

Exhibition: **Erró. The great collage of the world**
IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern
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In collaboration with: Sala Alcalá 31 – Madrid

Curator: Victoria Combalía

The exhibition *Erró. The great collage of the world* presents 72 works from all the artistic periods of Erró (1932, Ólafsvík), ranging from his small collages of 1958 (*New Life, I Am Happy, Méca-Make-up*) to *God Bless Baghdad*, a 3 x 5 metre mural made especially for this exhibition. The show also includes samples from his most important series, which are concerned with femmes fatales, the history of art, Chinese paintings, space and a tribute to American comics. The exhibition is completed by a selection of catalogues and publications and a projection of the film *Grimaces*, made by the artist in 1962–67.

Erró's work has been considered as one of the first to express postmodernity. One of the basic ingredients of his language is working with images from art history (ancient and recent), mixing them with pictures from the mass media, advertisements and the world of comics. Erró delights in his personal "cut and paste" technique, but he uses it in such a way that a completely new meaningful reality emerges, often with the virtue of appearing natural.

The exhibition catalogue contains illustrations of the works exhibited, together with texts by Consuelo Císcar, Santiago Fisas Ayxelà, Victoria Combalía and Danielle Kvaran.

Erró (Gudmundur Gudmundsson, known as Erró) belongs to the Nouvelle Figuration movement which appeared in Europe in 1960 as a reaction to Informalism. The movement was characterized by its strong interest in media images, the use of flat colours and iconography concerned with social issues, making it completely different from Pop Art. One of the group's first important exhibitions was *Figuration narrative*, presented at Galerie Creuze in Paris in 1965 by the French critic Gérald Gassiot-Talabot.

Erró was born in 1932 in Ólafsvík (Iceland), the illegitimate son of a working woman and an artist. He studied at art schools in Reykjavík and Oslo, in the latter case with Per Krohg. He came to Spain for the first time in 1953 and was fascinated by the work of Hieronymus Bosch in the Museo del Prado. As his Icelandic name was hard to pronounce he changed it to Ferró, inspired by a Spanish town called Castell de Ferro.

In 1954 Erró went to study in Italy, taking up quarters in Botero's studio in Florence. He met Jean-Jacques Lebel, who became one of his great friends. In 1957 he established a friendship with Dieter Roth, and in the early sixties with Fahlström and Roberto Matta. His work was seen in the first *Anti-Procès* exhibition (1960) in Paris, and he moved to that city in 1963. He also participated in the *Grand tableau anti-fasciste collectif* (Great Collective Anti-Fascist Painting), painted in Milan in 1961, which was confiscated by the police. He took part in numerous happenings, especially Jean-Jacques Lebel's *Catastrophe* (1962), with Tetsumi Kudo, and *Collage*, with the participation of Carolee Schneemann.

In 1965 Erró travelled to Russia, where he gathered material for his series *Forty-seven Years* and compared popular Russian art with its American equivalent. In that period he also travelled to New York, where he met American Pop artists. The first catalogue raisonné of his work was published in 1976. In 1985 he presented *Paysages* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In 1986 he represented Iceland in the *Biennale di Venezia*. He has created various mural paintings, such as the ones in the City Hall in Lille and in La Villette in Paris. In 1996 he presented *Von Mao bis Madonna* in Vienna, and in 1999 there was a major retrospective of his work at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris.

Jean-Christophe Ammann considers that Erró paints obsessively and intensely and always shows a neutral attitude towards his material, which he manipulates in terms of its own laws or even the absurd. For other critics, such as Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac, however, all of Erró's art is political. Anyone who looks at his work is tempted to make a first, obvious interpretation: the confrontation between the capitalist world and the communist world, the contrast between wellbeing and terror, between tranquillity and war, in both cases with standardized, idealized images. But Erró does not take sides, for he himself declares that "figurative narration proceeds through galaxies of images without a shadow of moral or political judgement".

Erró takes the technique of collage as his starting point, using magazines, newspapers, postcards and so on, generally collected by himself or else sent by his friends. In his

collages he uses Bib vinyl adhesive, because it does not damage paper. Sometimes he retouches the collages, which provide the basis for the final paintings. In fact, the paintings are enlargements of the collages.

His early paintings in the sixties were painted with Ripolin or Duco on paper. For his "Chinese" paintings he used oils, whereas later he began to employ glossy enamels. The technical aspect interests him enormously. His enamels are manufactured in the Netherlands and, as Philippe Dagen has explained, "they are solid". He used vinyl cloth because of a scene that he saw in Vietnam: bodies reduced to dust in a cemetery, while sheets of vinyl cloth remained intact.