



Chromatisms

This itinerary offers a cross-cutting journey through the exhibition, based on a selection of works that provide insight into colour and its multiple meanings in 19th- and 20th-century artistic practice. Beyond its ornamental role, colour emerges here as a field of aesthetic experimentation, sensory perception and cultural construction. At once subjective and objective, physically determined yet culturally constructed, it has been a subject of reflection in philosophy, science and artistic practice.

Philosophy engaged with these questions early on. Kant defended the beauty of simple colours on the basis of their purity, while Goethe, Runge and Wittgenstein reflected on chromatic relationships and their perceptual effects.

Traditionally, colour has been associated with emotion, in contrast to drawing and line work, which have been linked to rationality.

One of the key moments in the development of colour theory came when optical science began to systematise painters' perceptions through the work of Isaac Newton and ideas of harmony and complementarity. By the late 19th century, these scientific theories had entered artistic practice and went on to shape the avant-garde movements and many abstract practices of the 20th century.

The idea of listening to colour continues to inspire contemporary artists, both women and men, grounded in the belief in its capacity to exert a direct effect on perception and the human body. It has become one of the fundamental components of modern and contemporary visual experience.



ROOM 1

The awakening of chromatic autonomy

In the historical process that led to the break with art's traditional mimetic function, colour ceased to be a merely decorative element and became the dominant force in the work. Freed from its dependence on line work, it became an autonomous, structuring element, capable of unleashing a vibrant intensity that transformed visual perception.

With the early 20th-century avant-gardes, such as Expressionism and Fauvism, colour began to express subjective sensations through arbitrary chromatic combinations that challenged traditional forms of representation. In Cubism, it was reduced to a restricted palette of ochres, greys and muted greens, in order to focus attention on the decomposition of objects, the multiplicity of viewpoints and the construction of pictorial space, as seen in **María Blanchard's** *Bodegón oval* (1925).

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In *Dada-Kopf* (1917), **Hans Richter** used colour as a constructive device, breaking the portrait down into geometric forms and structures and bringing it closer to abstraction. He drew on portraits of fellow Dada artists made in low light and in states close to automatism or trance, using a restrained palette whose muted tones created a sense of indeterminacy and visual balance. Chromatic gradations replaced traditional modelling and organised the composition through planes of colour.

ROOM 2

The physical dimension and functionality of colour in design

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In Russian Constructivism, artists such as **El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko, Natalia Pinyus, Gustav Klucis** and **Natalia Goncharova** deliberately reduced the palette to a small number of high-impact colours: red, black and white. This restriction served communicative, political and structural purposes closely tied to the visual culture of the Revolution. Red, associated with the revolutionary imaginary, functioned as the dominant symbolic colour; black provided contrast and structure;



and white created breathing space and supported typography. In propaganda posters, this chromatic system directed attention and established a hierarchy of visual information. In book and publication design, colour worked with typography and page layout, acting almost as a system of visual navigation within the printed page.

The Bauhaus treated colour as a rational, operative language, where each chromatic choice had a specific function within design, with the aim of bringing together aesthetics and industrial technique. Its approach to colour was shaped over time by its teachers: Johannes Itten developed a mystical approach based on the theory of the seven contrasts and Runge's colour sphere; Josef Albers focused on colour interaction, showing that the perception of a hue changes according to its context; Wassily Kandinsky carried out psychotechnical studies, establishing an iconic correspondence between form and colour, such as the yellow triangle (aggressive and acute), the red square (solid and defensive) or the blue circle (deep and introspective); Paul Klee understood colour as visual polyphony; László Moholy-Nagy developed a utilitarian approach; and Wilhelm Ostwald worked towards a mathematical systematisation of the chromatic palette.

Artists associated with the Dutch De Stijl group also applied these principles to graphic design and advertising, using geometric compositions, functional typography and primary colours to reinforce visual clarity and communicative efficiency, as seen in the work of **Bart van der Leck**, **Paul Schuitema** and **Piet Zwart**. Finally, Herbert Bayer and **László Moholy-Nagy** approached colour from a functional perspective, favouring primary colours, high contrasts and controlled combinations that highlighted key elements of the advertisement.

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ROOM 3

Dialogue and interaction between colours

Orphism emerged within Cubism with the aim of organising space through colour. Drawing on Eugène Chevreul's 19th-century theory of perceptual laws, the Orphists sought to generate optical vibration and movement through compositions based on the dynamic interaction of pure colours, placed side by side to expand and energise form and pictorial space. **Robert and Sonia Delaunay's** series of concentric coloured discs became emblematic of the movement, appearing not only in their paint-

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ings but also in their “simultaneous books”. **Robert** used them on the cover of *Tour Eiffel* (1918), designed for Vicente Huidobro’s collection of poems, where the image of the Tower – recurring in his visual imagination – stands as a symbol of modernity. In **Sonia**’s case, her collaboration with Blaise Cendrars on *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913) shows colour as more than illustration, functioning instead as a visual equivalent of poetic rhythm, conveying the vertigo of modern life, for which the Eiffel Tower became the ultimate symbol.

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The Orphist vocabulary spread beyond France, and **Joan Miró** made a subtle reference to these circular forms and their chromatic dynamism in *Aviat l’Instant* (1919), a work produced during Robert and Sonia Delaunay’s stay in Spain between 1915 and 1921.

In the European abstract avant-gardes of the 1930s, colour gained increasing autonomy from the representation of the visible world, becoming a structural principle in its own right. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), Wassily Kandinsky formulated a conception of colour as a language of “inner necessity”, intended to create a deep resonance in the human soul through psychology and synaesthesia. In this view, colour, form and sound can establish perceptual correspondences comparable to music.

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František Kupka approached colour from an analytical and dynamic perspective, exploring its capacity to generate movement and perceptual relationships akin to music. In *Proportions* (1934), he organised tones into horizontal and vertical bands, with the vertical elements forming the backbone of the composition. Drawing on scientific theories of simultaneous contrast, he juxtaposed red and blue to produce optical effects that intensify rhythm and proportion, giving the geometric composition musical depth.

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Like Kupka, **Otto Freundlich**, a member of the Abstraction-Création group, sought to develop a universal visual language based on harmony and precision. In *Composition* (1932), he structured the canvas as an assemblage of chromatic fragments inspired by stained glass, where geometric forms and colour contrasts generated vibration and dynamism. His model drew on medieval architecture, especially the arrangement of stone blocks, from which he created a luminous mosaic aimed at evoking mystical and spiritual states.



Both artists break decisively with representational tradition: colour no longer depends on the appearance of things, but stands as an autonomous element capable of generating internal relations within the painting, structuring space, evoking inner rhythms and opening up new forms of visual experience.

The emergence of monochromy

Monochromy acquired a new aesthetic and conceptual dimension at the beginning of the 20th century with works such as *White on White* (1919) by Kazimir Malevich, now in MoMA, New York.

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Abstraction in the first half of the 20th century developed different approaches to monochrome colour. In the 1930s, **Jean Arp** used it as a principle of dematerialisation and organic balance. In reliefs and biomorphic compositions such as *Coquille Nuage I* (1932), white acts as a neutral field of visual suspension, allowing form to emerge more subtly, while the organic curves of his work appear weightless and without fixed spatial reference. White softens contrasts and creates smooth transitions between form and void, reinforcing the ambiguity between figure and ground. Another example from the 1930s can be seen in **Léon Arthur Tutundjian's** *Relief* (1929).

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Similarly, **Carl Buchheister** (*Diagonal White Composition*, 1929) used white to emphasise the essence of painting and its support, treating it as a neutral colour that highlights geometric and mathematical structure, texture and light without emotional distraction.

The systematisation of colour: the balance of pure components

From 1917 onwards, Neoplasticism – centred on the Dutch group and journal *De Stijl* – argued, following Piet Mondrian, that art should be reduced to its simplest components in order to achieve absolute balance. This restriction came from the search for equilibrium between horizontal and vertical lines. As a result, compositions were limited to strictly horizontal and vertical lines, set within rectangular or square formats. At the same time, the palette was restricted to the primary colours (red, yellow and blue) and the so-called “non-colours” (white, black and grey), as seen in



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Bart van der Leck's *The Three Graces* (1933), avoiding the mixing of pigments to preserve purity and applying colour uniformly, with no trace of brushwork or volume.

Within De Stijl, however, variations emerged, such as “Elementarism”, developed by Theo van Doesburg, which introduced diagonal lines and a broader palette to animate the composition and shift the relationship between form and space, showing that even within an apparently closed system, internal tensions could arise.

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Alexander Calder was strongly influenced by Neoplasticism, translating its principles of purity and balance into three-dimensional form through his mobiles of the 1930s (*Untitled*, 1934). In these constructions, where primary-coloured elements are held in delicate equilibrium, movement is generated by inertia and the action of natural forces.

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Another artist to adopt the Neoplastic palette was **Joaquín Torres-García** (*Construction / Constructif*, 1931–1934), particularly in his Constructive period, when he developed a structured grid-based space with a clear hierarchy of elements. He used a more earthy, nuanced range of primary colours, linked to materiality and ancestry, distancing himself from the movement's orthodox purity.

ROOM 4

From colour as psychic energy to colour as a controlled system of perception

After the Second World War, two ways of understanding colour came into focus: one linked to inner experience, the other to its near-scientific regulation within perception. This duality can be seen in the work of Adolph Gottlieb on the one hand, and Hans Hofmann and Ad Reinhardt on the other. For Gottlieb, colour forms a field of psychic tension and emotional or symbolic energy, where chromaticity triggers inner experience. Hofmann and Reinhardt, by contrast, approached colour through a more structural and analytical logic, based on controlled relations of contrast, balance and optical perception, subordinating expression to the organisation of the pictorial field.



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The use of yellow and red in American Abstract Expressionism – and especially in **Gottlieb**'s work – forms part of a search for an archaic or “primitive” language and for universal structures of human experience. In series such as Pictographs and Labyrinths, these colours function as elementary signs with strong symbolic intensity, close to what the artist himself understood as an archetypal vocabulary. In *Labyrinth #3* (1954), the combination of yellow and black produces a sense of radiance and luminous expansion without losing its material density, creating a tension between concentration and expansion that refers more to primary phenomena than to culturally coded references. This reduction to the elemental is precisely what links his chromatic language to a primitivist sensibility.

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By contrast, **Hans Hofmann** shifted psychic expression towards an analysis of colour and spatial dynamics. His theory of “push and pull” redefined pictorial depth and tension. For Hofmann, colour acts as a spatial force: warm tones tend to advance towards the viewer, while cool tones recede, as can be seen in *Scintillating Red* (1962). In *Brick Painting* (1950), **Ad Reinhardt** superimposed rectangular forms to produce a vibratory effect generated through colour interaction.

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The emergence of earth pigments and archaeologies of matter in European and Spanish Informalism

Earth pigments have been used since the earliest artistic practices, as in the caves of Altamira, where they were made from natural materials such as oxides, clays and manganese.

In the mid-20th century, during the European and Spanish post-war period, the use of earth pigments (ochres, siennas, umbers) became especially prominent in Informalism. Their use was almost a statement of intent – a radical break with the authority of traditional painting. Informalism turned to “poor” materials and earth pigments in search of a more direct, physical language, distanced from traditional forms of representation. In doing so, it moved away from the avant-garde languages of the 1920s and 1930s, which had developed alongside the destruction of war.

One of the key concerns of this movement was the relationship between matter, identity and memory. The use of earth pigments, far from being a purely chromatic choice, opened up a complex field of meaning in which territorial imaginaries, literary resonances and a generational sense of historical rupture came together. This focus on matter finds an important



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precedent in **Jean Dubuffet**'s Art Brut (*Missions secrètes*, 1953), where earth acts as an agent of de-hierarchisation, in favour of a universal notion of the "raw". The work moves closer to the ground, to the elemental, to forms considered "untrained", close to the childlike, the marginal or the mentally alienated.

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Within this context, it is also worth drawing a link with certain three-dimensional practices by **André Derain**, who, in less canonical phases of his career, turned to clay to model figurines with an archaic appearance. In these works, earth is not only a material but also a vehicle for a primitive imagination, seeking to reconnect with forms predating Western academic tradition. Although formally distant from Informalism, these pieces share with it a desire to return to origins through the direct handling of earth.

ROOM 5

In the work of artists such as Juana Francés, Manolo Millares and Antonio Saura, the use of earth pigments reflects an explicit move away from painting's representational role towards a space of material inscription, where earth no longer represents landscape but replaces it ontologically. This connects with the poetics of Antonio Machado, whose work – especially *Campos de Castilla* – became a key reference in post-war Spanish culture. In Machado, earth is both physical reality and moral metaphor: a space worn down by time that reflects a shared historical consciousness. Spanish Informalism translated this sensibility into material form. Where poetry names dust, paths or hills, painting builds surfaces that act as visual sediments – accumulations of matter that embody a dense, layered sense of time.

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This idea of stratigraphy connects in turn with an archaeological dimension, with layers that record the passage of time, traces and ruin. In *Cuadro 163* (1962), **Millares** pushes this logic further by introducing burlap, a material marked by precarity and an almost organic physicality. He does not simply apply pigment to it, but wounds, stitches, opens and reconstructs it. Cuts, knots and sutures turn the surface of his works into a field of broken matter and earth pigments, evoking an underlying imagery of what has been eroded, buried or worn away by time. Millares also introduces a more explicit sense of the wounded body.



In **Juana Francés'** material paintings (*Untitled (JF 152)*, 1957), especially those from the 1960s titled after Spanish towns, dense, granular surfaces also appear, dominated by earthy tones that link her work to the imagery of the Spanish countryside, to Machado's literary tradition, and to a symbolic archaeology.

The moving retina: colours of kinetic art

In the 1960s, colour was used as a device for optical illusion designed to produce movement. Chromatic contrasts – especially between complementary colours or between black and white – generated vibration, interference and effects of visual instability. Colour worked together with repeated geometric patterns, producing phenomena such as retinal vibration, a sense of wavering or displacement, and difficulty in clearly distinguishing figure from background. In this way, colour lost the symbolic role it had held in earlier periods and instead began to question the idea of fixed, objective vision, turning looking into an active perceptual process.

Eusebio Sempere's “luminosos” are devices in which light – and therefore colour – becomes active matter (*Relieve luminoso*, 1960). They are closed boxes containing a light source filtered through translucent grids and meshes that break up the light. The *luminosos* dematerialise the art object: the physical box recedes, and what is perceived is a shifting field of light in which lines of illumination seem to float. The boundary between surface and space becomes unstable, creating an illusory sense of depth.

Movement produced through the vibration of repeated black-and-white structures is another key principle of kinetic and optical art, seen in the works of **Manuel Barbadillo** (*Untitled*, c. 1968–79) and **Javier Calvo** (*Itinerario que conduce al invierno (No. 63)*, 1974). In these works, the image does not move physically, but instead triggers perceptual movement in the viewer's eye. The key lies in the repetition of modules – lines, bands and waves – set out with near-mathematical precision. When these black-and-white patterns are varied slightly (through curves, changes in thickness or minimal shifts), they create a conflict in visual perception: the eye tries to stabilise the image but never quite succeeds. It is in this instability that the sensation of vibration emerges.

Other works move away from the purely sensory and introduce a more constructive, structural approach, as in the case of **Equipo 57** (*PA 8*, 1960), who, in contrast to a pictorial tradition based on a dominant figure against a passive ground, propose a homogeneous, non-hierarchical space in which each part carries equal visual weight. This reflects an almost “demo-



cratic” idea of form: there is no centre and no periphery. Instead, they build structures in which distinctions between units of colour become unstable. No element is subordinate to another; the entire surface functions as a continuous field of relations that undulates to create depth. As a result, the pictorial surface is no longer static but becomes a dynamic field.

Colour fields

The development of monochromy acquired a conceptual dimension over the course of the 20th century. The monochrome is understood as a way of reflecting on the pictorial medium itself: it asserts the full autonomy of colour and reduces painting to its essential conditions. A single colour becomes a field of concentrated attention, where minimal shifts in intensity, saturation or texture can be perceived, inviting reflection, contemplation and a form of spiritual resistance.

From the mid-20th century onwards, monochromy was used to create spaces of silence and reflection, whether as a means of historical evocation or as a way of questioning the limits of painting. In the 1950s, **Antoni Tàpies**’s “walls” (*Gris amb cinc perforacions*, 1958) took the form of stone-like monochrome surfaces, becoming a surface for reflection onto which traces and marks of death and the suffering of post-war Spain were inscribed.

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From the 1960s, with the rise of geometric practices, artists such as **Elena Asins** (*Estudio No. 14 para cuartetos prusianos*, 1978) turned to systematic calculation to express transcendent ideas through line and the monochrome plane. **Jordi Teixidor** and **José María Yturralde** worked with the idea of a “chromatic continuum” or “continuous space” in painting, a notion that can be compared to Leonardo da Vinci’s *sfumato*, achieved through infinite gradations of a single colour. Teixidor (*Untitled*, 1975) developed monochrome as a tightly controlled poetic structure, where painterly gestures and brushstrokes function almost as traces of thought. By contrast, monochromy in José María Yturralde’s work (*Figura imposible (Serie Cuadrados)*, 1971) can be understood as an expanding field of colour, where the edges of the painting no longer mark the limits of the work, but suggest that what is perceived is only a small part of an ever-expanding universe. Other examples of this approach can be seen in **Joaquín Michavila**’s *Convergencias* (1973).

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ROOM 6

The artificial colour of Pop Art

Pop Art made a deliberate break with earlier painterly traditions, above all through a chromatic language that did not seek to imitate reality but to compete with it through artifice. Rather than treating colour as a naturalistic or subjective expressive device, its leading figures turned it into a tool of visual impact, repetition and cultural coding, drawing on advertising, comics and mass media. They used flat, bright, impersonal colours inspired by commercial printing techniques and advertising imagery.

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Martial Raysse devoted part of his practice to examining the representation of women in advertising, appropriating these images and subjecting them to processes of manipulation. In *Visage en bleu* (1963), he brings together a fascination with the new – the aesthetics of packaging and display, suggested by the blue patina enveloping the model – with the idea of a hygienic, sterile body, linked to sexual prophylaxis and underlined by the sponge held in the figure's hand.

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Richard Lindner (*Rear Window*, 1971) used a palette of saturated colours – intense reds, electric yellows and deep blues – applied in flat areas defined by sharp contours. Moving away from the apparent neutrality of Pop Art, he turned colour into a device for critical distance, revealing the theatricality and artificiality of social roles, particularly around the body and identity. In his work, colour takes on a tense, even unsettling quality. His figures – often female, mechanised or fetishised – are built from chromatic blocks that recall both urban signage and shop window displays, while stark colour contrasts generate a sense of rigidity and visual aggression that heightens the psychological intensity of the characters and scenes.

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Ana Peters is one of the artists who has explored the symbolic value of gold. In an early phase during the 1960s, as part of groups such as *Crónica de la realidad* and *Estampa Popular*, she used gold as a visual strategy of critique within the Valencian Pop context. Historically, gold has functioned as a sign of nobility, rank and privilege, and has often been used in art to signal social status. In secular contexts, it has also referred to trade and money, evoking modernity and economic prosperity. It is this latter meaning that Peters draws on in her work *Avaricia*, from the series *Los siete pecados capitales*, where she sets out, in a grid, the image of a lamb on a white background alongside empty gold squares, alluding



to the accumulation of livestock and gold as a basis of wealth. The serial repetition of the motif visually evokes accumulation itself, linked to greed as a transgression of Christian morality.

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James Rosenquist conceived reality as a puzzle of separate, disconnected fragments, inviting the viewer to reconstruct and organise them mentally. On this basis, he produced *Blue Spark* (1962), in which a fragment of a hand on a monumental scale, rendered in flat, strident colours, functions as a metaphor for consumer goods, using enlarged detail to generate visual impact drawn from his experience as a billboard painter.

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In **Jasper Johns's** *Black Numerals* series, black operates as a device of obscuration that resists straightforward reading of the sign. The reduction of colour does not simplify the image, but makes it more reflective. The dominant black – applied in dense, layered passages – functions as a field that both unifies and unsettles legibility. Black ceases to be background or contour and becomes an active space in which figure and surface tend to merge.

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Equipo Realidad, in its *Hazañas Bélicas* series or *Cuadros de Historia* (1973–1976), appropriates black-and-white press photographs and transfers them onto canvas, introducing distance between event and representation. By applying this method to historical and political subjects, the collective questions the tradition of history painting as a heroic or unified narrative and exposes the ideological construction of the image.

ROOM 7

The absence of colour in conceptual art and the importance of materials

Conceptual art marked a radical shift in the very definition of the artwork, moving attention away from sensory appearance towards the idea or concept that underpins it. In this context, colour loses its central role, as it is no longer necessary to generate meaning. The result is an art that no longer seeks to seduce visually, but instead activates processes of reflection, language and critical thought. For this reason, conceptual practice often relies on neutral materials or even dispenses with colour altogether. The whiteness of the page, written text, documentary photography or the absence of image itself become sufficient carriers of meaning.



The use of industrial materials such as rubber, iron, steel or prefabricated elements like concrete responds not only to formal concerns, but to a rethinking of what the artwork is and does. These materials are chosen for their capacity to activate conceptual, social or critical readings. Iron, for example, evokes industry, mass production and the logic of modern construction; rubber suggests flexibility and resistance, as well as technological and industrial processes; while prefabricated or found materials such as maps, toys, cardboard, fabric or rope bring the logic of everyday objects into the artistic space. Through these materials, artists strip away associations with the handmade and aesthetics, as well as the artwork's aura, breaking with the idea of "noble" materials linked to traditional genres and shifting the role of the artist closer to editing than to making.

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Richard Serra (*Prop*, 1968) exemplifies this approach through the use of metal plates and industrial structures that do not seek to represent anything, but instead occupy space and make visible the cultural charge of industry, mass production and the transformation of the contemporary landscape.

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In *The Point from the Corner of the Room III, IV and IX*, **Richard Tuttle** presents three objects that, at first glance, resemble pieces of fabric left on the floor, questioning traditional conventions of display and challenging our expectations about the nature and status of the artwork.

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Antoni Miralda, in *Paris, la Cumparsita*, turns the map of Paris into a space for performative intervention. The map no longer functions as a tool for orientation, but becomes a territory onto which marks, routes and signs linked to collective actions and rituals are traced, intensifying a critique of militarism and of the symbols of state power.

ROOM 8

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From the late 1960s onwards, **Darío Villalba** encapsulated photographs of marginalised figures – beggars, psychiatric patients and people in extreme situations – within striking methacrylate bubbles, presenting them as "human presences". In the following decade, he worked on photographic images of his own body and face with broad strokes of oil paint as a way of challenging traditional portraiture, questioning identity, and turning photography – seemingly objective – into a psychological and almost bodily



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terrain (Místico, 1974). The colours of the oil paint became a kind of metaphor for emotional aggression or contamination, introducing subjectivity and undermining photography's status as documentary evidence, turning the body into a fragmented, wounded subject marked by secretions, scars and bruises. In doing so, Villalba anticipated ideas of the "double" and the mask, understood as artificial constructions or unstable identities, later developed by artists such as **Michel Journiac**, who in his series *24 heures dans la vie d'une femme ordinaire, Réalités* (1974) used black and white photography to strip away much of the image's immediate sensuality, reinforcing a colder, more documentary or ritualised tone and increasing the distance between the real individual and the constructed image. His photographs read as records of actions, evidence of bodily transformation or rituals performed on the body.

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In this sense, in the series *Untitled, Film Still* (1979), **Cindy Sherman** used black and white photography to present a wide range of female stereotypes drawn from classical cinema, with the aim of showing how identity is constructed through cultural images. Black and white photography, and the absence of colour more broadly, thus functioned as a space of detachment that exposed identity as something in crisis.

ROOM 9

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During the 1980s, postmodernism began to establish itself across the international art scene: in Europe, German Neo-Expressionism and Italian Transavanguardia were on the rise, while in North America movements such as New Image and Bad Painting gained prominence. As an artist who emerged during this period, **José María Sicilia** brought painting back to the fore as a primary medium. In the 1990s, as can be seen in *Untitled I* (1990), he almost entirely removed iconographic reference, developing near-monochrome, almost white surfaces in which objects or figures remain only faintly perceptible. These works can be read alongside Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of the "aspect of seeing", which holds that the meaning of images depends on their use. At the same time, Sicilia began working exclusively with beeswax and oil, focusing on what he called the



“dramatic epiphany of light” and giving it form, density and substance. The wax also allowed marks and imprints to be retained, making time and memory visible.

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Ángeles Marco (*Pasadizo de pared*, 1989) selects materials and colours to carry specific meanings: she associates iron with load-bearing structures in engineering; silver with illusionistic effects or reflective surfaces; rubber with flexibility; and black with density and opacity.

ROOM 10

The symbolism of colour

Throughout the history of art, colour has carried symbolic, cultural and emotional meaning, shifting according to historical context, belief systems and artistic intent. In ancient and medieval traditions, it was closely bound to religious and hierarchical codes, governed by strict symbolic conventions: blue, for example, could be associated with purity or the Virgin, while red referred both to power and sacrifice. It is in modernity that colour, freed from its representational role, gains expressive autonomy. In this process – shaped in particular by the historical avant-gardes – it stops “describing” and begins to “signify” in its own right, generating emotional, rhythmic and even spiritual effects. From the 1960s onwards, its perceptual qualities were explored in depth, and contemporary art has gone on to incorporate political, social and cultural dimensions. Colour can function as a marker of identity, a critique of consumer systems or a tool of subversion, showing that its meaning is not fixed but historically constructed and open to interpretation.

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In her abstract period in the 1990s, **Ana Peters** moved away from using gold as a purely decorative element and began to invest it with conceptual meaning. From an epistemological perspective, Ludwig Wittgenstein offered a key distinction, suggesting that “golden” should not be treated as a colour, but as a **surface property** defined by the way it catches and reflects light to the human eye. In this sense, Peters turns it into a vehicle for the poetic and the divine, linking it to traditional iconography. In *Teófanés (tríptico de oro)* (2004), she reflects on transience and eternity, and on the richness of spirituality, evoking both Gothic altarpieces and Japanese folding screens, whose opacity prevents the gaze from penetrating beyond the gilded surface, which both blocks and reflects light at once.



In his landscapes, **Nico Munuera** (*Torii III*, 2021) uses fields of colour as a means of creating shifts between states or moments, encouraging the viewer to sharpen perception through comparison within apparent uniformity. Influenced by the 17th-century Japanese Rinpa school, colour acquires a suspended, vibrating quality through techniques such as *tara-shikomi* (pouring one colour over another while still wet) and *mokkotsu* (painting without contour lines), lending greater luminosity, fluidity and vibration to the painted surface. His work proposes a way of seeing landscape that moves away from dominant representations and focuses on what usually remains hidden.

For **Bouchra Khalili**, blue becomes a perceptual and expansive experience of space. *The Constellations* (2011) does not act as a fixed symbol (sky, divinity, melancholy), but as a field of dematerialisation in which colour approaches the cosmic and the ineffable without relying on traditional symbolism. It becomes a metaphor for shared experience in contemporary life. Its expansive, enveloping quality can be understood as a way of representing a space without visible hierarchies, where individual forms dissolve into a continuous environment. The viewer is thus drawn into a space that reflects contemporary ways of relating: fluid, unstable and non-hierarchical.