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VILANOVA I LA GELTRÚ

COMMENTED WORKS

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS



Stormy Sea

Ramon Martí Alsina (1826-1894)

1872-1884. Oil on canvas

Foundation bequest. BMVB-240

This painting of the sea, a common theme in Martí Alsina's work, depicts rough waters and a cloudy sky that portend a storm. Despite the romantic echo of the scene with all the emotions that nature evokes, Alsina used a fully realistic technique, with a broadly sketched and vibrant brushstroke, characteristic of this latter stage in his career. Ambitious in its size, this work has been part of this collection since the museum was founded.

Martí Alsina, the foremost painter of Catalan Realism, is a key name in the rebirth of 19th century Catalan painting. He studied in Paris, where he discovered the work of Gustave Courbet and the Barbizon School. He also had a profound influence on younger artists through his position as a teacher at the Escola de la Llotja, as well as through his highly productive activity within the art market.



Landscape with bridge

Hermen Anglada Camarasa (1871-1959)

1890. Oil on canvas

Donation by the artist (1890). BMVB-246

This work is one of the first known landscapes by Anglada Camarasa, who painted it after spending time in Montseny with other young painters. The piece recalls the work of Modest Urgell, who advised his students to be in direct contact with nature. The strength of the colours, the realism in the workmanship, the bright line of the horizon and the precision with which he draws the vegetation in the foreground show the artistic quality of the young Hermen. His friends gave him the nickname *Branquetes*, (“twigs” in English) precisely because of the thoroughness of his work.

In the lower right-hand corner one can see the dedication: “Al Excmo. Sr. D. Víctor Balaguer [To the esteemed Mr Víctor Balaguer] / 1890”. It seems that Anglada had the opportunity to personally visit the museum and library during a visit in 1886. The presence of this work by a then 19-year-old painter in this gallery can be seen as a first step in his promising career.



Rainy afternoon

Santiago Rusiñol i Prats (1861-1931)

1889. Oil on canvas

Donation by the artist (1890). BMVB-3817

This work is the result of Rusiñol i Casas's famous journey by carriage throughout Catalonia started in 1889 and published as chronicles in *La Vanguardia* at the time. The resulting paintings were exhibited in the Sala Parés. The scene depicts the porch of a Catalan farmhouse with a young woman observing the rainy landscape. The fog and the grey atmosphere give the lonely woman at the centre of the painting a feeling of sadness that conveys melancholy.

Rusiñol was one of the most complete and productive creators of Catalan Modernisme as well as one of its most multifaceted artists: painter, illustrator, writer, collector, journalist and playwright. The son of a family of industrialists, he showed an interest in painting from a very young age. Despite his family's initial opposition, he trained with the painter Tomàs Moragas and soon began publishing drawings that depicted his passion for the outdoors.



Askari

Marià Fortuny i Marsal (1838-1874)

c. 1860. Oil panel painting

Donation by Pere Bové i Montseny (1895). BMVB-3831

Marià Fortuny spent a long period of time in Morocco as a graphic chronicler of the so-called Hispano-Moroccan War (1860) on behalf of the Diputació de Barcelona. The intense light of that land transformed his colour palette. There, he worked on his renowned large-scale paintings such as *The Battle of Tetouan*, now in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. One of the small paintings he made at the time was of a Moroccan soldier, crafted with powerful brushstrokes and notable workmanship.

Originally from Reus, Fortuny created and circulated a style of detailed, precious realism throughout Europe and the Americas, boasting technical mastery and achieving great success on the art market. His death at a very young age cut short a career that had started to approach Impressionism in his final brushstrokes.



The Second of May

Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863-1923)

1884. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.
BMVB-259

This work is Sorolla's only known contribution to the historical paintings in the National Fine Arts Exhibitions. The large canvas, created in Valencia in 1884 when Sorolla was 21 years old, represents one of the episodes of the Spanish War of Independence, also known as the Peninsular War, in which the people and certain soldiers rebelled against Napoleon's troops. The moment that Sorolla captured was the defence of the Monteleón Barracks in Madrid, where Captains Luis Daoiz and Pedro Velarde fought with the help of civilian volunteers. The barracks, which are no longer present, occupied what is now the Plaza del Dos de Mayo, in the neighbourhood of Maravillas.

The work won second prize at the National Fine Arts Exhibition in 1884. The Spanish Government bought it for the National Painting and Sculpture Museum (which later became the Museo del Prado). Since 1886 this piece has been on display in the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum.



Female nude

Juan Luna Novicio (1857-1899)

1885. Oil on canvas

Donation by the artist (1894). BMVB-901

This type of full-body female nude in an interior decorated with fabrics of different textures and vivid colours responds to a well-established aesthetic taste in the final decades of the 19th century. This style has been described as Africanist exoticism, as it was highly exuberant and evoked scenes of harems. This taste for exoticism was nurtured by French artists. In Catalonia it had become fashionable in large part thanks to Marià Fortuny, who capitalised on the European market's interest in all matters inspired by fantasy and oriental luxury starting in the period of Romanticism.

Of Filipino origins, Juan Luna lived between Rome and Paris, where he painted this canvas. In the French capital he garnered acclaim when he won first prize at the National Exhibition in Madrid in 1884 with a great historical painting entitled *Spoliarium*, which aroused passions when it was exhibited at the Sala Parés in Barcelona in 1886. The collection at Balaguer Museum includes different pieces donated by the same painter, given that Balaguer, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, had a personal relationship with the artist.



Sketch of the opening ceremony of the 1887 Philippine General Exhibition

Francesc X. Amèrico i Aparici (1842-1912)

1887. Oil on canvas

Donation by the artist (1887). BMVB-162

This work shows the opening ceremony of the Philippine General Exhibition, which was held at the Palacio de Cristal del Retiro in Madrid in 1887, at the behest of Víctor Balaguer, who then held the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is a sketch for a large work that was lost in a fire.

The moment chosen by the artist raises the problem of the representation and perpetuation of the colonial gaze and makes viewers question the colonisers' viewpoint. The image forcefully reflects the power that Spain exerted on the Philippine islands. A soldier on horseback, representing military authority, is the backdrop to the main scene. The foreground depicts the arrival of a group of Filipinos, probably Igorots from the north of the island of Luzon, who had been hired to be put on display in a human zoo as part of this exhibition. In front of them is the Queen Regent María Cristina, who appears accompanied by the government of the Restoration, where we can perfectly see Balaguer.

The confrontation with the colonial legacy preserved in the founding collection of the Víctor Balaguer Library Museum opens up new perspectives for interpreting history and provides relevant historical testimonies of the colonial administration.



Portrait of a woman

Joaquim Espalter i Rull (1809-1880)

1856. Oil on canvas

Bequest from the Manyoses family (1928). BMVB-130

For a time, portraits were the primary activity for which many artists were paid thanks to commissions from the bourgeoisie. This is a magnificent example of a romantic portrait, depicting an idealised image of a woman sitting in a luxurious interior. Details such as the red velvet dress, the necklace, the pointed scarf as well as the subject's pale white skin tell us about her privileged social status. The work showcases the academic drawing that the painter learned in Rome, looking to the Nazarene Movement and Italian Primitives as references. This painting has a counterpart in *Portrait of a man*, displayed next to it. Both were donated by the Manyoses family, which hailed from Cubelles.

Espalter, considered one of the main representatives of romantic painting in Spain, settled in Madrid after he returned from Italy. He was a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando and a chamber painter for Queen Isabella II.



Unknown lady

Juan Pantoja de la Cruz (c. 1553-1608)

First third of the 17th century. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.

BMVB-8602

This enigmatic, unidentified woman, who holds an imperturbable gaze, wears a magnificent pointed ruff (known in Spanish as *lechuguilla punteada*) which the artist has painted with exceptional skill. The white of the subtle collar frames her face and sustains the volume of the entire composition. Set against an impersonal and timeless dark background, the strategic light attracts viewers to noble details such as the pearl earrings, the ornate cross, the clasp and the golden ribbon in her hair.

Pantoja de la Cruz is one of the greatest exponents of Spanish Renaissance portraits. A disciple of Sánchez Coello, he strengthened his position as an official portraitist of the Court with the monarch Felipe III. The meticulousness of the details stands out in his portraits of aristocratic characters, highly typical of the Flemish tradition, in contrast to the faces, which distil the psychological penetration of the Venetian school.



Charles II

Juan Carreño de Miranda (1614-1685)

1673. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.

BMVB-8599

This portrait depicts the Spanish monarch Charles II, the last of the House of Habsburg and son of Felipe IV. His death without a successor after a chaotic reign led to a change of dynasty in the Spanish crown. He is depicted in the Hall of Mirrors of the Alcázar, dressed in black silk with a ruff and wearing the Golden Fleece hanging around his neck with a chain. This room had been decorated under the guidance of Velázquez and contained a remarkable gallery of paintings. A painting by Titian and an equestrian portrait by Felipe IV can be seen in the mirrors.

An Asturian by birth, Juan Carreño de Miranda started working for the Court to decorate the dome of this hall, based on a recommendation by Velázquez. In 1669 the Queen Regent, Mariana of Austria, appointed him as a chamber painter, the highest category for a court painter.



Portrait of Queen Marie Louise (copy)

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828)

c. 1790. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.

BMVB-8630

This work is the portrait of Carlos IV's queen consort, Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma (1751-1819), granddaughter of Louis XV of France. Many state affairs were conducted by this queen and her favourite Manuel Godoy, to whom she was closely connected. She had confrontations with members of the aristocracy, including her well-known rivalry with the powerful Duchess of Alba, who was related to Goya.

During his time as a chamber painter, Goya became the great portraitist of the nobility and royalty in Madrid. After the monarchs ascended the throne in 1789, he was responsible for preparing the official portraits, of which there are multiple versions. Here we see the sovereign dressed in an opulent hat garnished with feathers and a luxurious dress bursting with embellishments. The crown and cape, symbols of the monarchy, are present on her right.



The Penitent Saint Jerome

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682)

1650-1652. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.
BMVB-8601

This work is an example of Murillo's tenebrism era, notably influenced by Ribera. He employed a dark background crossed by a diagonal beam of light. The work is an eremitical representation of the saint inside the cave. During his period of seclusion, Saint Jerome read and analysed numerous philosophical and religious texts. He is known as a translator of the Bible into Latin (the *Vulgata*). A number of items accompany the saint, including books, a crucifix, an inkwell and two quills. His nude torso demonstrates the artist's mastery of the anatomical representation of the body.

Murillo is one of the most illustrious proponents of Baroque painting in the religious genre. His style is in line with the postulates of the Counter-Reformation and encourages viewers to focus on human and sentimental scenes. Despite having had contact with the court, the artist always lived in Seville, where he became a respected figure who founded and presided over a painting academy for training artists.



The Holy Family with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John

Doménikos Theotokópoulos “El Greco” (1541-1614)

c. 1600. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.
BMVB-8606

The Holy Family was a regular theme in El Greco's production in the transitional years from the 16th to the 17th century. The figures fall perfectly in line with his elongated canon and dramatic point. The surreal colours of the artist's palette were often described as dreamlike, adopted centuries later by the Surrealists. The artist modelled shapes and figures based on the light and he united his Byzantine origins with the Western tradition of the Venetian and Roman masters, resulting in a marked expressionism that is difficult to place firmly in any one school of art.

El Greco is a figure of paramount importance in Spanish art. His presence at the Balaguer Museum dates back to the original collection of the Prado with *The Annunciation*, a key work by the artist, which was returned to Madrid in 1981.



Saint Dominic of Guzmán

Saint Catherine of Siena

Fray Juan Bautista Maíno (1581-1649)

1612-1614. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.
BMVB-9218 and BMVB-9219

These two pieces flanked the central scene of the Calvary on the main altarpiece of the church of Convent of San Pedro Mártir in Toledo, formed by different scenes from the life of Jesus. Saint Dominic appears with a quill in hand, a reference to his intellectual activity, and holding a small church as the founder of the Dominican order. The historian Angulo Íñiguez believed that it could be a self-portrait of Maíno himself, who took on the habits of a Dominican while working on this piece. Saint Catherine appears with a crown of thorns and sores on her hands, in reference to the Passion.

Very few of Juan Bautista's works are preserved as he joined the Dominican order in 1613 and renounced painting. However, it is known that he visited Italy and came into contact with the Caravaggio's tenebrism and Carracci's classicism. These lessons resulted in art that was highly personal, with excellent portraits, descriptive drawing and contrasting lighting.



Mummified infant. Nesi

Late Period (664-332 BC). Thebes (Egypt)

Human remains, fabric material and polychrome cardboard pulp

Donation by Eduard Toda i Güell (1886). BMVB-2964

The collection of Egyptian antiquities donated by Eduard Toda to Víctor Balaguer features the mummified child preserved in this display case. The child has two polychrome plaques on its body: the one resting on its chest includes a representation of the goddess Nut with her wings open and kneeling in a protective pose; as well as another plaque on Nesi's legs which shows a jackal representing the god Anubis, protector of the embalming process, who accompanied the deceased in the passage to the afterlife.

Regarding the child's name, Toda himself stated that it was Nesi, which he must have read somewhere on the sarcophagus or the tomb and jotted it down in his notes. This name has been used to refer to the child throughout the hundred-year history of the institution. X-rays made it possible to deduce that the child was about five years old, though its sex could not be determined.



Samurais

19th century. Japan

Wood, silk, iron and leather

Donation by Eduard Toda i Güell (1884). BMVB-1451 and BMVB-3986

Samurais or *bushi* were a warrior elite from Japan that emerged around the turn of the 10th century. They were the dominant class from the late 17th century until the Meiji Restoration (1868). Their armour, apart from its defensive significance, also had an important artistic and symbolic value. The sword represented the samurai's soul, while the cherry blossom referred to the fleeting nature of life, since, just as the petals fall at the first gust of wind, they could give their life for their lord at any time.

There are two types of samurai armour: the *yoroi*, designed for warriors on horseback, and the *domaru*, a lighter type of armour made for soldiers who fought on foot. The suits of armour in the Balaguer Museum are *domaru* and are merely decorative, not designed for battle. They are formed by the cuirass and the defensive elements, the helmet and mask, which were also used to frighten the enemy.



Still life with prunes, a basket of grapes and an apple

Luis Egidio Meléndez (1716-1780)

1762. Oil on canvas

Long-term loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado.

BMVB-8607

Meléndez painted a variety of intensely lit fruit on a dark neutral background in this work. In the foreground, we can see prunes and an apple, while the centre of the composition features a basket with bunches of grapes. We can see how the artist clearly studied the reflections of the light, which continuously vibrate throughout the piece. The work belongs to the series of still lifes collected by the future King Carlos IV, who was the Prince of Asturias at the time, for his cabinet of curiosities (Real Gabinete de Historia Natural) at the Royal Palace. This piece represents a magnificent example of the level of technical excellence that still lifes acquired during the Baroque.

Meléndez was one of the leading names in this style. Named “the Spanish Chardin” due to his French influence, he lent a great deal of importance to transparencies and textures and ensured that the fruits he depicted emerged from a mysterious penumbra.



Countryside scene

Anonymous

18th century. Oil on canvas

Legacy 1956. BMVB-3833

The Legacy 1956 only features three works prior to the 19th century: two still lifes with flowers, by Juan de Arellano from the 17th century (exhibited on the ground floor), and this festive countryside scene, an example of the French artistic tradition that became fashionable in the 18th century following the arrival of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne. This piece represents a popular celebration in a rural setting, with a jovial tone, where the figures are playing musical instruments, drinking and dancing.

Recent research has pointed to the possibility that this piece was made by the circle around the French painter Michel-Ange Houasse (1680-1730), who worked in the court of Felipe V. Houasse's oeuvre features numerous genre and popular scenes, following the style of David Teniers (1610-1690), however with a more academicist viewpoint.



The hermitage of Saint Blai. L'Aleixar

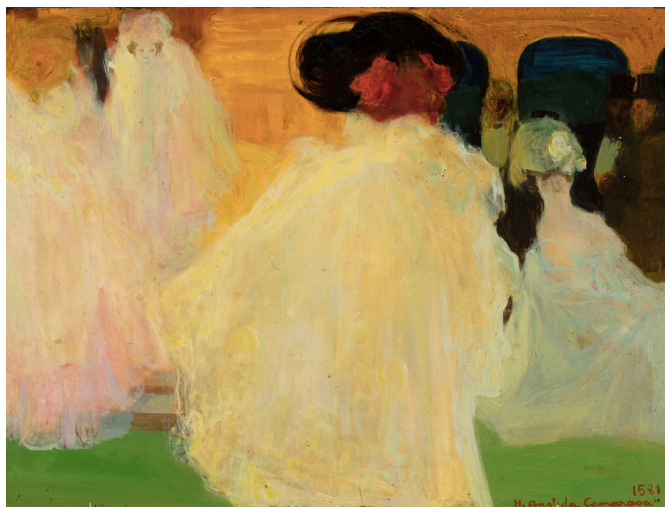
Joaquim Mir i Trinxet (1873-1940)

c. 1911. Oil on canvas

Donation by Josep Mir i Estalella (1968). BMVB-250

Joaquim Mir lived for a time in the area of Camp de Tarragona, after which he was admitted to the Pere Mata Institute in Reus, having suffered a nervous breakdown. He would go on outings to paint in nearby places, especially in the towns of L'Aleixar and Maspujols. The hermitage of Saint Blai in L'Aleixar became one of his favourite places, and he became friends with the hermit who lived there, known as "Lo Cotna", the figure represented here in a large format. The period in Tarragona led to the reappearance of human figures in the work by this painter, who is widely considered one of the great Catalan landscape artists.

Mir is one of the leading names in the history of Catalan art from the first half of the 20th century. After many creative stages during his time in Mallorca and in Camp de Tarragona, Mir settled in Vilanova i la Geltrú in 1921 when he married a local woman, Maria Estalella. He would reside there until the end of his life, and he would become a point of reference for local cultural activity.



Figures

Hermen Anglada Camarasa (1873-1959)

c. 1900. Oil panel painting

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1581

This small painting is an excellent example of the painting from Anglada Camarasa's first Parisian period, which served as the basis for the artist's subsequent international acclaim. With the inclusion of the electrical light to the shopfronts, their novel interplay of chromatic and luminous values enhanced these beaming colours. At the time, the artist considered his creation as a pure painting exercise, in which the subject was only a pretext to develop wondrous bursts of colour. He later produced mesmerising works, including *Scenes of a Parisian restaurant at night* and *Flowers of Paris*.

Anglada Camarasa spent an initial period of time in Catalonia focused on the landscape, until he travelled to Paris in 1894 where he managed to make a name for himself relatively quickly. At the start of the 20th century, he participated in numerous international exhibitions that definitively catapulted him to fame.



Montmartre

Ramon Casas i Carbó (1866-1932)

1890. Oil on canvas

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1651

In the winter of 1890-1891 Ramon Casas, alongside Santiago Rusiñol, settled in the highest part of the Parisian neighbourhood of Montmartre, the cradle of modern art, where they discovered Impressionism and were influenced by artists such as Manet, Degas and Whistler. Due to the intense cold in the French capital, they often painted without leaving the house. This depiction of Montmartre is merely an example, with a perspective taken from a higher viewpoint, surely from the window of his workshop. The canvas captures the winter atmosphere, in the style of the impressionists, where objects lost their lines and contours. In the foreground we can see the neighbourhood carousel, while in the background, among the grey fog, we can see the old windmill turned into one of Paris's most famous dance halls in the 19th century.

Casas is one of the essential names of Catalan Modernisme. His use of drawing and poster making stood out in his painting. His influence on younger artists was evident from the early years of that first artistic trip to Paris, where many young Catalan artists would follow in his footsteps.



Still life of the herring

Isidre Nonell i Monturiol (1872-1911)

1910. Oil on canvas

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1620

These two still lives by Nonell belong to the artist's final stage, in which he left portraits and scenes with people behind and delved into the still life genre. His highly austere still lives with compositional simplicity, stand out for their rich colour palette, crafted with nervous, short and thick brushstrokes.

Nonell was one of the most charismatic artists among the second generation of the modernists, internationally renowned for his influence on a young Pablo Picasso. One of the main subjects of his work were the portraits of gypsies and scenes with vulnerable people at the margins of society, with which he promoted the modernisation of Catalan art at the turn of the century. He delved into topics outside the norm that were not always well accepted by critics and the art market. It was not until shortly before his premature death that he started to receive public recognition.



The sad room

Pere Torné Esquius (1879-1936)

c. 1913. Oil on canvas

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1631

This interior scene, created within the flat painting guidelines of synthetism, coolly evokes the presence of a recent death without any sense of drama which can be observed in different details: the bell raised in the background (tolling for the dead), the flowers scattered about on the bed or falling to the ground, and the reference to the Pietà in the picture above the headboard. The work dates from the artistic stage of Torné Esquius in which he was selected by Eugeni d'Ors as one of the illustrators of the influential *Almanac dels Noucentistes* (1911).

Pere Torné Esquius, with his naïve intimism, artistically contributed to Noucentisme before leaving for France, where he settled in 1906. However, he never stopped coming to Catalonia to hold exhibitions and visit.



Portrait of Victoria González Somón

Ricard Canals i Llambí (1876-1931)

c. 1931. Oil on canvas

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1602

This portrait is a posthumous work by the painter Ricard Canals. The portrait depicts Victoria González Somón, who holds a special role in the history of the Balaguer Museum, as her collection of small paintings by Catalan artists enormously enriched the museum's artistic collection when it was included under the label of the "Legacy 1956". Originally from Andalusia and an intimate friend of the art collector Lluís Plandiura, Victoria González socialised closely with many Catalan artists from the Noucentist generation, and she was even portrayed by painters such as Pere Pruna or Joaquim Mombrú, who are present in this gallery.

Canals, a member of the Safrà group together with Mir and Nonell, ended up successfully entering into the orbit of the Durand-Ruel in Paris, art merchants who had helped to showcase the impressionists. In his old age, already back in Paris, the artist approached the classical serenity of Noucentisme.



The sardana

Xavier Nogués i Casas (1873-1941)

1939. Oil panel painting

Legacy 1956. BMVB-1719

This popular scene represents a sardana dance in the midst of the outdoors, where circles of dancers, known as colles, move while being observed by people sitting on the grass. We can see the group of musicians, known as the cobla, in the background, with several instruments, and a country house in the distance that evokes the rural background. Both the topic as well as the execution owe to a fashionable aesthetic characteristic of Noucentisme.

Xavier Nogués, an artist in every sense of the word – cartoonist, illustrator, engraver, ceramist, puppeteer and painter –, would form part of the group known as El Rovell de l’Ou, which took its name from the tavern on Hospital street that was a meeting point for artists and intellectuals and the cradle of the realist line of Noucentisme. Linked to the Sant Lluç Artistic Circle, he was also a member of the Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Sant Jordi.



Tórtola Valencia and crow

Rafael Sala Marco (1891-1927)

1915. Oil on canvas

Purchased (1983). BMVB-2490

A profile portrait of the popular dancer Carmen Tórtola Valencia (1882-1955), whom Rafael Sala painted completely nude, with only earrings and a bracelet, holding a black crow in her hand. This renowned performance artist was one of the great revolutionaries of dance in the early 20th century. She was admired by artists and celebrities from many countries, and she entertained audiences in theatres across the world. Rafael Sala witnessed one of her shows at the Teatre Apollo in Vilanova in 1915, penning a summary of it in the magazine *Themis*.

Born in Vilanova i la Geltrú, Sala was in contact with the artistic avant-garde in Munich before 1911 and 1913, he spent time in Florence in 1914, alongside E. C. Ricart, and was one of the members of the Courbet Group. In 1919, he set sail for New York, before settling in Mexico later. He died young in Pasadena, California.



Porch

Enric C. Ricart i Nin (1893-1960)

1918. Oil on canvas

Donation by the heirs of Enric C. Ricart (1960).

BMVB-228

This vista by Ricart is an example of the sterilisation of the Catalan rural influenced by Fauvism and Cubism. With an evident linear perspective, the piece represents the porch of Masia d'en Cabanyes, with clothes hanging to dry, and the surrounding landscape with farmland and mountains in the background. The upper right-hand corner of the painting includes a hot air balloon bearing the colours of the French flag, an homage to the end of World War I and in memory of the victorious country. The work formed part of the 1918 Autumn Salon in Barcelona and, later, in the section of Catalan artists from the Autumn Salon in 1922.

Ricart was a renowned Noucentisme artist and one of the great Catalan woodcutters. During his formative years, he met Joan Miró, with whom he shared a workshop in Barcelona and with whom he founded the so-called Courbet Group in 1918, together with other colleagues. As an engraver, he illustrated a great number of publications and produced a wide range of works.



Foulé

Antonio Saura Atarés (1930-1998)

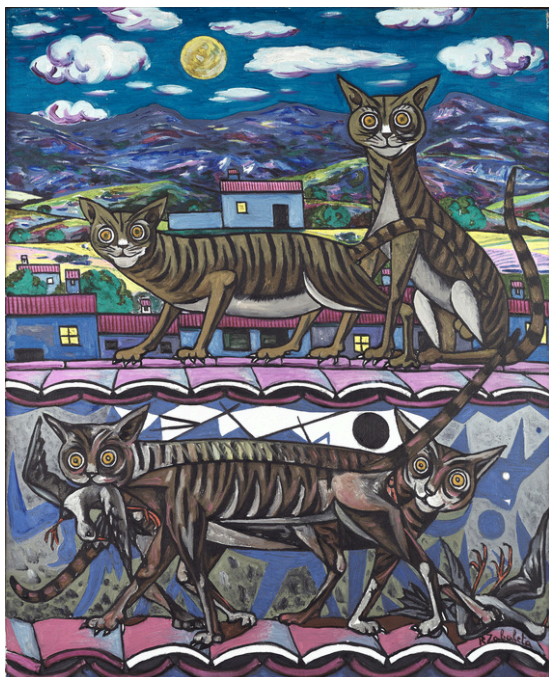
1959. Oil on canvas

Donation from the Contemporary Art Museum (1967).

BMVB-1931

Composition made up of three panels with black paint on a white background. This is an example of the well-known “Crowds” by Antonio Saura, a topic that held a significant place in his career. This creation, moved by his desire to occupy a massive blank space, expands across the surface of the canvas with a free brushstroke, modelling a set of shapes and organic associations that generate a sense of continuity.

Originally from Huesca, Saura spent time in Paris in the early 1950s. There he connected with different artistic circles, evolving toward abstract art with a gestural trend. He was one of the individuals who introduced Informalism in Spain. He would go on to form part of the El Paso group, a crucial movement for the Spanish cultural scene. Today, he is considered one of the leading Spanish artists on the international stage in the second half of the 20th century.



Nocturne of Cats

Rafael Zabaleta Fuentes (1907-1960)

1956. Oil on canvas

Donation from the Contemporary Art Museum (1967).

BMVB-1500

Rural scenes were one of Zabaleta's main themes, as seen in this work which represents four cats walking along the rooftops with mountains in the background and a bright moon in the sky. In this case, the artist divided the composition into two planes, in which we can see the simplified work on the shapes, marked by the use of pure colours and drawing lines. The museum has two more works by the artist: *Still Life with Dish of Broad Beans* and *The Workshop*.

Zabaleta is considered one of the leading exponents of expressionist realism, as well as one of the most singular artists in 20th Spanish painting. During his trips to Paris, he got to know fauvists, cubists and expressionists, influences that he would internalise to end up creating his own highly personal style.