

MACBA Acquires the Miserachs Archive

The Miserachs family deposits 80,000 photographic images, taken from 1954 to 1998, for a renewable 25-year loan period

Barcelona, 21 February 2011

80,000 photographic images, comprising around 60,000 in the form of negative strips and 20,000 on slides or transparencies and 2,500 contact sheets, as well as administrative documentation and several notebooks. This treasure trove, which covers 44 years of activity (from 1954 to 1998), is structured around the series that produced some of the most important photography books in the history of the art in our country: *Barcelona blanc i negre*, *Costa Brava Show* and *Los cachorros*, as well as countless travel reports. In order to ensure that this vast collection of material is conserved, catalogued and made available for research, on February 3 the Miserachs Family deposited the personal archives of Xavier Miserachs (Barcelona, 1937-1998), without doubt one of the great masters of Spanish photography, with the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). All this is complemented by the original contact sheets for the book *Barcelona blanc i negre*, which Miserachs gave to the historian Maria Dolors Tapias in 1991 in thanks for her assistance in ordering the negatives in the archive, and which Tapias has also decided to deposit with MACBA to complement the materials. By securing this loan of the Miserachs Archive, the MACBA Study Center advances towards fulfilling one of its key missions: to conserve artistic heritage from the 1950s and 60s, a period when the photographic avant-garde was emerging at various points in Catalonia and Spain as a whole. The first step towards achieving this goal was the acquisition of the personal documents from the photography critic Josep Maria Casademont (Barcelona, 1928-1994), precisely the leading promoter of photography in Barcelona during the aforementioned period. Casademont coined the term "new avant-garde" in Spanish photography and directed the Sala Aixelà, which, in 1959, devoted an epoch-making exhibition to works by Xavier Miserachs, Ricard Terré and Ramón Masats.

The Miserachs Archive can be viewed at the MACBA Study Center (Plaça dels Àngels, 8), by prior arrangement (tel.: 93 481 33 66, email: arxiu@macba.cat). A selection of images from the archive is also available for viewing on Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/arxiu-macba/collections/.

The MACBA Study Center, which opened its doors in December 2007, pursues the mission of collecting, conserving, studying and disseminating documentation linked to contemporary art practices. Its resources are structured between the library (an expanded continuation of the old Museum library) and the archive, which conserves, basically artist publications, personal archives and relevant historic documentation of all kinds. Both the library and the archive pursue the same goals as the MACBA Collection, and they also cover the same chronological context: the period from the 1950s to the present. The continuity that exists between the documentary collections conserved by both the Study Center and the MACBA Collection, as well as their solid links to all facets of the Museum's activities, particularly with regard to the Independent Study Programme (PEI), are key factors in helping to achieve two of the Centre's goals: disseminating its collections and facilitating academic research into contemporary art practices.

The development of photography over the second half of the 20th century occupies a prominent place amongst the different lines of activity at the MACBA Study Center. With regard to this timeframe- whilst not neglecting later periods – the Museum plans to begin its work by focusing on the task of documenting the 1950s and 60s, a time when a photographic avant-garde began to emerge from various sources in Catalonia and Spain as a whole. This was, moreover, a period when a new generation of photographers entered into an intense debate about the neorealism that would generate the reconstruction of a documentary genre whose origins go back to pre-Civil War times.

The Casademont Archive: a precedent to the loan of the Miserachs collection

In the library, the aforementioned period is illustrated by the acquisition of magazine series such as *Imagen y Sonido*, *AFAL* and *Arte Fotográfico* and several collections of photography books featuring work by the leading members from that generation. These publications include “Palabra e Imagen” (Lumen) and “Fotoscop” (La Polígrafa), amongst others. As regards the archives, an initial step was made in 2010 through the donation to the Study Center of the personal documents of the photography critic Josep Maria Casademont (Barcelona, 1928-1994), the leading theorist and promoter on the Barcelona photography scene in the 1960s and 70s.

The addition of the Miserachs Archive to the MACBA holdings through the loan agreement reached with the photographer's heirs represents an enormously important step forward. Miserachs was a key figure on the Barcelona photography scene in the 1950s and 60s. Together with Oriol Maspons, he formed part of a core photographic avant-garde that formed around the magazine *AFAL*, published in Almería, and he also played a key role in the reinterpretation of the photographic profession that took place in the 1960s and culminated in the emergence of Spanish neorealism. Miserachs' *Barcelona blanc i negre* (Aymà, 1964) is, indisputably, a masterpiece of Spanish photography and the most important photography book of its day. On its publication in 1964, the art critic Alexandre Cirici affirmed that “Miserachs has carried out a work that will have considerable effect on Barcelona's self-consciousness”, whilst also placing him, with Maspons, at the centre of Catalan photography in that period, and the pair as the purest and most outstanding exponents of neorealist photography on the national scene.

Agreement to deposit the Miserachs Archive at MACBA

Negotiations with the Miserachs family, which gave highly positive and generous cooperation towards reaching the final agreement, began in late-2009, when MACBA contacted the photographer's heirs to express an interest in acquiring the documentary archives. They culminated on 3 February 2011 with the transfer of the materials to the Museum. Restoration, cleaning and disinfection work is currently in progress, after which the contact sheets, negative strips, slides, transparencies and other materials will be catalogued by series, and the administrative documentation will be organised.

Broadly speaking, the agreement establishes the following conditions:

- That the Miserachs family deposits the archives with the MACBA Study Center for a renewable 25-year loan period. Under the agreement, the Museum is responsible for the custody, cataloguing and conservation of the archive. Moreover, MACBA intends to add a number of vintage photographs, property of the Miserachs family, into this collection. Negotiations for this acquisition are currently in progress.
- Miserachs' period prints (vintage photographs) and proofs are excluded from the agreement, as is management and sale of new copies of photographs from the original negatives in the archive, which will continue to be the exclusive right of the Miserachs family.
- To promote academic research, MACBA will include the contents of the archive as a subject in a future edition of the Independent Study Programme (PEI), which the Museum organises. MACBA will also organise an exhibition devoted to the work of Miserachs and linked to the results of this research work.
- MACBA agrees to gradually digitise and disseminate the images in the archive, using the following Flickr profile: www.flickr.com/photos/arxiu-macba/collections/.
- MACBA also agrees to make the necessary arrangements to enable the images to be reproduced on all supports.
- The Miserachs family authorises MACBA to disseminate ten photographs by Xavier Miserachs under a Creative Commons license. These photographs will be made available for copying, distribution and communication by third parties without the obligation to pay royalties, as long as the following three conditions are met: the author must be credited, whatever use is made of the photographs; the images cannot be used for commercial purposes; and they must not be used to generate another product or work of any kind.

MACBA Press Service

Tels.: (00 34) 93 481 33 56 y 93 481 47 17

Email: press@macba.cat