

Exhibition: Rafael Pérez Contel

IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
7 May – 12 July

Organized by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curators: Juan Ángel Blasco Carrascosa
Vicent Joan Morant



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To celebrate the centenary of the birth of Rafael Pérez-Contel (Villar del Arzobispo, 1909 – Valencia, 1990), the IVAM is exhibiting a selection of over 150 items from the extraordinary collection of more than a thousand works donated to the museum by the artist's heirs. Rafael Pérez Contel is considered one of the few sculptors who sought to bring about a sincere transformation of our art scene, starting in the late 1920s.

The IVAM is also presenting a new documentary, *Pérez Contel por Pérez Contel*, made by the Intermedia Creations Laboratory at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Valencia, with the coordination of Miguel Molina Alarcón.

A catalogue has been published to accompany the show, with illustrations of all the works exhibited and essays by Consuelo Císcar, director of the IVAM, Josefina Álix, Carlos Plasencia, Sebastià Miralles, Francisco Agramunt, Ricard Silvestre, the artist's grandson Pablo Pérez García, Manuel Silvestre and the curators of the exhibition, Juan Ángel Blasco Carrascosa and Vicent Joan Morant Mayor.

The IVAM has already shown a small selection of his work in the exhibition *Rafael Pérez Contel / Manolo Gil, en la colección del IVAM* (2006).

His many-sided personality (sculptor, draughtsman, painter, engraver, publisher) deserved more detailed study of those facets, together with a selective monographic

exhibition – including a new documentary show – based on a strict selection from his prolific artistic oeuvre.

He is an amazing exponent of the creative adventure that took place in Valencia. With his artistic contribution – throughout his whole life – he delved into the knottiest cultural and socio-political questions, during the last years of Primo de Rivera and the advent of the Republic, and then in the Civil War, the years of the Franco regime and the first furlongs of the new democracy. Pérez Contel obtained information about the Post-Impressionist, Fauve, Cubist, Futurist and Surrealist movements from foreign journals. He belonged to the same generation as Renau, Badía, Carreño, Climent, Roso and Manuela and Antonio Ballester, and at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts he was taught by Beltrán. He exhibited at the Mercantile Athenaeum in Valencia and the Sala Blava. He was a member of the Proletarian Writers' and Artists' Union (UEAP in Spanish). As one of the founders of the journal *Nueva Cultura* (1935–37), he became responsible for design and layout and he was a member of the Editorial Board. He contributed many drawings and acted as foreign correspondent during his time in Paris. His early works show a clearly transforming, avant-garde intention and reveal one of his abiding interests, the dialogue between mass and emptiness, hollow and volume.

At the age of 24 he went to live in Madrid. The strongest influence on him was Alberto Sánchez (co-founder, with Benjamín Palencia, of the first School of Vallecas), who became his friend and teacher, and who was responsible for his rapport, in his early paintings and sculptures, with Cubist and Surrealist forms, geometrical investigation of the active principle of the hollow, the shaping of space by means of precise, simplified planes and the formation of a concise, sober oeuvre. Ángel Ferrant also left his mark on his personal life and on his art.

He received a scholarship to travel to Paris, where he “discovered” Brancusi, acquired an interest in Rodin and Bourdelle, and became directly acquainted with Picasso's work and the Cubism of Léger and Braque. He made two sculptures for the Spanish Republic's pavilion in the Exposition Internationale in Paris.

After his confinement in Valencia's Model Prison, during the years immediately after the Civil War he was obliged to devote himself to making decorative objects, pottery and carvings of religious imagery. He established a fruitful relation with the young Valencian artists who gathered around Grupo Z (1947–50), led by Manuel Gil. He did not join the group (though he agreed to take part in their fourth and fifth exhibitions), but he encouraged them and gave them the benefit of his experience and support (contacts with the Abad and Faus galleries), realizing the importance of the link with the generation of the Republic. He was awarded prizes in the first (1951) and second (1953) celebrations of the *Exposición Bienal de Arte del Reino de Valencia*. From 1955 onwards he devoted himself intensely to teaching at the José de Ribera secondary school in Xàtiva, where he became head of the drawing department and headmaster. In 1986 the Valencian autonomous government published his book *Artistas en Valencia, 1936–1939*, which was followed by a major retrospective – *Pérez Contel, escultor* (1987) – at the Caja de Ahorros de Valencia Cultural Centre.