

Exhibition: **Cristino de Vera. “Esencia y fugacidad”**
3rd May – 3rd July 2005
Curators: Raquel Gutiérrez & Rafael Sierra
Organised by: IVAM Institut Valencià d’Art Modern

Cristino de Vera belongs to the generation of Spanish artists who emerged in the years after the Civil War. The artist showed the influence of tragic Baroque tradition in his early work and of Christian and Oriental mystic meditation practice in his creative processes. Considered by some to be an anchorite of painting, he has continued along his trajectory outside mainstream groups and trends, although he admits he admires some abstract contemporary painters, like Rothko or Pollock, “capable of painting nothingness with a few mere colours”. The exhibition presents 15 canvases and 32 drawings, donated by the artist to form part of the collection of the IVAM.

The catalogue of the exhibition reproduces all the works shown and includes texts by Elena Pita, Barbara Rose and the curators of the exhibition, Raquel Gutiérrez and Rafael Sierra.

Cristino de Vera (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1931) began his artistic studies at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1946, where one of his teachers was Mariano de Cossío, his first mentor in artistic creation, through whose influence he

became familiar with Post-Cubism and the poetry of the Generation of 27. He also followed the teachings of Alfonso de Reyes until his desire to learn took him to Madrid in 1951. Cristino de Vera completed his training by frequenting Vázquez Díaz's studio, the Casón, the Círculo de Bellas Artes and the Escuela de Bellas Artes.

At the age of twenty-two, once he had assimilated the influence of the painters who most moved him, he decided to start from scratch, following his own intuition. He held his first one-man exhibition at the Galería Estilo in Madrid in 1954, where his unquestionable desire to investigate could already be seen. Other solo exhibitions followed in the capital of Spain: Sala Alfil, 1956 and 1957, Ateneo de Madrid in 1959, and the critics did not take long to consider him one of the most genuine and austere painters of the time. The mysticism of his painting was praised by the poets Gerardo Diego, Carlos Edmundo de Ory, Ángel Crespo and José Hierro.

Cristino de Vera has always been interested in the desolation of the Castilian landscape and still lifes, which soon turned into *vanitas*, recurrent themes in his tireless pursuit of beauty, which he conceives as a synthesis of order and serene harmony. "Art is a form of prayer, a way of expressing a feeling of undefined religiousness, unrelated to any particular god. I need to paint as a spiritual exercise. Artists of all periods speak about the rapture of inspiration, moments when they are not entirely aware of what they are doing. These are moments of ecstasy, where the artist is a medium," he states.

Most of the authors who have studied his work coincide in saying that Cristino de Vera paints the aftermath of the glance. He himself affirms that he works on his memory of what he represents, not his first sight of it. In the solitude of his studio he austere landscapes broken by the outline of cemetery walls, cypresses, crosses and skulls.

As his painting evolves, he makes purer and purer forms, his figures are reduced to the bare essentials, a far cry from the large forms of his early years; his painting is stripped bare of all sorts of accessories and touches on aspects that allude to spirituality.

In the nineteen sixties and seventies, he participated in group exhibitions all over Spain and abroad, and was awarded the Juan March Prize and Grant, which allowed him to travel around Europe. In 1958 he took part in the Alexandria Biennial; in 1961, in the

Paris Biennial; in 1963, in the Venice Biennial; in 1964, in the New York Fair. In February 1974 he held an exhibition at the Rutland Gallery in London, and in December of the same year he inaugurated another solo exhibition at the Galería Sur in Santander. 1974 is also the year of his first trip to the United States. In fact, we can say that travel was one of Cristino de Vera's main pursuits in the seventies: in 1975 he went to India and Brazil. In April 1976, the City Council of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria presented an anthological exhibition of his work in the Castillo de la Luz. After this, he did not exhibit again until 1982, when he travelled to Arles in France. He went to Russia in 1977 and Mexico in 1978.

He took part in ARCO in 1990, 1992 and 1994. In October 1994 the Canary Island Government organised an anthological exhibition of the previous four decades of the artist's work, held at the Centro de Arte la Regenta in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

In 1993, when he had practically retired in interior exile, and even decided to stop painting—although he took it up again later— to dedicate himself entirely to drawing, official recognition came: the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid held an exhibition of his work on paper in 1996, which was followed by an exhibition of his drawings at the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. In 1997 he donated a large part of his work to the Canary Government on condition that it should be exhibited for all the inhabitants of the Canaries to see and enjoy. In 1998 he was granted the National Visual Arts Award. His work is present in collections and museums like those of Tenerife and Ibiza, and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid and the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende in Santiago de Chile.