

transversal and socio-economic but also ethical, going beyond limits of genre, which he called Art-Nature, Nature-Art. His new formula consisted in selecting large natural spaces on which he acted, integrating architecture, landscape, gardening, painting, sound, design, sculpture and equipment – with a declared attitude of respect for nature. Practices which made him an anomalous, off-centre, out-of-focus artist in this country.

In 1973, after an interlude of three years of inactivity as a painter, he incorporated a significant variation into his plastic expressive register. Characteristics and traces of figuration were admitted to his vocabulary and became part of the grammar of matter that he was cultivating. Works translated into synthetic forms which were a mixture of deconstructions of bodies or figures and mere constructed abstractions, alternating with paintings that continued with the artist's characteristic logic of "matter" Informalism. The numerous paintings in this series – his *calcinations* and *burnings* – continued until 1977, with variations in terms of the intensity of the figurative signs.

In the eighties his aesthetic world solidified, producing painting that became his spiritual refuge from the public hustle and bustle which was the result of his environmental commitment and landscape activity. In addition to his conventional matter, now noticeably softened on broad surfaces of colour, he used a variety of other materials, including pieces of card, paper, cork, iron, wood and sackcloth. In the work produced in the eighties mention must be made of the series *Fauna Atlántica* (Atlantic Fauna), a variety of pieces with the generic title of *Fósil* (Fossil), produced serially and numbered, updating the subterranean world, the *palaentological poetics*, outlined in the previous decade. In the early nineties he concentrated on various large works, sometimes concentrating on the surface, sometimes once again penetrating the world's skin and exploring the bowels of the earth.



Charca seca (Dried-up Pool), 1982

Fuetón, 1967

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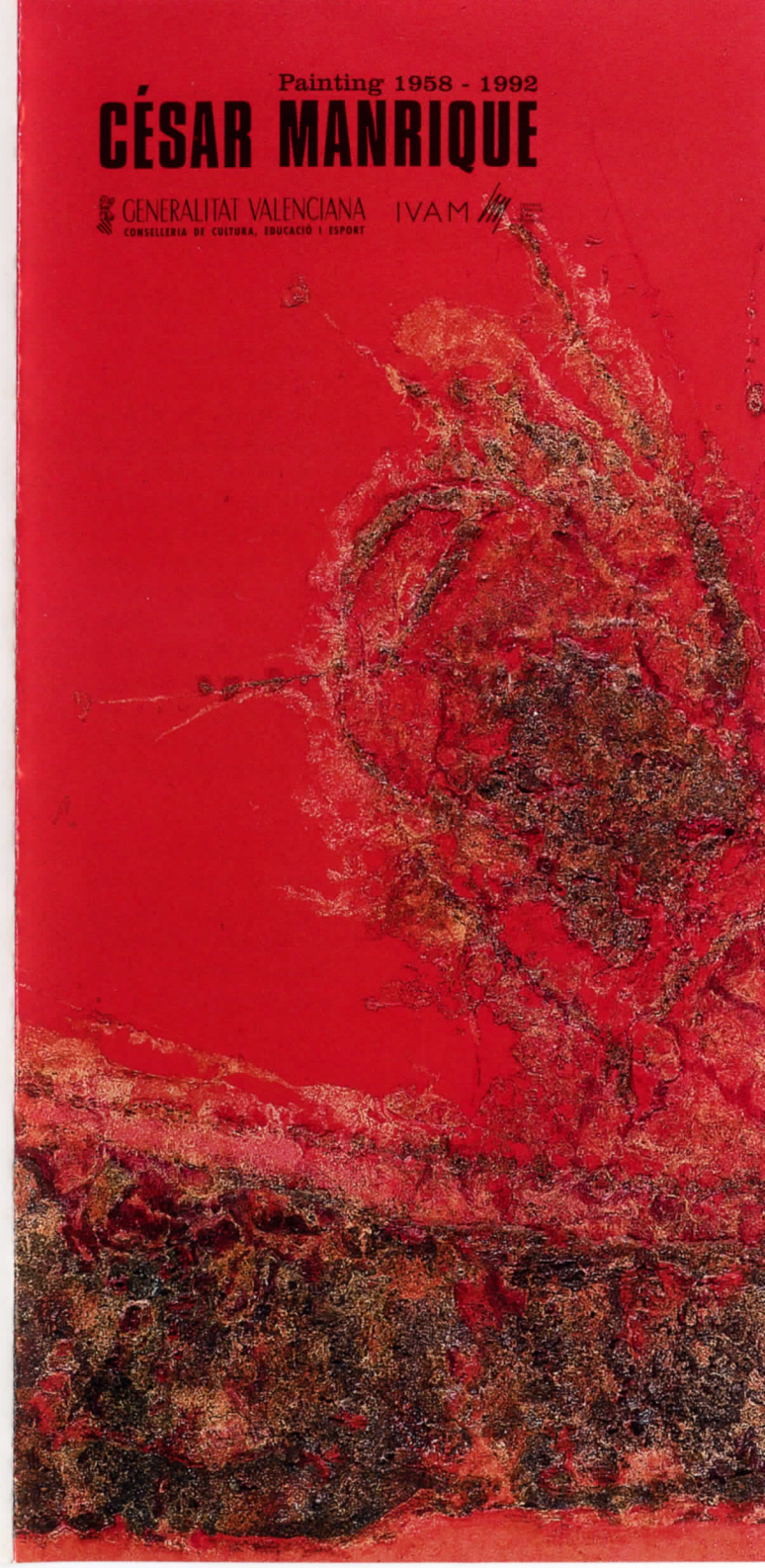
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Painting 1958 - 1992
CÉSAR MANRIQUE

GENERALITAT VALENCIANA
CONSELLERIA DE CULTURA, EDUCACIÓ I ESPORT

IVAM



The dialectic between reformist abstraction and figuration polarized much of the debate about the visual arts in Spain in the fifties. César Manrique (Lanzarote, 1919–92), who had gone to Madrid in 1945 to study Fine Arts, took an active part in the abstract renewal of Spanish painting undertaken in that decade and the following one.

At the end of 1959 Manrique plunged into the fabric of his true language, through which he became associated with the “matter” facet of Spanish Informalism and also with what seemed to be the spirit of the earth. In synchrony with the pre-eminence that the discourse of matter and new materials acquired in the movement of renewal in European painting in those years, he embarked on his most brilliant period as an artist, particularly intense in the sixties but also extending into and developing in the following decade. He began to give shape to his *new reality* in art: mineral, telluric and in constant dialogue with originative nature. The matter pulsing in his tremulous reticulations of 1958 took possession of the picture plane. The texture became rough and untidy, taking on a harsh, abrupt form, saturating the surface. Sober works at first, soon evolving towards a vibrant chromaticism which drew him away from his generation.

In fact, Manrique might well have been painting calligraphies of the origin of life, moments prior to existence. Hence the cosmic, germinal dimension of his pictorial Plutonism, enriched in the mid-sixties with paintings that reverberated with his personal igneous reds, warm ranges permeated with an originative purity.

Pintura nº 84 (Painting no. 84), 1961



The provision of Manrique's plastic imagery came from impressions of the island that the artist digested from the internalization of one specific nature: “I try to be like the free hand that forms geology,” he wrote. Yet his apparent naturalism is paradoxical, not coming from realistic reproduction of the landscape but from its internalization and spiritual clarification through emotional intellection: “feelings” and “sensations” channelled through an abstract linguistic support. Manrique is a *naturalistic painter of abstraction*.

The irradiation of the energy of the landscape intensified in the sixties, particularly after the period he spent in New York (1964–66), where he painted a magnificent series of collages. The island began to loom larger in his consciousness. Two circumstances came together: the nostalgia that the harsh, intense urban life of Manhattan produced in him, and the fact that in about 1964 the mechanism of transforming the landscape of Lanzarote and adapting the island to a tourist-based economy got under way – a project largely directed from a distance by Manrique, involved in conserving its heritage and stimulating the appreciation of his island since the previous decade.

The colour, emerging from the matter itself, was enriched without excesses: blazing carmines, blues from the bottom and borders of the sea, rusty greens, a great variety of violets, garnets, sandy yellows ... on the threshold of the new decade of the seventies. With the passing of the years the matter slimmed down its bulky presence, and its appearance was made more delicate by virtuosity.

In 1966 there was an acceleration in the pattern of actions and interventions aimed at enhancing Lanzarote's landscape and natural attractions, which were to form its new face and international image. The main lines of the programme of action were drawn up with an eye to environmental considerations and the concept of the *genius loci*. Culture, aesthetics and nature marked out the coordinates of the innovative commitment to public art and landscape design. While all this was happening his painting suffered, particularly in the early eighties. First of all functional landscape and then his ecological activism concentrated and absorbed his energy.

Painting gradually became a fragment of a more ambitious poetics and system of art, complex and integrating,

Cienfuegos, 1964

