

Exhibition: ***Rafael Pérez Contel & Manolo Gil en la colección del IVAM***

Produced by: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curator: Joan Blasco Carrascosa

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*Rafael Pérez Contel y Manolo Gil en la colección del IVAM* comprises 82 works, between paintings, sculptures, moulds, drawings, etc., by these Valencian artists who belong to two decisive periods in the history of Spain: the Second Spanish Republic and early Francoism. In the exhibition a correlation is established between the plastic creation of Rafael Pérez Contel and Manolo Gil, with the intention of emphasising the stylistic connections and the differences arising from two very different plastic trajectories. The coincidences/contrasts between two such singular contributions will also encourage spectators to form opinions, make deliberations and arrive at historical conclusions, apart from the aesthetic pleasure involved.

The works that make up this exhibition have been donated to the IVAM. The exhibition includes some paintings and drawings by Manolo Gil that have never been displayed in a museum and a varied repertoire of sculptures, paintings and drawings by Rafael Pérez Contel unknown to spectators.

The catalogue published for the exhibition reproduces all the works displayed and includes texts by the director of the IVAM, Consuelo Císcar,

the curator, Joan Ángel Blasco Carrascosa and a chronology drawn up by Vicent Joan Morant.

### **Rafael Pérez Contel and Manolo Gil. Two biographies whose paths cross**

**Rafael Pérez Contel** (Villar del Arzobispo, 1909 – Valencia, 1990) enrolled at the General and Technical School in Valencia in 1919, but the economic hardships of his family made him seek employment and so he started to work as an apprentice in the studio of the sculptor Vicente Gerique, dedicated to making religious statues. This sculptor encouraged him to enrol at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de San Carlos in Valencia in 1926. He was granted a State Sculpture Scholarship, which paid for all his studies. He travelled to Madrid, where he made friends with Alberto Sánchez, Victorio Macho, Luis Lacasa, Pancho Lasso and Benjamín Palencia. In 1928 Pérez Contel produced his first sculptures in a clean renovating and avant-garde style.

In 1933, in an atmosphere of social unrest, he completed his studies and was granted a Sculpture Scholarship by the Diputación de Valencia to broaden his studies in Madrid. With a group of Valencian artists, writers and intellectuals, he created an association to defend culture from a left-wing progressive standpoint, which was called Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios. In 1934, his friend Alberto Sánchez put him in contact with the group of artists known as Ibéricos, who were the greatest exponents of the avant garde in the capital of Spain. He is also indebted to Alberto Sánchez for his interest in Cubist and Surrealist forms, geometric investigations, the configuration of space and the confirmation of a concise and sober work.

He achieved the post of Drawing teacher at Alzira secondary school. In 1935, the publication *Nueva Cultura* came out. This magazine became the organ of expression of the young Valencian artists most engaged with the avant-garde, and Ángel Gaos, Max Aub, Juan Gil Albert, Gómez Nadal, Alberto Sánchez and others collaborated in it. That same year, he went to Paris, where he discovered Constantin Brancusi, Auguste Rodin and Émile Antoine Bourdelle. He enrolled in the Académie Grand Chaumière and saw the work of Pablo Picasso and the other masters of Cubism first-hand.

In 1936 he came back to Valencia to take up his post as Drawing teacher at Alzira Secondary School. In 1939 he was court-martialled and sentenced to three years and a day for crimes of aiding and abetting the rebellion and sent to the Cárcel Modelo in Valencia. In 1942 he was let out of prison on parole and initiated one of the most doleful periods of his life, carrying out decoration tasks and furniture design in order to provide for his family. In 1946 he came in contact with a group of artists called Grupo Z. In 1950 he worked as Drawing professor at the Secondary School José De Ribera in Xàtiva. The following year the first Exposición de Arte del Reino de Valencia was inaugurated in the Industrial Show grounds. This was a huge exhibition, with over 600 works by 250 authors, including Manuel Gil and Pérez Contel.

The artist represented Valencia at the first Bienal de Arte Hispanoamericano in Madrid, where he was awarded a Third-Class Medal. In 1953 he was granted a medal at the II Exposición Bienal de Arte del Reino de Valencia. In 1955 he was appointed Drawing professor at the Secondary School José De Ribera in Xàtiva, and devoted himself to teaching there. In 1961 he was awarded second prize by the Council in the poetry

competition in Valencia for his book *El Ninot de Falla*. In 1968 he participated in the IX Sal3n de Marzo in Valencia, where he was awarded third prize for painting. In 1980 he was granted the Medal of Gratitude in the National Ceramic Competition in Manises. In 1986 the Generalitat Valenciana published his book *Artistas en Valencia, 1936-1939*, one of the greatest contributions to the history of art during the Spanish Civil War, which was awarded the prize for the best book published in Spain by the Ministry of Culture. In 1987 he received the Gold Medal of the C3rculo de Bellas Artes in Valencia.

**Manolo Gil P3rez** (Valencia, 1925 – 1957) enrolled at the Escuela de Artes Aplicadas y Oficios Art3sticos in Valencia. Grupo Z was created in 1947 and immediately became very active. In the group Gil produced what are known as his *pinturas negras*. In 1948 the artist had his first great success as an artist, when he was awarded the Third Medal for Engraving at the Exposici3n Nacional de Bellas Artes. In 1950 Grupo Z broke up. In spite of the good critiques received by Gil's works, he entered into a phase of questioning his aesthetic stance, and so his period of *pinturas negras* ended. That year he was granted a scholarship to study in France by the Direction G3n3rale des Relations Culturelles Fran3aises of the Institut Fran3ais in Spain. He met Jos3 Mar3a Cam3n Aznar, Eugenio d'Ors, Enrique Azcoaga, Carlos Pascual de Lara, C3sar Manrique and Carlos Edmundo de Ory.

In 1951, the Fundaci3n Conde de Cartagena of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando granted him a scholarship for the United States or Great Britain, and the Department of Cultural Matters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted him an exchange scholarship for Italy. He participated in the first Exposici3n Bienal de Arte del Reino de

Valencia, where he coincided with Rafael Pérez Contel, and where he won the First Medal. In 1953 he became friendly with Wolfgang Natusch, who introduced him to Existentialism, Buddhism and the oriental literature of Lao-Tse and Chiang-Tse. The following year Manolo Gil entered his period of mythical painting, clearly showing the influence of the thinking of Carl. C. Jung, Wolfgang Natusch, Carlos Edmundo de Ory, Joan Brodat and Salvador Faus.

In 1956 his work suffered a new transformation, and he initiated a debate between figurative and non-figurative painting. That same year a group of Valencian artists and intellectuals founded the Grupo Parpalló. Gil's participation in the group, of which he was one of the ideologues and the most enthusiastic exponent, was interrupted by his premature death after only one year. The group's inaugural exhibition was held at the Ateneo Mercantil, and was accompanied by an open letter from the Grupo Parpalló, signed by Vicente Aguilera Cerni, Agustín Albalat, Nassio Bayarri, José M. Bendito, Juan Genovés, Jacinta Gil and Manolo Gil, among others.

Between 1956 and 1957, Manolo Gil went through a period of deep reflection about plastic representation, involving research he carried out with collages and wax crayons on paper. In 1957 *Arte Vivo* came out, the bulletin and official organ of the Grupo Parpalló. That year Manolo Gil died of acute pancreatitis. The third issue of *Arte Vivo* was a tribute to the artist. In 1958 the fourth exhibition of Grupo Parpalló was held, with the title *Homenaje a Manolo Gil*.

In 1991 his widow, Jacinta Gil donated a group of works by Manolo Gil to the IVAM. The museum set up a solo exhibition in 1995 titled *Manolo Gil*.