

**M for MACBA**, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. Ever since it was set up in 1988 and following its opening in 1995, MACBA has established itself as a flagship space for contemporary art and thinking situated at the centre of a mapping of the pushes and pulls between the forces of invention and the normalisation of cultural institutions. These tensions have driven a continual mobilisation of its structure, its logics and its habits to the extent that they have constructed an institutional approach that is constantly in the throes of transformation. Over the course of its existence, MACBA has been shaken by various forces, from the hang-over suffered by Barcelona after its Olympic Games to the anti-globalisation movements at the close of the twentieth century, the emergence of the citizens' occupy movement and anti-establishment revolution – known as the movement of the Indignados (indignant) or 15M after the date of the first event that was convened (15 May), which began in response to the neoliberal financial crisis of 2008 and which was a turning point in the balance of powers that had established itself in Spain after the death of General Franco – and the more recent pro-independence movements in Catalonia. The museum's history is also framed by pandemics, as MACBA was created during the AIDS pandemic and the publication of this *Manual* is being finalised amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These frames of infection delimit the very spirit of the museum, which has never been free of contagion. Its collections and programmes are spaces for addressing, questioning and constructing

critically-minded citizens, and the museum allows itself to be affected, penetrated and impacted on by its contact with its audiences.

**M for Map.** MACBA is in southern Europe and the northern Mediterranean, a location that determines its economies, its ways of doing and its ways of looking at the world. A gaze that is not totalising but partial, situated, a stance. The museum does not regard itself as endorsing a closed account of the history of art but as a place of experimentation in which new forms of relating to history, the artistic act in all its manifestations and the various communities that make up the museum can be put into practice. Spain's colonial past and the current extraction policies in the world's southern regions force the institution to continually question the ways in which culture remains an effective technology of colonisation. The museum's various programmes probe the narratives and representations that underpinned much of the colonial project and their uses today. In addition, the presentation of the MACBA Collection starts in 1929, but its core is a response to the paradigm that emerged in the 1960s that radically altered ways of making and understanding art. It was at this time that a new generation of artists came to the fore, driving a second wave of avant-garde movements which, with their Conceptual practices, Minimalism, institutional critique and dematerialisation of the art object, undermined the principles that had governed much of modernity. This was also the time when various factors split authorship from authority, as pointed out by Roland Barthes in 'The Death of the Author' (1967) and Michel Foucault in 'What Is an Author?' (1969). Their essays

overthrew the notion of the artist as an exceptional figure shut up in their ivory tower. Thus, the meanings of the work were no longer closed off by artists at either a poetic or a political level. The spectator became central to the artistic act.

**M for Movement.** The powerful transformations in art that began in the 1960s were in part the result of the mobilisation of civil society. So much so that any situated and politically engaged history of art that goes beyond the formalist account and the disciplinary delimitations of rational modernity must perforce include social movements, among them the fights for civil rights and sexual liberation and the green, pacifist and decolonisation movements. In addition, it must take on board the transformations advocated by feminists at a macro and micro level in the ways art is made, in its discourses and in the way institutions are run. To an extent, the transformations driven by the various branches of the feminist movement were achieved outside the art world because women were excluded from the account, as the art historian Linda Nochlin rightly points out in her essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971). New media such as performance and video – which came into being as a medium in 1965 and spread with the launch of the Portapak video camera onto the market in 1968 – enabled women to explore fields of expression that had not been subject to longstanding male domination. Artists such as Martha Rosler, Eulàlia Grau and Eugènia Balcells explored new possibilities for producing art that went beyond depicting women as an object and added their voices to the criticism made by theorists such as Nochlin, Lucy R. Lippard, Laura Mulvey and Rosalind Krauss of the centrality of the

detached vision of the body that presupposed the existence of subjects with an uninterested gaze. It is impossible to gaze without ceasing to be who we are. These various operations weakened the great narratives of that history which had, not in vain, been white, male and heterocentric.

**M for Mail art, Mangolte, Manzoni, Matta-Clark, McBride. M for Mediterranean, Meireles, Memory/Amnesia, Merz, Metrònom. M for Miralda, Miralles, Miserachs, Modernity/ies, Morris, Mullican, Muntadas and Muñoz.**

At first glance, the M entry in this *Manual* reveals its structure: an index of artists and works in the museum's collection inserted into a set of concepts. Because a museum speaks, primarily, on the basis of the work of artists. The essays that accompany the works and the artists do not, therefore, centre on each artist's personal life or on what their works 'represent'. They do not explain the works since, in contrast with a certain pedagogical tradition of museums which has it that art conveys messages that are hidden and hence need to be decoded, we do not believe art can be explained without any ado, as aesthetics plays in a space in which language becomes clumsy. Consequently, each analysis is not confined solely to the connection between an artist and a work; instead, it removes them from the realm of pure visibility and places them in a context by setting out not just their meanings but also the conditions surrounding their production and the historical circumstances. The concepts in the *Manual* describe the institution as a critical space. This *Manual* has been conceived and written by people in a number of the museum's departments, among them curators, educators, archivists, librarians, restorers and

editors, as well as others who collaborate with the museum, in an express exercise in teamworking. Institutions are made up of their staff, who research, administer, manage, disseminate, communicate and arrange works for public display and hence can contribute valuable knowledge deriving from their daily work connected with the collection. However, this is just one part of the institution. The other – more important – half consists of its visitors, the people who use its Library and Study Centre, the participants in the activities it runs, the school-children who come here to learn, the users of its website and its permanent working groups.

While this *Manual* conforms to certain conventions, such as its alphabetical organisation by artist and the commentaries on their works, it aims to serve as a reading tool that does more than assert or represent by facilitating other ways of connecting with the collection, not just in these pages but also during visits to the museum. This *Manual* seeks to expand readers' knowledge of the museum's collection and of the underlying principles of the institution, but in so doing it does not aspire to give closed instructions on how the collection should be read. Rather, it is an invitation to embrace the museum and make your way through it with absolute freedom.

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