

In Real Time

Rafael Tous

Collection of Conceptual Art

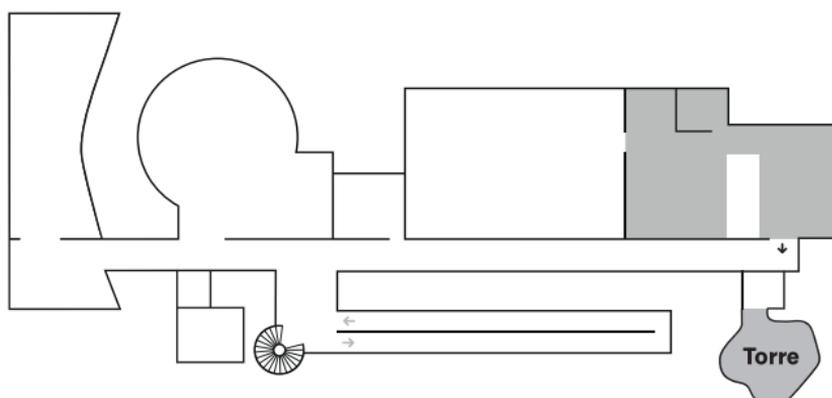
Exhibition from 14 May 2021 to 6 June 2022



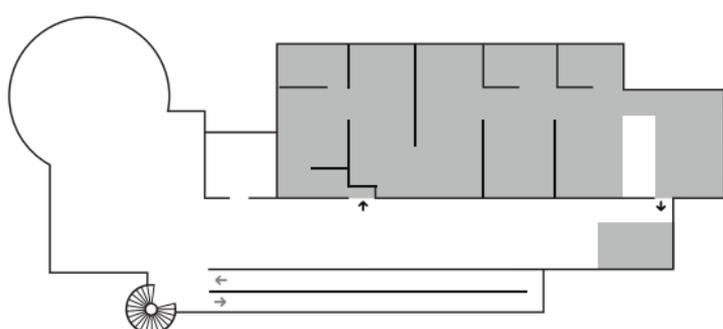
Recommended itinerary

Meier Building

Level 1



Level 0



The exhibition will be held at MACBA (Plaça dels Àngels, 1) until 6 June 2022; at the Capella MACBA (Carrer dels Àngels, 7) until 1 November 2021; and at Sala Metrònom (Carrer Fusina, 9) until 24 October 2021.

THIS IS THE FIRST EXHIBITION at MACBA of the Rafael Tous Collection of Conceptual Art, which represents the artistic practices of a specific period in time. Donated to the Museum just one year ago, this extensive body of work will find its place in the collections that make up the MACBA Collection, highlighting associations and affinities within the international context and promoting a necessary re-reading of those years.

The Rafael Tous Collection

A passionate collector who was linked to the textile world, Rafael Tous developed an eye for Conceptual art, with its diverse practices that nevertheless prioritise the idea and process over the object. Acting intuitively, and without regard for market speculation, Tous built a collection that helps define the attitudes and experimental work carried out by a group of artists, many of whom became friends and were supported by him on their artistic journey.

This collection contains the testimony of a generation that chose to take part in exhibitions held in alternative cultural spaces rather than more conventional art venues. The first of these were *Mostra d'Art Jove*, an exhibition of young artists held in Granollers in 1971 and 1972; *1.219 m³* at a pelota court in Vilanova de la Roca, 1972; *Informació d'Art Concepte* at the Llotja del Tint in Banyoles, 1973, and the events at the Catalan Summer University at Prades in France. Equally relevant are the spaces that constituted the cultural fabric of the time, such as the Petite Galerie de l'Alliance Française in Lleida, Sala Tres in Sabadell, Espai B5-125 of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and, in Barcelona, Sala Vinçon, the galleries G and Ciento, Escola Eina, Sala de l'Associació del Personal de la Caixa de Pensions and the various foreign cultural institutes. At a time when there were still no institutions that supported art, these and other alternative spaces provided a courageous and risky support network, which nevertheless led to the creation of a heritage.

In this context, the role of Metrònom, a space created and managed in 1980 by Rafael Tous himself, cannot be underestimated. Initially based in Sant Gervasi, and from 1984 in Carrer Fusina in the Born, it acted as a catalyst for proposals that fused art, music and performance, as well as commissioning large site-specific installations. Led by Tous' eagerness to collect, Metrònom also managed to gather a large library and archive.

One of the distinguishing features of the Tous Collection is that it developed organically, while the art it incorporated was being produced. On the other hand, although it presents a portrait of a particular time, it primarily represents the singular gaze of the collector who gave unity to these very diverse practices. As Elio Grazioli points out in *La collezione come forma d'arte*, although art collections reflect their times, when one observes 'what they became when deviating from the mainstream, from the norm, this is when the depth and truth of the choices made become apparent'.¹

¹ Elio Grazioli: *La collezione come forma d'arte*. Milan: Johan & Levi, 2012, p. 11.

An unavoidable and necessary rereading

'The option was to do more "art of the moment" than "Conceptual art",' Joan Rabascall explained in an interview in 1992.² And Jordi Cerdà reflected: 'I see Conceptual art more as a conjunction than a movement.'³ Being outside of mainstream art meant that in the seventies, while the work was actually being produced, it remained largely ignored by the critics, with the exception of Alexandre Cirici in Barcelona and Simón Marchán Fiz in Madrid, who were key to the diffusion and understanding of Conceptual art. Notable, too, were the contributions of Joaquim Dols, M. Lluïsa Borràs, Daniel Giralt-Miracle and, among the artists themselves, Luis Utrilla, Alberto Corazón and the Grup de Treball. The latter, active from 1973 to 1975 and made up of artists considered Conceptual – many of them represented in the Tous Collection – were a collective that understood theoretical reflection as an artistic practice.

It was not until the 1990s that the systematisation of Conceptual practices began. A first attempt was the exhibition *Art concepte. La dècada dels setanta a Catalunya*, presented by Glòria Picazo at the Alfonso Alcolea Gallery, Barcelona, in 1990, followed by the more far-reaching exhibition *Idees i actituds. Entorn de l'art conceptual a Catalunya, 1964-1980*, curated by Pilar Parcerisas at the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona, in 1992. It was an exhaustive but necessary project guided by certain individuals and marked by the differential features of Catalan art, as critics such as Victoria Combalía and, later, art historians such as Jesús Carrillo pointed out. 'Emphasising the binomial "avant-garde Catalan identity", democratic Catalonia would adopt the Conceptual movement, establishing it as one of the fundamental pillars [...] on which its artistic identity would be based.'⁴ In the new Catalonia, the development of an autochthonous and utopian avant-garde put an end to the fissures and nuances that occurred in experimental practices, as well as their radicalism.

In Real Time. Rafael Tous Collection of Conceptual Art is conceived as a new space for reflection and leads to an unavoidable re-reading of those years. Authors such as Jesús Carrillo, Jorge Luis Marzo, Patricia Mayayo, Paul Preciado and Valentín Roma have already pointed us in this direction. Roma argues: '...whereas conservative Catalan historiography adopted the heroic discourse of the "founding fighters", most of them men, of the art that combatted the Franco regime and turned all of them into what might be described as the primal legends of rebellion, artists [...] who operated on the basis of other parameters were deemed to have engaged in missions in the past of

² The artists' quotes come from Pilar Parcerisas (ed.), *Idees i actituds. Entorn de l'art conceptual a Catalunya, 1964-1980*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura, 1992 [exh. cat.].

³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴ Jesús Carrillo, 'Conceptual Art Historiography in Spain', *Papers d'Art* [Girona], n^o. 93 (2nd semester 2007), p. 42.

secondary importance.’⁵ Marzo and Mayayo also warn: ‘Obviously, it is not a question of denying the undoubted importance that Conceptual art had in Catalonia; but it is one thing to recognise its importance and quite another to pretend that there is a kind of inalienable relationship between the avant-garde and Catalan national identity.’⁶

The international context

The very act of integrating the experimental works of Catalan artists represented in the Tous Collection within the wider context of the MACBA Collection will generate coexistence and simultaneities that will lead to a re-thinking of this period of art history. Also, the very fact of the international outreach of many of these artists, their permeability and the development of their later careers will further extend the discourse.

We need to turn to the artists themselves to understand the extent of their knowledge of what was happening in the international arena. We should review the facts to understand the connections. Miralda and Muntadas arrived in the United States in 1971. The following year, Francesc Torres and Àngels Ribé relocated to Chicago from Paris and Francesc Abad moved to New York. Abad explains that, thanks to galleries such as John Weber and Leo Castelli, and to reading, for example, Germano Celant’s book on *arte povera*, he became increasingly attracted to the working process and lost interest in ‘the physical aspect of the works’.⁷ Eugènia Balcells, having already studied at the University of Iowa from 1968 and dividing her time between the United States and Barcelona, finally settled in New York in 1979. It is also necessary to take into account the participation of Catalan artists in international events such as the ICSID World Congress of Designers, Ibiza, 1971; Documenta 5, Kassel, 1972; V Catalan Summer University at Prades, 1973; the Paris Biennial, 1975 and 1977; and the Venice Biennale, 1976 and 1978.

Recently, the focus has been on the Conceptual movements that emerged in the Latin American context and how international affinities transcend geographies. The exhibition *El arte sucede. Origen de las prácticas conceptuales en España, 1965–1980*, curated by Rosa Queralt at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, in 2005, was along these lines. ‘An art of similar premises made all over the world’, as Victoria Combalía wrote in the catalogue.⁸ Also significant here is the collective work being carried out by the Red Conceptualismos del Sur, an international platform for

⁵ Valentín Roma: ‘Historicism and Refutation in the Work of Fina Miralles’, in *I Am All The Ones That I Have Been*. Barcelona: MACBA, 2020, p. 157 [exh. cat.].

⁶ Jorge Luis Marzo and Patricia Mayayo, *Arte en España (1939-2015), ideas, prácticas, políticas*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2015, p. 317.

⁷ Francesc Abad, interviewed in *La Vanguardia* (22 March 2006).

⁸ Victoria Combalía: ‘El arte conceptual español en el contexto internacional’, in *El arte sucede. Origen de las prácticas conceptuales en España, 1965–1980*. Madrid and San Sebastián: MNCARS and Koldo Mitxelena, 2005, pp. 20-35

collective research and positioning active since 2007 that maintains the critical radicalism provided by Conceptual movements. More recently, other critics, such as José Díaz Cuyás, have proposed shifting the debate to clarify whether or not the various manifestations that are often described as Conceptual share the same 'hybridised' historical impulse. Situated between different genres and embracing internal divergences, it is an art that sought indefiniteness. An 'artistic transvestism', as Díaz Cuyás calls it, which arises in part from the lack of documentation and manifestos generated in real time. As Jesús Carrillo states: 'Texts not only document what has happened, but insert the events in a narrative and even allow the protagonists themselves to be recognised as part of a process. There is feedback between fact and text, artworks and discursiveness, from which many works have been excluded, both while they were being produced and subsequently. It would be interesting to review obliquely all the absences and discontinuities by analysing the configuration of what has actually been articulated, of what remains reflected textually and documentarily.'⁹

Producing things that no one asked for

Avoiding a chronological itinerary, the exhibition highlights various lines of work and approaches embraced by so-called Conceptual practices. Beyond the uniformity imposed by the Conceptual art heading, the emphasis is on the diversity of manifestations and positions that characterise the practices of artists gathered under this name. Artists who, far from any programmatic intent and without identifying with any group, shared the same spirit of experimentation and research. Eugènia Balcells spoke of 'producing something that no one asked for'.¹⁰ This is how the thematics that accompany us on the itinerary reveal the permeability of the artists, who are often represented in more than one section; thus, demonstrating that they did not stick to one category and that the act of vindicating their practice was precisely one of inhabiting the liminal spaces existing between the theoretical and closed axes of art history. By recovering these frictions, the exhibition inevitably opens cracks in the historiographical narrative and encourages new readings.

Including the work of 28 artists, the exhibition presents action art and practices that focus on pure events; proposals linked to nature and which take the body as the subject of a cosmic order; works that emphasise the ideological element of images and the power of the mass media; and those that are articulated as devices of political critique or, as Luis Camnitzer has called it, 'guerrilla strategy'. But also practices that analyse the language and value of signs, and others that explore the metaphysics of the object.

⁹ Jesús Carrillo, at the round table of the seminar *Where the Political Was (Or Went Astray)*, within the cycle *Art after Feminisms*, organised by MACBA's Independent Studies Programme in January 2009. <https://www.macba.cat/en/exposicions-activitats/activitats/va-ser-o-es-va-perdre-que-es-politic>

¹⁰ Pilar Parcerisas, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

The exhibition incorporates some of the large-scale installations that Francesc Abad, Jordi Benito and Carlos Pazos presented at Metrònom in 1989. Francesc Abad presents *Europa arqueologia de rescat*, which is inspired by a cave found by the artist in a wooded area near Terrassa that had once been inhabited. As a result of this fortuitous discovery, the artist invented a primeval system of signs and a calendar with a clearly sexual significance, thus recreating the first prehistoric visions of the cosmos. The Capella MACBA features *No hay replay* by Carlos Pazos, an extensive object-based installation exploring the inner journey and intimate experience. Through the artist's own aesthetic language, it evokes the condition of memory and its fetishes, but also evokes a sense of oblivion and discarded paths, loss and chance. Finally, Jordi Benito's installation, *Les portes de Linares*, is presented in its original context at Metrònom, thus incorporating this space into the exhibition. Far from his Wagnerian quotations, in this installation Benito adopts the theme of tragedy, total art and Goya's *Tauromaquia*, with eight scenes illuminated as sculptural fragments that place us on the threshold between life (or art) and death.

Artists included in the exhibition:

Francesc Abad, Eugènia Balcells, Jordi Benito, Carmen Calvo, Jordi Cerdà, CVA (Comité de Vigilancia Artística), Benet Ferrer, Alicia Fingerhut, Teresa Gancedo, Ferran Garcia Sevilla, Eulàlia Grau, Josep Maria Joan i Rosa, Àngel Jové, Antoni Llena, Eva Lootz, Miralda, Fina Miralles, Muntadas, Pere Noguera, Jordi Pablo, Pilar Palomer, Carlos Pazos, Carles Pujol, Joan Rabascall, Àngels Ribé, Benet Rossell, Francesc Torres and Jaume Xifra.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to Rafael Tous for his generosity, dedication and involvement in the project, as well as to all the artists with whom we have collaborated closely to make this exhibition possible.

We also want to thank the following people and companies for their help and support:

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Exhibition organised and produced by MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

All the exhibited works belong to Rafael Tous Donation, MACBA Collection. Long-term loan of Barcelona City Council.

Curated by

Antònia Maria Perelló, Curator and Head of the MACBA Collection, and Claudia Segura, Curator of Exhibitions and Collection.

Enjoy explanatory pages and audio-descriptive guides on a selection of works from the exhibition with the **MACBA App**.

Further detailed information on the exhibition at macba.cat.

Visits

In Real Time. Rafael Tous Collection of Conceptual Art
Fridays, 6 pm

By the pli-é collective, a research and curatorial group formed by Eva Paià, Marina Ribot Pallicer and Angelica Tognetti.

Guided tours in Spanish or Catalan. Consult specific programmes at macba.cat. Included in the admission price.

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Round Table

In Real Time. Accompanying, Experimenting, Sharing and Collecting

With the participation of Francesc Abad and Pere Noguera, artists; Rafael Tous, collector: chaired by Glòria Picazo, independent critic and curator.

INFO Thursday 3 June, 7 pm. MACBA Auditorium. Free admission, prior registration at macba.cat.

Opening hours

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am to 7.30 pm (from 25 June to 24 September, 10 am to 8 pm)
Tuesdays, except public holidays, closed
Sundays and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm

Saturdays from 4 to 8 pm, free admission thanks to UNIQLO.

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