

# A short century: MACBA Collection

- ▶ This display offers a chronological path through the MACBA Collection from 1929 to the present. It includes many key works in a series of rooms devoted to emblematic moments or decades.
- ▶ Curated by the **MACBA team**, special attention is given to the changing presentations and experiences of art through these nine decades or 'short century'. The presentation seeks to reflect perspective from Barcelona, hence its beginning in 1929 with the International Exposition.
- ▶ The exhibition shows works by **Alexander Calder** and **Joaquín Torres-García**. In the presentation of the successive decades, works by **Eugènia Balcells**, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, **Christian Boltanski**, **Esther Ferrer**, **Gego**, **Eulàlia Grau**, **The Guerrilla Girls**, **Hans Haacke**, **Jenny Holzer**, **Sanja Iveković**, **Miralda**, **Joan Miró**, **Juan Muñoz**, **The Otolith Group**, **Raymond Pettibon**, **Benet Rossell**, **Joan Rabascall**, **Martha Rosler**, **Jorge Oteiza**, **Antoni Tàpies** and **Werker Collective**, will be included, among others.
- ▶ **A dynamic presentation:** although presented chronologically, ***A Short Century: the MACBA Collection*** will change over time so that each consecutive display can offer a new view of the fonds of the Collection. An open reading **formulating variations** on the selection of works with the aim of **renewing and extending the content of the chronological itinerary and intensifying its didactic intention.**

Consequently, in **the coming months** we will present *On Subjectivity (1978)*, by **Muntadas**; *Proyecto Niágara (1993)*, by **Roberto Obregón**; and *Un pechiche para Benkos (2017)*, by **Marcos Ávila Forero**, which will be installed in the tower.

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**Title:** *A short Century.MACBA Collection* **Opening:** October 4, 2018, **Dates:** October 5, permanent  
**formulating variations** **Organisation:** MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, **Curator:** MACBA  
team

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# A short century: MACBA Collection

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In 1929 Barcelona hosted the International Exposition. Mies van der Rohe, in collaboration with Lilly Reich, designed the German Pavilion, otherwise known as 'Barcelona Pavilion'. On the initiative of Josep lluís Sert and Josep Torres i Clavé, the GATCPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) was founded. André Breton wrote the Second Surrealist Manifesto. In Paris, a group of abstract artists led by Joaquín Torres-García and Michel Seuphor, founded *Cercle et Carré*. That same year, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened in New York and Virginia Woolf published her first essay *A Room of One's Own*. This is the cultural context that initiates the new presentation of the **MACBA Collection**, set out as a chronological path from 1929 to the present. This display includes a number of key works from the Collection, in a series of rooms dedicated to the most emblematic cultural and social moments of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. **Curated by MACBA's team**, it highlights the changing presentations and experiences of art through the nine decades of this 'short century'. **A dynamic presentation**: although presented chronologically, ***A Short Century: the MACBA Collection*** will change over time so that each consecutive display **can offer a new view of the fonds of the Collection**. An open reading **formulating variations** on the selection of works with the aim of **renewing and extending the content of the chronological itinerary and intensifying its didactic intention**

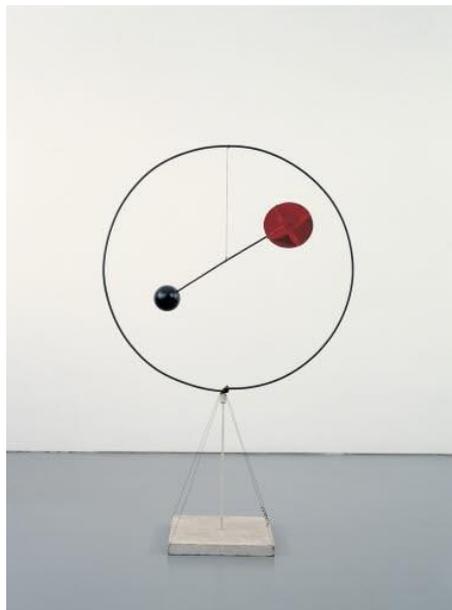
The exhibition opens with a room including screenprints by **Anni Albers** reflecting her Bauhaus period, together with important works by **Alexander Calder** and **Joaquín Torres-García**. In the presentation of the successive decades, works by **Eugènia Balcells**, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, **Christian Boltanski**, **Esther Ferrer**, **Gego**, **Eulàlia Grau**, **The Guerrilla Girls**, **Hans Haacke**, **Jenny Holzer**, **Sanja Iveković**, **Miralda**, **Joan Miró**, **Juan Muñoz**, **The Otolith Group**, **Raymond Pettibon**, **Benet Rossell**, **Joan Rabascall**, **Martha Rosler**, **Jorge Oteiza**, **Antoni Tàpies** and **Werker Collective**, will be included, among others.

The presentation seeks to reflect perspective from Barcelona, hence its beginning in 1929 with the International Exposition. At the core of the exhibition is a room dedicated to the political context of 1968, on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and 1975, the year of Franco's death.

The reading of this 'short century' concludes with contemporary practices such as **Allan Sekula's** series *Methane for All* – a photographic series made in Barcelona that critiques advanced capitalism, *Mar negro* by **Carlos Aires** – made with fragments of wood from abandoned boats and migrants rafts from the Mediterranean, together with the film *Hydra Decapita* by **The Otolith Group**, acting as an epilogue.

## Room 1

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a rupture with established art forms and a profound transformation in the field of aesthetic reflection. The idea of there being an artistic avant-garde (advance guard), which adhered to values like the new and the original, led to a radical experimentation with materials and forms. Among the main trends of this vanguard were those that sought to construct artistic languages of the universal and utopian from an analytical approach to form.



**Alexander Calder, Sense títol, 1931.**  
MACBA Collection

The International Exposition of 1929 took place in Barcelona in the context of this tension between tradition and radicalism. It was an event that marked an important urban transformation in the city, responding to the desire to connect with new technical developments, as well as the introduction of the most advanced architectural and artistic languages of the international avant-garde. In addition to showing the world the degree of Catalan industrial development, the Exposition would strengthen Barcelona as a capital of tourism.

## Room 2

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) was also a war of images in which artists and filmmakers were involved in the diffusion of the different political ideologies at stake through their corresponding aesthetic means. In the territory loyal to the Government of the Republic, poster design underwent a special development in which the advanced visual and typographic languages of the international avant-garde were used to communicate messages clearly to a mass audience.



**Carles Fontserè, Llibertat!** [1936?] (2018) Facsímil. Cartell [Barcelona]: FAI (Barcelona: Gràfiques Boix) encolat a paret CRAI Biblioteca-Pavelló de la República, Barcelona



**Benages, Contra el feixisme assassí, oposem-hi el socialisme alliberador** [1936?] (2018) 100 x 70 cm Facsímil. Cartell [Barcelona]: Secretariat de Propaganda del POUM (Barcelona: Gràfic Modern) encolat a paret CRAI Biblioteca - Pavelló de la República, Barcelona

In cinema, the contribution made by the anarchist movement through the Unified Trade Union of Public Entertainment of the CNT (a confederation of anarchist labour unions), with the production of films addressing subjects including the collectivising revolution in agriculture as well as the role of the militias, was fundamental to the anti-Fascist resistance. The involvement of artists in the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the 1937 Paris International Exposition reveals the use of art for the internationalisation of the conflict and to generate support.

## Rooms 3 and 4

In the years after the Civil War and following the end of the Second World War, artists explored divergent forms of abstraction. While this has been articulated as a tension between abstract geometric and concrete art on the one hand, and an abstraction that explored matter and an *informel* aesthetic on the other, these two principal

tendencies also had degrees of proximity. Even though later forms of concrete art continued in the tradition of earlier utopian abstraction advanced by an international avant-garde, nevertheless elements of organicism, biomorphism and gesture began to be used. Similarly instances of geometric form can be detected in the more material abstraction.

While associated with a resurgent bourgeoisie, as well as a counter to it, both tendencies were a means to deal with the creation of art in the aftermath of so much war and violence. They can be seen not necessarily as a way to avoid the consequences of conflict, but instead as techniques to examine, even if indirectly, the nature of humanity.

## **ROOM 5**

During the sixties, art became imbued with images from advertising and the media. Artists experimented with these new visual languages, often using them to address urgent political issues of the time, and as effective ways through which to claim freedom of speech.

The May 1968 revolts in various parts of the world, the process of decolonisation, as well as the Civil Rights, feminist and anti-war movements coincided and contributed to an era of turbulent change and counter-cultural struggle, transforming society and confronting its contradictions.

In the case of the Spanish state, the social and political reality was defined by the Franco dictatorship (1939–75) and a conservative society strongly determined by Catholicism. This 'grey' context (named after the colour of police uniforms as well as the feeling of living under a dictatorship) provoked artistic practices from denunciation to irony – a tool for avoiding censorship. Through their work artists configured a critical iconography, sometimes referring to the aesthetics of comics, which coexisted with the alternative spaces of psychedelia.

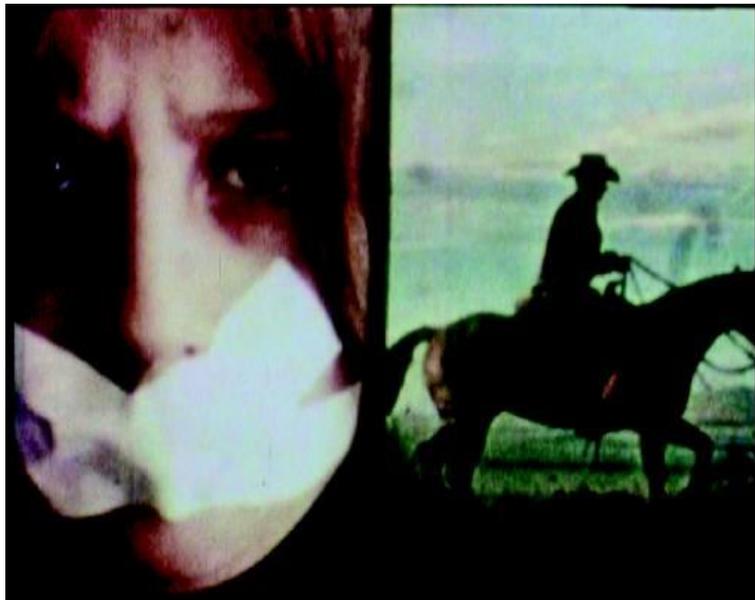
## **ROOM 6**

At the end of the sixties, artists developed new ways to address the subject of the city. They used it to elaborate a discourse that revealed the conflictive nature of urban planning and the impoverishment of public space afforded to its inhabitants.

Beginning in the seventies, New York was a paradigmatic example of urban and architectural morphology, demonstrating how changes in the fabric of the city altered its social distribution. Following in the wake of the degradation of urban areas was large-scale property investment and the associated processes of gentrification. Thus abandoned buildings, real estate speculation, the impossibility of public space and the existence of the homeless became the raw circumstances, materials and subject matter of socially-engaged artistic critique. The works undermined the official discourse of the new urbanism and its conception of the city, supposedly aseptic and without conflict.

## ROOMS 7 AND 8

The late sixties and seventies witnessed the emergence of a new era of radical feminism and feminist activism, within a broader counter-cultural or anti-establishment context, which took different forms around the world. This feminist struggle was at the basis of the work of a number of women artists, or even within a given social context. Many used the objectification of women in traditional forms of art and in the mass media, the creation of highly commercialised female stereotypes that emerged from advertising and publicity, as a means to denounce the subordinate role of women in society.

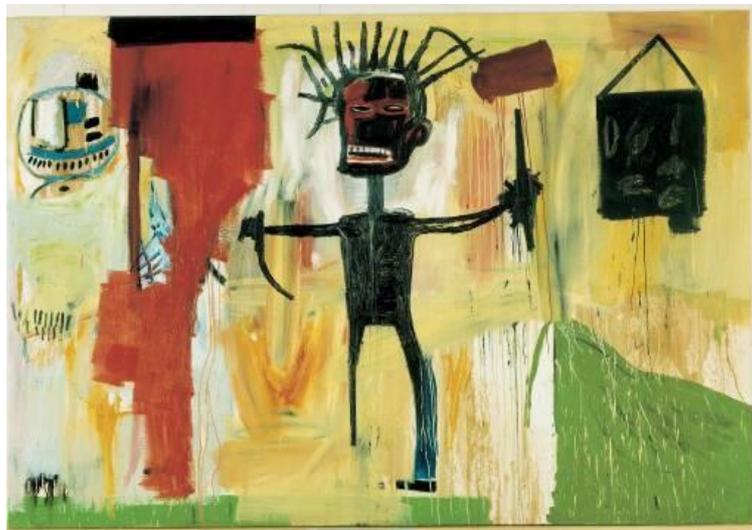


**Eugènia Balcells** *Boy Meets Girl*, 1978  
Pel·lícula 16 mm transferida a vídeo, color, so, 9 min 13 s  
Ed. 1/7 MACBA Collection

Similarly, the body (through sexuality, motherhood and physical attractiveness), space (such as the domestic sphere), language, objects or attributes and colours associated with femininity or gendered as feminine were employed in ways that, with deliberate irony, embraced their formerly pejorative connotations in order to deconstruct and undermine such associations. Some artists widened their critique to counter a broader gender stereotyping.

## ROOM 9

Art and activism gained a new proximity in the eighties, and artists created work with strong ties to the domain of the street or elsewhere beyond the studio, bearing a relation to forms such as graffiti, comics or unauthorised fly-posters. Developing with the ongoing emergence of feminism, anti-racism, gay rights and identity politics were forms of art and activism that addressed specific issues such as the AIDS crisis. A burgeoning context of neoliberalism, free market economic policies and neo-colonial interventions were also targets for activist art.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Self-Portrait*, 1986  
MACBA Collection

Popular culture and the cult of celebrity also exerted a continuing fascination for artists, who were impacted by the creation of new forms such as the music video and MTV, as well as fanzines produced as informal means of expression for subcultures, which provided a means to bypass establishment culture. Art, as well as

fashion and graphic design, became dominated by intense new synthetic, heightened and fluorescent colours.

## ROOM 10

While identity politics continued to influence artists into the nineties, and they were still negotiating the legacies of Minimal art and its tendency to eschew the personal, they began to work with large-scale installation art and scenography in ways that, even while often referencing Minimal art, addressed intensely personal or political subject matter. Allusions to the body were frequently made through its absence, or through props, prosthetics or proxies in the form of aids for and augmentations of the body, or else via furniture or other objects that stood in for the body or body parts.



Juan Muñoz, *The Nature of Visual Illusion*, 1994-1997

MACBA Collection

Underlying these practices was a new consciousness of history at the fin de siècle and the end of the millennium. It was marked particularly by an awareness of the violence dominating twentieth-century history, a reflection made more intense in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and thus in an era of post-Communism, and likewise, at a time marked by debates around post-colonialism.

## Room 11

Recent art has focused on the critique of economic relations governed by neoliberalism, globalisation and simultaneously has examined the human relations that are dominated by geo-politics and unequal distributions of power. In our transnational economy the open sea is an economic space for the mobility of material goods, but it is also a contested space fraught with social and political debate. While commodities travel aboard container ships with ease, the mobility of people is curtailed despite circumstances of persecution and violence. A stark linguistic and conceptual contrast is drawn between those who are designated economic migrants or refugees.

Artists have variously focused on the maritime economy through the transport of natural gas; the precariousness of the sea through the material remains of the migration crisis, reshaped into a parquet floor; or the interplay of capitalism, labour and politics through captions from news photographs that attest resistance movements worldwide against unjust economic policies, abuse of power and political repression.

## Tower

*Hydra Decapita* evokes the underwater world imagined by the Detroit-based electronic duo Drexciya, inhabited by the descendants of the Africans who were thrown overboard from slave ships, such as the *Zong*, during its crossing or 'Middle Passage' of the Atlantic in 1781. This atrocity was carried out with the aim claiming insurance payment for 'cargo' lost at sea.



**The Otolith Group, *Hydra Decapita*, 2010**  
00:31:41 h. Vídeo monocanal, color, so, 31 min 41 s  
Col·lecció MACBA. Fundació MACBA, Barcelona

The film's reduced visual language, focusing on the ocean and accompanied by contemplative electronic music and voices, weaves together three historic references: the *Zong*; J. M. W. Turner's painting *The Slave Ship* (1840), which alludes to the horrific event; and critic John Ruskin's analysis of the painting. With the slave trade serving as an allegory, *Hydra Decapita* combines mythos and history to contemplate the entangled relationships between power, death, globalisation, abstraction and our contemporary system of finance capital.



**PHOTOS** [www.macba.cat/press/colleccio20181004](http://www.macba.cat/press/colleccio20181004)

**LIST OF WORKS ON EXHIBITION** [www.macba.cat/press/colleccio20181004/llista\\_obres.pdf](http://www.macba.cat/press/colleccio20181004/llista_obres.pdf)

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■ **MACBA:** Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona, [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

■ **TIMES:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am – 7.30 pm. Tuesdays except public holidays, closed. Saturdays, 10 am – 8 pm. Sundays and public holidays, 10 am – 3 pm.

■ **Ticket valid for one month**

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