



MUSEU  
D'ART CONTEMPORANI  
DE BARCELONA

**A broad selection of previously unseen works and material  
from around a hundred artists of different generations**

**The exhibition focuses on the performance scene of the 1990s.**

## **ACTION** **A Provisional History of the 90s**

- ▶ These were years in which there was a return to the practices previously experienced by the conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s in a fertile intergenerational relationship as a way of overcoming the forgetfulness that a good portion of culture had given itself over to during the Spanish transition to democracy.
- ▶ The pieces are based on simple actions as a reencounter between art and life, dissolving authorship and hierarchies that refer to an alternative scene whose goal was to move away from the market and the institutional system of art.
- ▶ Art practice itself and the definition of “action”, chance, play and the role of the spectator were its themes, combined with a questioning of the new neoliberal system, refusal to perform military service and AIDS.
- ▶ The exhibition reflects this generation’s relationship with experimental music, the paratheatrical scene and polypoetry as well as its determination to write its story in real time.
- ▶ The intense personal relationships that gave rise to self-managed and autonomous networks that reclaimed art as a space for critical reflection were one of its greatest legacies.
- ▶ The exhibition comprises a wide range of activities including a seminar and a programme of actions and activations by the artists and groups involved in the exhibition as well as new generations of guest artists.

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**Title:** *Action: A Provisional History of the 90s*. **Dates:** 10 July 2020 – 7 February 2021. **Organized by:** MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona **Curated by:** Ferran Barenblit, director, and Aida Roger, assistant curator **Curatorial advisers:** Oscar Abril Ascaso, Joan Casellas, Nieves Correa, and the contribution of Marta Pol Rigau



**PHOTOS** <https://www.macba.cat/ca/sobre-macba/premsa/imatges-2020>

## ► ACTION. A provisional history of the 90.

**Press conference:** 10 June 2020

**Opening:** 10 June 2020 2020

**Dates:** 10 June 2020 – 7 February 2021

**Curated by:** Ferran Barenblit, director, and Aida Roger, assistant curator.



**Action-Esther Ferrer.** "Mallarmé révisé o Malarmado revisado, 1968/1992". 1992: Festival Polyphonix. Hommage à John Cage, Centre Pompidou, Paris. Foto: Jean-Pierre Sonolet. Cortesía de la artista.

**Action - Isidoro Valcárcel Medina,** "Omisión", 1991 Omisión, 1991.  
Presentación en Festival de Performances, Espacio P, Madrid. Cortesía de l'artista.

**Action. A provisional history of the 90s** focuses on the performance scene in Spain throughout this decade. In a fertile intergenerational relationship, this period saw a return to the practices already begun by the Conceptual artists of the sixties and seventies as a way of overcoming the abandonment of cultural memory during the Transition. Taking place in art schools, festivals and independent spaces, this alternative scene featured artists with a common desire to move away from the market and the dynamics of art's institutional system, including the newly-founded museums. They created pieces based on simple actions that brought together art and life, dissolving both the notion of authorship and the hierarchies of the artworld. Taking as their central subjects the artistic practice per se and the definition of 'action', these artists also embraced chance, playfulness and the role of the spectator as an effective and symbolic activator of the work. Their discourse was further fuelled by certain concerns of the moment such as the critique of productivity and efficiency (typical of the prevailing neoliberalism), resistance to compulsory military service and the impact of the AIDS pandemic. They also shared common ground with experimental music, the paratheatrical scene and poly-poetics, while writing their own history in real time, through photo documentation, studies and diagrams, which were reproduced in various

publications. Perhaps their main legacy was that of a whole generation: the intense personal relationships that resulted in self-managed, autonomous networks claiming art as a space for critical reflection.

While in Europe the 1980s represented a return to order, to the demand for a certain formality in art and to the conventional formats of painting and sculpture widely accepted by the market, the 1990s revived a large part of the Conceptual experiences of the preceding decades, notably the sixties and seventies. In this way, practices related to the human body were recovered, which we jointly call action art. In Spain, this history has a particular relevance, with multiple initiatives that had an immense impact on art from then onwards. This art of action was frequently expressed in the form of performances – which usually occurred in very restricted or unconventional contexts such as festivals or gatherings – and their more heterogeneous expression that has come to be called performativity.

It is time to review these practices as a whole and understand their great importance: not only because the history of those years is still to be written, but because a good number of young artists are directly or indirectly influenced by them. It also facilitates a rethinking of the institution, and its usual tasks, from the act of curating to the way of communicating. The interaction with the audience undergoes a fundamental renovation: the role of the visitor is transformed from observer to activator. All of this at a time – prefigured by Michel Foucault's biopolitics, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and J.L. Austin's pragmatics – in which the human body establishes itself again as the place through which emotional tensions pass and the political condition of being is claimed. We are because we occupy a space, because we act and are recognised in it.



**Action-Tere Recarens. *La Gallineta Ciega*, 1992. L'Artesà de Gràcia. Photo: Joan Cuní**

Across different nodes, *Action* will examine this period tracing some of its fundamental works. In addition, it will include mostly unpublished documentation and audiovisual material that recovers those experiences. The result will be a

dense exhibition, with multiple extensions, both historical and contemporary, that will help to interpret, in a much more precise way, the art of our time.

Artists included in the exhibition: Accidents Polipoètics (Rafael Metlikovez and Xavier Theros), Oscar Abril Ascaso, Lluís Alabern, Marcel·lí Antúnez, Arxiu AIRE, Arxiu de l'Associació de Nous Comportaments Artístics (A.N.C.A.), Miquel Baixas, Jordi Benito, Miguel Benlloch, Pedro Bericat, Denys Blacker, Joan Brossa, C-72R (Mònica Buxó, Sònia Buxó and Marta Domínguez) Cabello/Carceller, Joan Casellas, Jordi Cerdà, Circo Interior Bruto (Jesús Acevedo, Belén Cueto, Marta de Gonzalo, Rafael Lamata, Publio Pérez Prieto, Rafael Suárez, Jaime Vallaure and François Winberg) Club 7 (Oscar Abril Ascaso, Joan Casellas, Andrea Dates, Marta Domínguez, Manuel Morales, Xavier Moreno, Andrés Pereiro, Laura Tejeda, Cristina Zabala), Enric Casasses, Nieves Correa, Espacio de Arte Excéntrico (Nel Amaro and Abel Loureda), Nacho Criado, Eduard Escoffet, Pepe Espaliú, Bartolomé Ferrando, Esther Ferrer, Rosa Grau, Carles Hac Mor and Ester Xargay, Juan Hidalgo, Rafael Lamata, Los Rinos (Marcel·lí Antúnez, Sergi Caballero and Pau Nubiola), Artur Lleó, Macromassa (Juan Crek and Víctor Nubla), Merz Mail (Pere Sousa), Xavier Manubens, Daniela Musicco, Pere Noguera, Antonio Ortega, Lucía Peiró, Pere Lluís Pla Boixò, Tere Recarens, Àngels Ribé, Xavier Sabater, Sala Nasa (Xesús Ron, Pepe Sendón, Fran Pérez y Miguel de Lira), Carles Santos and Mariaelena Roqué, Mariano Sanz-Noguera, José Antonio Sarmiento, Superelvis (Anki Toner, Meteo Giráldez, Raimon Aymerich), Tres, Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, Jaime Vallaure, Veivi Gísus Urkestra (Steven Forster, Lucho Herмосilla, Ariel Reinhart), Albert Vidal, Fefa Vila, Borja Zabala and Zush among others.

**“Direct Action”** with Jaume Alcalde, Iñaki Álvarez, Pep Aymerich, Joan Baixas, Miquel Baixas, Laia Bedós, Josep Manuel Berenguer, J.M. Calleja, Xavier Canals, Enric Casasses, Victoria Combalía, Ignasi Esteve, Susanna Fernando, Barbara Held, Juan Hidalgo, Mercè Ibarz, Allan Kaprow, Konic Thtr, Dídac P. Lagarriga, Julia Montilla, Andrés Pereiro, Imma Pla, Jordi Pope, Benet Rossell, Joan Simó, Rosa Suñer, Quim Tarrida, Noel Tatú, Alexis Taulé, Carme Torrent, Gustavo Vega, Carme Viñas, Marta Vives.

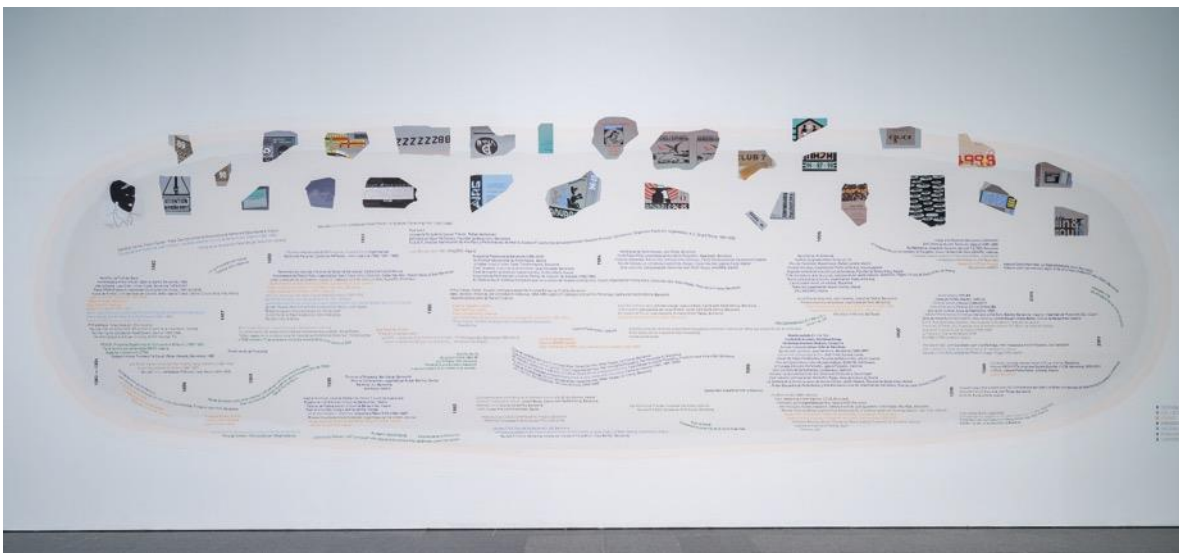
*Our Many EuropeS* is a programme by the European museum confederation "L'Internationale" and co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The members of L'Internationale (Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Moderna Galerija (MG+msum), Ljubljana, Van Abbemuseum, The Netherlands, MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, SALT Research and programs Istanbul and Ankara, and Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid) and its partners National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin and Valand

# ACTION

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## THE EXHIBITION

**Action: A Provisional History of the 90s** focuses its attention on the performance scene in Spain throughout that decade. A period of profound changes in the social and political spheres during which, after the dissolution of the Communist Bloc in Europe, the logic of a new globalised world that still prevails began to take over. The field of culture was characterised by increased institutionalisation, as evidenced by the opening of a good number of museums and art centres, along with the consolidation of the market and internationalisation, made visible through the large-scale artistic events that sprung up all over the country. Parallel to this dominant structure, another scene emerged, one that was much more precarious and fragile, and which emphasised interpersonal relationships and emotional ties. It began to forge itself in certain fine arts faculties in cities such as Barcelona, Valencia, Cuenca and Madrid, and in self-managed spaces of all kinds, picking up momentum in festivals and gatherings of different durations and formats. It insisted on writing its own history in real time, both in publications and in exhibitions. If there was a common denominator in all the works that were created, it was simplicity: in fact, almost all that has endured are documentary traces that allow us to fragmentally reconstruct actions of an ephemeral nature. Some of them can be recreated by anyone, as if following an instruction manual. Beyond simply defining a space of its own, action permeated a whole way of doing, in which the work not only *expresses* but also *does*.



**Action: A Provisional History of the 90s.** Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

The years of the Spanish Transition had led to the establishment of a democracy that prioritised necessity over reason, and that favoured the future over the analysis of the recent past. This systemic erasing of memory also involved the marginalising of some of the conceptual practices already experimented in the 60s and 70s, in order to make way for more formally conventional ones that, in their celebration of appearances, gazed less critically at the complex realities of the time. However, during the mid-80s, a generation emerged throughout the country that found inspiration in the conceptual practices and Fluxus spirit of artists such as **Àngels Ribé, Benet Rossell, Carles Hac Mor, Jordi Benito, Carles Santos, Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, Juan Hidalgo, Esther Ferrer and Nacho Criado**, prioritising processes over results and expanding artistic practice to territories that had not been previously explored.



*Action: A Provisional History of the 90s.* Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

The very definition of *action* and the limits of art were their main subjects of reflection. Many of their pieces raised questions to the performance practice as a way to tackle more complex issues, among them the resistance to the logics of productivity and usefulness so characteristic of a period in which capitalism advanced triumphantly. At a time when the art system was becoming consolidated, institutional criticism brought into question the validation mechanisms and many of the norms that had become accepted in the professional art practice. Their resorting to notions of chance and playfulness served to counteract everything that appeared planned and premeditated, in order to give rise to experience and subjectivity. The hierarchies and roles of each of the actors involved in this scene were resolutely dissolved. Depending on the occasion, most were either artists,

photographers, producers, technicians or simply spectators. Thus, a privileged place was reserved for the spectator as a symbolic and effective activator of the work. Other issues that society was facing in the 90s also emerged in various actions, such as the spread of HIV—which by then had already reached pandemic proportions—, gender issues, and the refusal of military service.

The action scene engaged in turn with other scenes with which it shared various interests, concerns, ideas and spaces. Paratheatrical experiences, made visible through the pioneering work of **Albert Vidal** or collectives such as **La Fura dels Baus**, were a transgressive model that reevaluated the public's place. Poetry, as evidenced through the work of the **Accidents Polipoètics** duo, expanded the territory of the written and spoken word towards the fields of action, sound experimentation and public participation. In a similar way, experimental music and action music accompanied this entire generation, who often summoned the spirit of John Cage, both in his challenges to the notion of virtuosity and in his search for silence.

#### **The exhibition:**

The exhibition begins by showing the link between the practices of the 70s and the symptoms of change that were experienced during the second half of the 80s. Thus, after reexamining the notion of randomness or the ability to subtly alter reality, **Pere Lluís Pla Buxó's** *Epítomes*—diagrams that reread the history of art—are introduced, followed by **Antonio Ortega's** ironic pieces that play with the notion of the use of time. Then, **Rafael Lamata and Jaime Vallauré's** 35-minute-long video piece—which, incidentally, has the same duration as many of their own performances—outlines the basics of performance art while also reflecting on its codes, languages and strategies, including the criticism towards those who tried to turn the practice into as watertight and impermeable a space as the conventional practices it was attempting to overcome.

The next room allows us to experience how the scene was being perceived in real time by faithfully reconstructing the exhibition ***Acción directa*** [Direct Action], organised by **Joan Casellas** and based on his immense archive, **Arxiu Aire**, which he began compiling in 1992. The exhibition, which took place at the former headquarters of the Institut del Teatre as part of the Primavera Fotogràfica festival in 1996, displayed photographs of various artists in action, and showed how the scene was experienced from within.



*Action: A Provisional History of the 90s.* Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

A large mural by **Antonio Gagliano** articulates the following room, as it reflects on the developments of that decade, condensing the experiences of dozens of festivals, in addition to the programmes of multiple self-managed initiatives throughout the country. It displays a large part of the experiences of the time, from **Oscar Abril Ascaso's** *Low-Tech Music* to **Nieves Correa's** tours of Barcelona; from **Borja Zabala's** sober and powerful work to **Cabello/Carceller's** critical vision of those who ignore political minorities. This itinerary culminates in two pieces that lead us towards silence: the sophisticated work of **Tres**, on route to the absolute void, and the large-format installation by **José Antonio Sarmiento**, made up of 180 radios tuned in to all the stations in the city, until they become completely silenced.

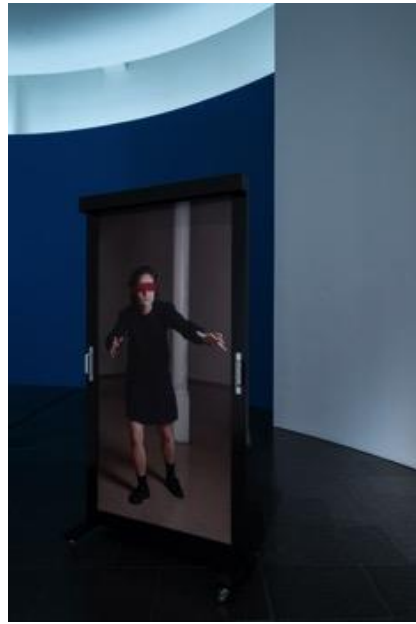


*Action: A Provisional History of the 90s.* Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

The exhibition ends with a room shared by three different experiences. The first is by **Tere Recarens**, an artist who throughout her career welcomed the fusion



between art and life, and shows documentation of various projects alongside her participatory piece *La gallinita ciega* [Blind Man's Buff]. The others are by two separate collectives. **Los Rinos**, formed in Barcelona by **Marcel·lí Antúnez**, **Sergio Caballero** and **Pau Nubiola**, were active between 1985 and 1992. Originating from the graffiti scene, and after having covered the city's walls with their trademark bullseyes, they also dedicated themselves to action, music and the publication of a magazine, becoming an unclassifiable, punk-inspired counterpoint.



*Action: A Provisional History of the 90s*. Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

**Circo Interior Bruto** (Gross Domestic Circus) is a collective formed in 1999 in a self-managed space of Madrid's Lavapiés neighbourhood by a dozen-odd members. The project emerged as a direct response to the lack of interiority, brutality and circus spirit of the art of that time. Its activity expanded to all kinds of experimental formats and was developed in three different phases: *The Creation of the World in Eleven Performances* (1999-2001), *Futures Market* (2001-2003) and *Trilogy of the Revolution* (2004-2005). In 2017 it started back up again with the creation of *Prometheus Bound* (Teatro Pradillo) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Matadero Madrid). The collective is currently made up by Jesús Acevedo, Belén Cueto, Marta de Gonzalo, Rafael Lamata, Publio Pérez Prieto, Rafael Suárez, Jaime Vallauré and François Winberg. Previous members have included Paula Morón, Luis Naranjo, Eduardo Navarro, Kamen Nedev and Teresa del Pozo as well as other occasional collaborators.

The exhibition is formulated as a live experience, an open process of collective creation, sharing methodologies and strategies with spectators, and it will be developed in three phases: **Congress** (19-20 September 2020), **Laboratory** (ongoing action, from 21 September 2020 to 5 February 2021) and **Performance** (6 February 2021).



*Action: A Provisional History of the 90s*. Gallery view. Photo by Miquel Coll, MACBA 2020

Finally, under the title ***An Implicit Commitment***, the exhibition *Action: A Provisional History of the 90s* brings together a set of interviews with artists and participants from that period, which allow us to reexamine some of the practices and attitudes of the 90s' art context, as well as to situate these experiences in relation to the present. The interviews emphasise orality as one of the most appropriate preservation methods for performance, and facilitate a direct dialogue with its creators to review what should be the expanded ways of approaching, case by case, the preservation and presentation of these.

# ACTION ACTIVITIES

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## Visits

Sundays at 12.00 p.m. Led by Loli Acebal, art historian, and Antonio Gagliano, artist.

## Accessibility

Assistive listening visits available upon prior request by writing to [educacio@macba.cat](mailto:educacio@macba.cat).

## Friends of the MACBA

Exclusive visits

## MACBA app

Enjoy the explanatory pages and audioguides of a selection of works from the exhibition with the MACBA app. You will also find detailed information on the exhibitions and activities, as well as videos, curiosities and all of the practical information for visiting the museum.

## Let's talk about...

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### ► 1 October

We'll be talking about murmured art with **Lluís Alabern**, artist.

### ► 15 October

We'll be talking about *Action: A Provisional History of the 90s* with **Denys Blacker**, artist.

### ► 29 October

We'll be talking about the spoken journal *De viva veu* (Out Loud). Spoken word evocations with **Ester Xargay**, writer, artist and promoter together with Carles Hac Mor from the spoken journal *De viva veu*.

### ► 28 November

We'll be talking about *Action: A Provisional History of the 90s* with **Ferran Barenblit**, director and **Aída Roger**, adjunct curator.

## Actions and activations

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► **Thursday 17 September, 7.30 p.m.**

**Isidoro Valcárcel Medina.** Action to be determined.

**Óscar Abril Ascaso** *Low-Tech Music nº 4* (piano piece for someone who doesn't know how to play the piano), 2020.

► **19 and 20 September, during museum opening hours**

**Circo Interior Bruto Congress:** 16 performative conferences presented by the artists.

► **Thursday 8 October, 6.30 p.m.**

**Borja Zabala.** *Viaje de Nogocios* (Nogocios Trip), 2020.

► **8, 9 and 10 October, from 11.00 to 7.00 p.m. in Girona, Ciutat Vella**

**Joan Casellas.** *GB. Homage to Brossa*, 1999/2020.

► **30 and 31 October**

### Action Seminar

**Esther Ferrer.** *Mallarmé révisé o Malarmado revisado* (Mallarmé Revised or Malarmé [poorly equipped] Revised), 1968/2020 / *Questions and answers*, 2020.

**Bartolomé Ferrando.** *Syntax*, 1996/2020 and *Cries*, 2002/2020.

**Xavier Theros** recites *Accidents Polipoètics*.

► **Saturday, 14 November, 9.00 p.m.**

**Night of the Museums. Canvis Vells and Macromassa.**

► **Saturday, 28 November, 21.30 p.m.**

**MACBA Anniversary.**

► **Saturday, 19 December, 7.30 p.m.**

**Actions by Luz Broto, Jaume Ferrete and Marc Vives.**

► **Saturday 30 January, 7.30 p.m.**

Tres, *Blackout*, 2020. A project by Michal Libera.

► **Saturday 6 February, 7.30 p.m.**

**Gross Domestic Circus.** *La función*, 2021.

**Ongoing actions:**

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**Every Wednesday at 4.00 p.m., Óscar Abril Ascaso: *Practical demonstration of the LTM programme, 2020-2021.***

**Circo Interior Bruto: *Open Creation Laboratory.*** See calendar of activations by artists and mediators.

Further information at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

#AccióMACBA #25MACBA

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# ACTION PUBLICATION

The **publication**, planned for next year, will continue with the narration of this provisional story including material generated by the exhibition itself. It will include a text by Ferran Barenblit, a transcription of the talks presented at the seminar, a summary of interviews with actors of the time featured in the videos and a photographic journey through some of the works presented in the exhibition as well as through the performances reactivated or created throughout this period.

## PHOTOS

<https://www.macba.cat/ca/sobre-macba/premsa/imatges-2020>

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■ **MORE INFORMATION** [macba.cat](http://macba.cat) i @MACBA\_Barcelona

■ **MACBA:** Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona,

■ Monday to Friday: 10:00 am — 8:00 pm Tuesday (except public holidays): Closed

Saturday: 10:00 am — 8:00 pm Sundays and public holidays: 10:00 am — 3:00 pm\*

■ **General admission — 11€ → Promotion 50%\*\*:** 5,50 €

- General admission gives you access to all current exhibits and to the permanent collection exhibition as many times as you want for one month from the date of purchase. Activate it at reception and come back! We'll be expecting you.

- You can purchase tickets for up to 10 people online.

- MACBA Friends get free entry to all exhibitions and other exclusive advantages. [Become a Friend!](#)

- Every Saturday, from 16.00 to 20.00 h, free entry to the museum thanks to [Uniqlo](#).

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