sup>8</sup> featuring both those proposals that are closer to collage and recycling, and those that are nearer to concrete poetry and conceptualism. Divided into nine different sections, it includes various of his most iconic poems, such as “Poemògraf” [Poemograph] and “Inici de poema” [Poem Beginning]. The poemographer is nothing other than the tool he supposedly used to create what he called poemographs, his own term for designating those works of visual poetry based on found images, a machine to identify and poetically process the graphic debris of everyday life.<sup>9</sup>

8 In fact, in the group shows he was involved in from that point on, he used the expression *visual poetry*, like at the Ars gallery in Valls, in 1972 (the poster for the exhibition is displayed in this exhibition).

9 In line with what tended to occur on the international circuit, where various terms are used alongside each other to refer to experimental poetic practices (concrete poetry, *poesia visiva*, visual poetry, spatialism, signalism, and so on), Iglésias would coin his own term.

The choice of typography, bold design, the subject matter and high-quality printing come together to put these publications at the same level as the work of Hansjörg Mayer, the German editor of the iconic magazines *Futura* and *Rot*, and the series of large-format concrete poetry books such as *ainmal nur das alphabet gebrauchen*, by Franz Mon, a creator who had many points of connection with Iglésias del Marquet.<sup>10</sup> From approximately 1965 to 1975, all over Europe we find concrete poetry publications with high quality poetics and graphics, and the publications of Lo Pardal are at a comparable level. I believe it can be stated that, despite more modest means and weaker connections with international networks than all other publishers, Iglésias made Lo Pardal into a milestone in the European context.

Despite his defence of concrete poetry, his work cannot be strictly set in this sphere, but rather should be understood within the more generic category of visual poetry, as it combines text and image, and only on rare occasions uses strategies that are clearly concrete. It is true that he shares with concrete poetry (whether Brazilian or European) an interest in typography, printing and strategies for distributing new poetic forms outside of habitual circuits. Likewise, with concretism he shares the idea of the poem as a useful object, and the disappearance of the self in favour of total communication. Poetry is oriented towards what is common, and abandons the realm of autobiography. In the work of Iglésias, the poetics of many of his peers resonates, referring to creators such as Augusto de Campos, Eugen Gomringer, Josef Hiršal, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Mary Ellen Solt, bpNichol and Václav Havel.

In a 1972 article he signed with a pseudonym, he stated:

Due to the imperatives of the culture we are called to live within, they say, [concrete and visual poets] have given themselves over to the task of serving poetics through the

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the book by Mon is divided into different sections, each corresponding to different approaches to concrete and visual poetry.



valid communication codes of their time. Especially in certain works, the image forms a new poetic universe.

Imagery, slogans, circulatory semantics, press clippings, ostensible advertising, colour, graphic representations of multinational merit, define another lyrical field known as “visual poetry”, often partway to or fully inserted in the visual arts.<sup>11</sup>

Despite his prolific production and high work rate, Iglésias del Marquet would always remain discreetly in the background; he preferred, to express this another way, to not have to leave the workshop and instead assist in every way possible in making new poetic forms more broadly known, and in the connection between his various areas of interest. A similar case was that of Felipe Boso, who like him died far too young (in 1983 in Boso’s case, before he turned 60). In this exhibition we present a publisher’s proof of a Felipe Boso poem (*Poética III*), designed by Iglésias, which apparently was not distributed much beyond the intimacy of their correspondence, perhaps because Iglésias was not convinced by the result. On the copy Boso dedicated to Iglésias we read: “To Josep Iglésias del Marquet, creator, believer, unquenchable creditor.” Iglésias also published *Sordmut*, by Joan Brossa, a theatrical piece from 1947. It seems it was hardly distributed, but at least the person responsible for it kept more copies.

### *Journalism*

Journalism was the main profession of Josep Iglésias del Marquet. He worked at the *Diario de Barcelona* from 1968 to 1983, and in his final years at *La Vanguardia*, from 1984 on. Further to this, he collaborated regularly in other publications, often using a pseudonym. He did not create his own magazine, but was able to introduce himself into journalistic circles; he also wrote many

11 Article signed with the pseudonym Ermengol Gallart, *Recoll*, no. 1197, Blanes, 22 July 1972.

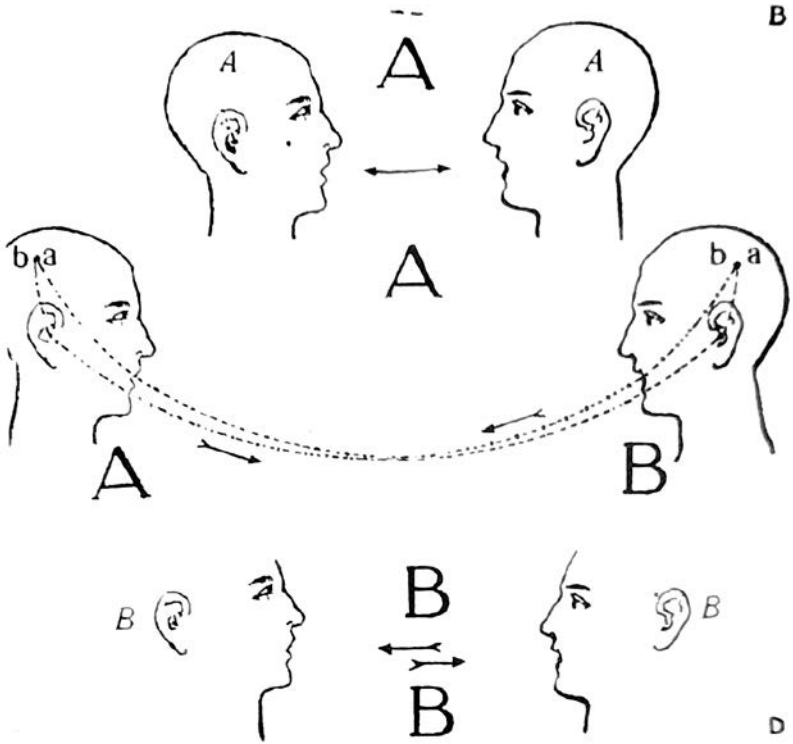
articles in general media on experimental poetry and other riskier artistic proposals. He also wrote impassioned articles on the history of the book, as well as reflecting on communications.

Some of these articles were illustrated with his own work, in a playful dialogue between his profession as a journalist, artistic verve and the passion of a man of many worlds. Amongst these many endeavours, there is the portrait of his friend Manuel de Pedrolo, used to illustrate an article by Josep Faulí on the writer in the *Diario de Barcelona* in 1975; there was another for the work purportedly by Arthur Cravan, illustrating an homage to Cravan in 1983 at Galeria Ciento (orchestrated by Carles Hac Mor, amongst others). Sometimes we find artworks reproduced together with an article, with no original illustration preserved. His role as a poetic worker, as played out daily at the newspaper, here becomes just that much clearer.

He also did articles on some of his favourite artists, such as Joan Miró, Leandre Cristòfol or Antoni Tàpies. These three names accompany him from an early age. As he was ever-attentive to the art world and what was happening in galleries, towards the end of his time as a journalist he wrote regularly about the art market. His own work was mostly on paper, and during the 1980s his public activity as an artist was sparse. Despite this, in 1985 he presented his only installation piece, *La llengua és la pàtria* [The Homeland is Language], at Espai d'Art Ferran & Jordi in Barcelona. In this project, he reuses and multiples one of his collages, in a modest homage to the printing press.

It was also during this period that Antoni Muntadas (who had already requested his collaboration for *On Subjectivity*, from 1978) came to interview him for *Between the Frames* (1983–1991), a work that presents a vision of the art system in the 1990s through conversations with 160 professionals, representing the various kinds of intermediaries between works of art and the public (journalists, gallerists, collectors, administrators and critics, amongst others). In this exhibition, fragments of this conversation are featured, with Iglésias del Marquet reflecting on art and communication. The declarations enable us to explore his thought and get a better, first-person idea of his world.

Josep Iglésias del Marquet is a man of many faces; here we have shown just a few of the facets that make up his world, although they are surely those that would most clearly drive him towards his lucid, daring reading of the present. Despite being recognised as a pioneer of mail art and as one of the creators who first introduced concrete poetry and pop art into Catalonia, there are still many aspects of his work that could be explored, including his influence on his most immediate context. This exhibition seeks to provide a minimal, non-linear mapping (like what we might find with curiosity cabinets and artist studios) of his vibrant perspective on the image and letters.



Untitled, ca. 1973

Curator: **Eduard Escoffet**

## GUIDED TOURS

**Thursday, 21 November, 6 pm**

With **Eduard Escoffet**

**Saturday, 18 January, 12 am**

With **Marc Iglésias Colomer** (son of **Josep Iglésias del Marquet**)

**Tuesday, 11 March, 6 pm**

With **Eduard Escoffet**

Free entry until filled to capacity

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