

NOTES ON GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION IN SPAIN

The history of art is formed through a close connection between the artworks that marked the avant-garde of a particular time and the documentary and literary materials that narrate, analyse and question them. This symbiosis has allowed art not only to advance towards iconoclastic forms and expressions but also to turn to subjects and materials that are in principle remote from its aesthetic postulates. Like other documentary exhibitions shown in this space, these *Notes on Geometric Abstraction in Spain* attempt to signpost the still incipient crossroads of art and technology, the conceptual and formal basis of many subsequent practices with links to the artistic.

The exhibition begins with references to the *First Joint Exhibition of Spanish Normative Art*, organised by the Grupo Parpalló at the Ateneo Mercantil in Valencia in 1960. Shown alongside the historic fold-out leaflet that documented this show are issues of the publications *Arte vivo*, *Acento cultural* and *Arte ultimo*, all examples of an aesthetic broadening of Spanish art towards new paths whose main objectives differed from those of informalism. Antes del Arte, a group under the theoretical direction of Vicente Aguilera Cerni, proposed questioning the stifled aesthetic dynamics of the time, initiating practices in which aesthetic results were endorsed or even anticipated by theory. Among the members of this group were Eusebio Sempere, Jordi Teixidor and José María Yturralde, key figures for an understanding of the relationship between geometry, art and technology in the 1960s and 1970s. Some members of Antes del Arte took part in the historic seminars at the Centro de Cálculo (computing centre) at Madrid's Complutense University together with others like Elena Asins and Soledad Sevilla, the last in a large number of Valencian artists who contributed to the first movements of Spanish geometric abstraction. The show is completed with the international response to these groups and individual artists and their innovative tendencies, especially in Europe.

1. NORMATIVE ART

Primera exposición conjunta de arte normativo español [First Joint Exhibition of Spanish Normative Art]. Ateneo Mercantil de Valencia, València, 1960.

Reverso

IVAM Library. Depósito Fundació Josep Renau

“The exhibition had a catalogue with reproductions of ten of the works on display, along with a text by Antonio Giménez Pericás arguing for the collectivisation of artistic creation. The Parpalló group presented both collective and individual work (...) a sculpture by Alfaro, a luminous relief by Sempere, the design of the bar of the Ateneo by Martínez Perís. (...) Alongside these works, Parpalló displayed a collective photomontage, *Project for a Monument to the Mediterranean*.”

Barreiro López, Paula: *Arte normativo español. Procesos y principios para la creación de un movimiento*. CSIC, Madrid 2005, p. 55.

Primera exposición conjunta de arte normativo español [First Joint Exhibition of Spanish Normative Art]. Ateneo Mercantil de Valencia, València, 1960.

Verso

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Parpalló. Club Urbis, Madrid, February 1960.

IVAM Library. Donación Huguet

Moreno Galván, Jose María: “Arte normativo” [“Normative art”], *Acento cultural*. Madrid, June 1961.

IVAM Library. Depósito Fundació Josep Renau

“The climate of reflection and debate, which had been gathering above all since the year 1959, bore fruit in the *First Joint Exhibition of Spanish Normative Art*, held in Valencia in March 1960. However, the exhibition originally had higher expectations. In fact, it was the most modest conclusion to a flood of more ambitious projects aimed at promoting all the Spanish collectives working on constructive trends through exhibitions, publications and artworks of all kinds. These projects were organised through the Parpalló group under the guidance of Aguilera Cerni, Giménez Pericás and Moreno Galván. The three critics joined forces to establish contacts between the different artists interested in constructive art, hoping to encourage a climate of exchange, understanding and reflection suitable for the creation of a rationalist common front.”

Barreiro López, Paula: *Arte normativo español. Procesos y principios para la creación de un movimiento*. CSIC, Madrid, 2005, p. 51.

Vasarely, Victor: “La plasticidad cinética” [“Kinetic plasticity”], *Arte Vivo*, no. 1. València, January-February 1959. IVAM Library. Donación Huguet

Manuel Calvo. Galería Darro, Madrid, 1960. IVAM Library. Depósito Fundació Josep Renau

Aguirre, Juan Antonio: *Arte Último. La «Nueva Generación» en la escena española* [Latest Art. The “New Generation” on the Spanish Scene]. Fundación Antonio Pérez, Cuenca, 2005. IVAM Library

In 1967, the critic Juan Antonio Aguirre organised the exhibition *Nueva Generación* [New Generation] at the Galería Edurne as an alternative to the predominance of informalism. He brought together various neo-figurative and abstract artists, among them the geometric artists Alexanco, Barbadillo and Yturralde. The same year, the poet Ángel Crespo organised the exhibition *Arte Objetivo* [Objective Art], which gathered the work of about twenty artists aligned with tendencies in geometric art. This official initiative, an enormous boost for geometric abstraction, included work by Elena Asins, the only woman selected.

Aguilera Cerni, Vicente: *Arte y Compromiso histórico (Sobre el caso español)* [Art and Historic Commitment (On the Spanish Case)]. Fernando Torres Editor, València, 1976. IVAM Library

2. ANTES DEL ARTE GROUP

VV.AA.: “Sobre el arte geométrico y la poesía: hablando de la obra de José María Yturralde” [“On geometric art and poetry: speaking of the work of José María Yturralde”], *Suma y Sigue de arte contemporáneo*, no. 3. València, 1967. Biblioteca IVAM. Donación Huguet

Gatt, Giuseppe: “La XXXIII Bienal de Venecia o La nueva tendencia en Italia: integración estética y arquitectura” [“The 23rd Venice Biennale or the new tendency in Italy: aesthetic Integration and architecture”], *Suma y Sigue de arte contemporáneo*, no. 1, València, 1967, p. 36. Biblioteca IVAM. Donación Huguet

Antes del Arte. Experiencias ópticas perceptivas estructurales [Antes del Arte. Structural Perceptive Optical Experiences]. Galería de Arte Eurocasa, Madrid, October 1968.

IVAM Library

“What does it mean to be situated “*antes del arte*”, “before art”? Is it a regression? Is it a modality of the new technological barbarity? (...) The hypothesis cannot be simpler: to trace the path that leads from science to art. Is it a long path? Sometimes it is. On other occasions, the distances vanish. The only positive and indisputable way to address the question is to use examples to illustrate the behaviours, processes, phenomena, structures, formulations, etc., that lie at the very base of artistic phenomenology, but limiting such examples to their connections with science. The hypothesis consists of isolating those elementary data, giving them graphic, sonic, corporal, translational or reproductive representation, either static or dynamic.”

Aguilera Cerni, Vicente: *Antes del arte*. Galería de Arte Eurocasa, Madrid, October 1968, p. 3.

Antes del Arte. Experiencias ópticas perceptivas estructurales [Antes del Arte. Structural Perceptive Optical Experiences]. Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Valencia, València, April-May 1968.

IVAM Library

“We want to draw attention to the dramatic and notorious gap that exists between the current state of the sciences and the basic information used by the various artistic media and movements. Polemics between artistic trends are of absolutely no interest to us. It is a question of producing updated examples of fundamental information.”

Aguilera Cerni, Vicente: *Antes del arte*. Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Valencia, València, April 1968.

Aguilera Cerni, Vicente: “Antes del arte” [“Before art”], *La postguerra: documentos y testimonios II*. Servicio de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Madrid, 1975.
IVAM Library

Francisco Llácer (València, 1918-2002)
Partitura Motete para el día sexto [Score of Motet for the Sixth Day], 1968
Archive of Francisco Llácer

Francisco Llácer is a self-taught musician and composer. A friend of Joaquín Michavila, he formed part of the group Nueva Música in the 1960s. His compositions in 1968 were atonal pieces that included occasional twelve-tone phrasing. Because he was seen as thinking “before art”, Michavila invited him to participate in the exhibition as consultant for the ambient music of the group’s shows.

Francisco Llácer (València, 1918-2002)
Partitura Trova heptafónica [Score for Heptaphonic Ballad], 1969
Archive of Francisco Llácer

Jordi Teixidor (València, 1941)
Cuaderno de notas [Notebook], 1968-70
IVAM, Institut Valencià d’Art Modern, Generalitat

Julio Le Parc. Galería René Metras - Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 1969.
IVAM Library

VV.AA.: *Forma y Medida en el Arte Español Actual* [Form and Measure in Current Spanish Art]. Dirección General del Patrimonio Artístico, Archivos y Museos; Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 1977.
IVAM Library

3 and 4. COMPUTING CENTRE

Formas Computables [Computable Forms]. Centro de Cálculo de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, 1969.

IVAM Library

“The results of the investigations at the computing centre (Centro de Cálculo) were presented there in the summer of 1969 in the exhibition *Formas Computables* [Computable Forms], with works from the early phases of research on Mondrian, Vasarely and Equipo 57. Alongside these were manual works by Alexandro, Amador, Asins, etc., and a few made thanks to the centre’s gigantic IBM computer (Barbarillo, Sempere and Yturralde).”

Abstracción. Del Grupo Pórtico al Centro de Cálculo 1948–1968. Galería Guillermo de Osma, Madrid, 2015, p. 43.

Arte objetivo [Objective Art]. Dirección General de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 1967.

IVAM Library

José María Yturralde. Estructuras [José María Yturralde. Structures]. Galería René Metrás, Barcelona, 1970.

IVAM Library

Eusebio Sempere’s personal notebook, where he describes his experience at the Centro de Cálculo (computing centre) of the UCM. 1971

IVAM Library. Donación Sempere.

IBM Informatique no. 1. Paris, 1970.

Colección José María Yturralde

L’Ordinateur et la créativité. Architecture-peinture [The Computer and Creativity. Architecture-Painting]. Centro de Cálculo de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1970.

Colección José María Yturralde

Catalogue *Ordenadores en el arte. Generación de Formas Plásticas* [Computers in Art. Generation of Plastic Forms]. Centro de Cálculo de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1969.

Colección José María Yturralde

Exhibition catalogue *Antes del Arte*.

Colegio de Arquitectos de Valencia,
València, 1968.

Colección José María Yturralde

Bertin, Jacques: *Sémiologie Graphique*.

Diagrammes, réseaux, cartographie

[Graphic Semiology. Diagrams, Grids,
Cartography]. Mouton et Gauthier-Villars,
Paris, 1967.

Colección José María Yturralde

“La Cybernétique” [“Cybernetics”],
*Recherches internationales à la lumière du
marxisme* no. 29. Paris, 1962.

Colección José María Yturralde

Gregory, Richard L.: *Ojo y cerebro*.

Psicología de la visión [Eye and Brain.

Psychology of Vision]. Editorial

Guadarrama, vol. 1 of the collection

Biblioteca para el Hombre Actual, 1965.

Colección José María Yturralde

Seminarios del Centro de Cálculo

[Seminars of the Computing Centre], no. 1.

Madrid, December 1968.

Colección José María Yturralde

“The intention of the group participating in the Seminar on Automatic Generation of Plastic Forms, which has formed in a spirit of scientific and artistic interest (...) is to formalise the objective description of the artwork as far as possible and analyse its semantics. The results so far have been scarce. The difficulty of the task is not hidden from us, and we are aware that not everything can be automated (...) but what we are sure of is that there are a great many mechanical processes and automatisms in current methods that entangle creative freedom, making it so arduous that the line of thought adopted is apt to be abandoned.”

García Camarero, Ernesto: “Ordenadores en el arte”. Centro de Cálculo (UCM), Madrid, 1969, p. 19

Seminarios del Centro de Cálculo nº2.

Madrid, enero de 1969.

Colección José María Yturralde

Seminarios del Centro de Cálculo nº3.

Madrid, febrero de 1969.

Colección José María Yturralde

Centro de Cálculo de la Universidad
Complutense de Madrid. Becas,
cursos, usuarios [Computing Centre of
Complutense University, Madrid. Grants,
courses, users]
Colección José María Yturralde

Catalogue of the exhibition *Arte
Asistido por Computadora* [Art Assisted
by Computer]. Palacio Nacional de
Congresos de Madrid, Madrid, 1971.
Colección José María Yturralde

*Variaciones de Figuras Imposibles
pentagonales* [Variations on Pentagonal
Impossible Figures], 1970
Silkscreen print based on computer output
38 x 30 cm
Colección José María Yturralde

*Variaciones de Figuras Imposibles
hexagonales* [Variations on Hexagonal
Impossible Figures], 1968
Computer output, IBM 7090, Benson
plotter
Ink on continuous form paper
78.5 x 58.5 cm
Colección José María Yturralde

“The computer has also proved very
useful in the systematic investigation of all
the impossible figures that Yturralde had
been working on intuitively. The computer
has generated and plotted the impossible
figures of three, four, five and six vertices,
joined together with rigid bars from which
the ones with the greatest perceptive
contrast can be chosen.”

García Camarrero, Ernesto: “Ordenadores
en el arte”. Centro de Cálculo (UCM), Madrid,
1969, p. 18.

Figuras imposibles [Impossible Figures, c.
1970
Crayons on graph paper
30 x 21 cm
Colección José María Yturralde

La Comunidad inconfesable [The
Unconfessable Community], Madrid,
October 1968
Colección José María Yturralde

*AA.VV.: A Little-Known Story about
a Movement, a Magazine, and the
Computer's Arrival in Art. New Tendencies
and Bit International, 1961-1973.* Margit
Rosen (ed.), The MIT Press, Cambridge
MA, 2011.
Colección José María Yturralde

5. SEMPERE

Eusebio Sempere's personal notebook.
Model for the apse of the Basilica of
Aránzazu, 1962.

IVAM Library. Donación Sempere.

“In the works exhibited, light is the
essential element. It is born of them and
reaches the viewer with all the force of
its physical presence, poeticised and
nuanced by simple planes and coloured
or transparent materials.
I use materials that are specific to me.
The metal components we are offered by
today's technology.”

Sempere, Eusebio: Manifesto published for the
Salon des Realités Nouvelles, Paris, 8 July 1959.

*Sempere. Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New
York, 1966.*

IVAM Library. Donación Sempere.

*Sempere. Salas de Exposiciones del
Ateneo de Madrid. Editorial Nacional,
Madrid, 1960.*

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“Sempere's plastic oeuvre has been
enriched and aggrandised. New kinetic
groups are springing up everywhere.
Important things are being done, as in
the work of Sempere, who has left Paris
for his native land, serene and confident.
Sempere's work was defined by Jean
Arp in a poem he dedicated to the
Spanish painter. ‘Sempere holds out to
me the leaves of a bright life, far from the
spectres invigorated by worms, far from
the hideous horrors of the bazaars of
placentas.’ And he goes on: ‘Sempere has
drawn projects for heights upon which
a white rain falls from a bright sky. He
paints battles of tears of joy. Sempere has
painted the most intimate designs of the
air.”

Vasarely, Victor: *Sempere. Cuadernos de Arte
del Ateneo de Madrid*, Madrid, 1961.

*Sempere: las intenciones más íntimas del
aire* [Sempere: The Most Intimate Designs
of the Air], Galería Edurne, Madrid, 1974.

IVAM Library

6. INTERNALISATION

Chroniques de l'art vivant no. 17. Paris, 1970.

IVAM Library

“Oteiza gana la Bienal de São Paulo de 1959” [“Oteiza wins the 1959 São Paulo Biennial”], *Arte Vivo*, no. 4. València, July-August 1959.

IVAM Library

“Oteiza is considered the national pioneer of rational aesthetics, and that is how he was regarded by the artists and critics of the time. He is held to be one of the precursors of normativist poetics. Aguilera Cerni unhesitatingly made a bolder assessment, including Oteiza within the “intense metaphysical side of normative art”. But it was not so. Oteiza never had a direct relationship with the group. The Basque artist really worked on his own, opening doors in the new spatial and ethical preoccupations that would connect with the later normative interests.”

Barreiro López, Paula: *Arte normativo español. Procesos y principios para la creación de un movimiento*. CSIC, Madrid, 2005, p. 29.

Palazuelo, Pablo: *Derrière le Miroir* [Behind the Mirror], no. 137. Maeght Editeur, Paris, 1963.

IVAM Library

Palazuelo, Pablo: *Derrière le Miroir* [Behind the Mirror}, no. 137. Maeght Editeur, Paris, 1964.

Inside page of the document

IVAM Library

Palazuelo, Pablo: *Pierre à Feu* [Firestone].

Maeght Editeur, Paris, 1955.

Inside page of the document

IVAM Library

Palazuelo 55. *Pierre à Feu*. Maeght Editeur, Paris 1955

IVAM Library

Palazuelo, Pablo: *Pierre à Feu* [Firestone].

Maeght Editeur, Paris, 1955.

IVAM Library

Inside page of the document

IVAM Library

The Responsive Eye. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965.

IVAM Library

Julián, Inmaculada: *El arte cinético en España* [Kinetic Art in Spain]. Cátedra, Madrid, 1986.

IVAM Library

Soledad Sevilla (Valencia, 1944)

Untitled, 1977

IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat

Soledad Sevilla (Valencia, 1944)

Untitled, 1978

IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat