



Conflicts

This itinerary offers a reading that cuts across the exhibition through a selection of works from the IVAM collection, exploring different forms of conflict that have shaped contemporary history from the early 20th century to the present. Far from being limited to warfare, conflict is understood here as a structural condition that runs through political, social, economic and cultural relations, while also shaping bodies, identities and forms of representation.

The route shows how artistic practices have responded to contexts of violence, revolution, exclusion, resistance and social transformation, providing a space from which to question official narratives, activate critical memory and explore other ways of representing what is difficult to articulate.

This reading is set in the present and brings together works drawn from different historical contexts, inviting reflection on issues that continue to shape our contemporary moment: political violence, war, social inequalities, the exclusion of certain identities and forms of collective resistance. The works included here also show how art has functioned both as a tool of propaganda and ideological confrontation, and as a space of critique, memory and repair.

Across the itinerary, the selected works enter into dialogue with different historical, ideological and political frameworks, allowing conflict to be understood not as an isolated episode, but as a complex and persistent reality running through contemporary experience. From this perspective, art becomes a site from which to critically examine the tensions of each period, but also a means of imagining other forms of coexistence, resistance and transformation.

ROOM 1

War painting (*Guerrapittura*)

The art of the early 20th-century avant-gardes was, at its core, disruptive. Alongside its programme of dismantling academic structures and the values upheld by tradition, there was also a constant drive to redefine the very nature of art and its role as a form of cultural expression. This dialectical process made conflict – both within and beyond the art world – a powerful force in the transformation of artistic practice.

The question of whether art should reflect the problems of society, and whether it can transform its structural imbalances, has accompanied modern and contemporary art to the present day.

In contrast to the self-absorption of Cubism – focused on formal and analytical investigation – early avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dada placed social engagement and direct action at the centre of a radical break with tradition, turning art into a weapon for dismantling the established order.

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Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, founder of Futurism, defended war in his writings as a surgical intervention capable of healing the wounds of a sick and decaying social body. The destruction of museums, academies and libraries formed part of the Futurist programme, as did the exaltation of the machine and speed – the technological foundations of a new and radiant future.

Marinetti's manifesto cry – “We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” – soon turned Futurism into a cultural vehicle for fascism in Italy. Its leader, Benito Mussolini, enlisted the Futurist movement to his political cause, and both supported Italy's participation in the First World War (1914–1918), a conflict that plunged Europe into an unprecedented period of devastation.

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Guerrapittura (1915), a book by the Futurist artist **Carlo Carrà**, sets out this political programme in a radical format where violent slogans, political declarations and typographic excess come together, glorifying war as a regenerative force.

The Dada storm

The grotesque, used as a metaphor for human greed and moral corruption, was one of the defining features of Berlin Dada. Emerging during the First World War as an anti-militarist and anti-capitalist response, the Berlin Dada group – which included artists such as Georg Grosz and John Heartfield – was known for its sharply satirical, political and revolutionary output. Through printmaking, collage, photomontage and the production of widely circulated newspapers and magazines, they understood artistic practice as a tool for agitation and for the political awakening of the oppressed classes.

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In the prints of **Georg Grosz**, an artist influenced by German Expressionism and political caricature, mutilated soldiers, emaciated prostitutes and caricatured bankers appear repeatedly. In *Hintergrund* (1928), a portfolio of seventeen prints produced for the stage adaptation of *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik* at the Piscator Theatre, military figures, politicians and clergy are shown as embodiments of moral depravity, forming a scathing collective portrait of the Weimar Republic (1918–1933).

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With the same aim, though using different visual strategies, the magazine *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)*, led by publisher and activist Willi Münzenberg, played a key role. With a communist orientation, it reached print runs of over 250,000 copies.

John Heartfield produced more than two hundred photomontages for the magazine, mainly for its covers. Through satire, metamorphosis and grotesque distortion, his work critiques militarism, political corruption and media manipulation, as well as the rise of Nazism as a barrier to the revolutionary aspirations of the working class.

ROOM 2

War and revolution in the land of the tsars

Russia's participation in the First World War deepened the Tsarist regime's already severe structural inequalities. A wave of popular protest against hunger and violence culminated in the October Revolution of 1917, led by Vladimir Lenin. However, this climate of social unrest had already pro-

05

duced a series of uprisings that preceded the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1905, the crew of the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied against their officers over poor food and the abuse endured on board. The uprising spread to the city of Odessa and was violently suppressed by the army, becoming one of the most mythologised episodes in Soviet culture during the 1920s. It later provided the narrative basis for Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), an avant-garde political work whose innovative visual language and editing inspired **Alexander Rodchenko** to design the film poster, one of the most emblematic examples of Russian Constructivist graphic design.

With the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, a communist state emerged for the first time in history, supported by the emerging Russian avant-garde, which developed in dialogue with European Cubism, Futurism and Dada.

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The artist, poet and playwright **Vladimir Mayakovsky** was one of the leading figures of the early 20th-century literary avant-garde. One of the foremost exponents of Russian Futurism, his flamboyant persona and work also resonated with the provocative spirit of Dada. After a brief period of admiration for Marinetti, he ultimately dismissed him as an impostor, a decorative Futurist and a reactionary.

Following the success of the Revolution and the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (1918–1921), Mayakovsky placed his artistic and literary production at the service of the new Bolshevik government. The conflict pitted the Red Army against counter-revolutionary forces supported by a coalition of Western powers – including the United States, Great Britain, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia – intent on containing the spread of communism.

Within this context, the new Bolshevik state established the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), responsible for producing rudimentary posters using stencils and flat, unmodulated colour, displayed in shop windows and public buildings to communicate updates on the war. Mayakovsky played a key role in the creation of these visual news bulletins, producing dozens of sharply satirical posters through which he launched daily attacks on counter-revolutionary forces.

ROOM 3

Images for the battlefield

This new art of agitation reached one of its peaks during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Both the Francoist and Republican sides used posters, cinema, radio and widely circulated magazines as tools of political propaganda. The outbreak of war following General Francisco Franco's military uprising against the Republican government reflected the deep tensions and political struggles that were shaping Europe in the 1930s.

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Workers' militias and trade unions resisting the military coup, along with events at the front, were documented by leading photojournalists such as **Agustí Centelles**, **David Seymour "Chim"** and **Robert Capa**. Using small-format Leica cameras, they produced spontaneous, direct and often dangerous images that form one of the most significant visual records in Spanish history. Their photographs circulated internationally, supporting the Republican cause and making visible both the human dimension of the conflict and its anonymous protagonists.

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The leading figure of the generation of Republican artists was the Valencian **Josep Renau**. Considered a pioneer of political photomontage in Spain, he was a designer, writer and theorist who held key posts during the Second Republic, including Director General of Fine Arts and head of propaganda for the General Staff Commissariat.

His work drew heavily on John Heartfield and Soviet Constructivism. Shortly before going into exile in Mexico, Renau produced one of his most important works in Barcelona, *Los 13 Puntos de Negrín*, a series of photomontages inspired by Juan Negrín's 1938 government programme, in which the Republican government called for the unity of democratic forces against the radicalisms of Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler.

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Pere Català Pic was another key photomontage artist working in support of the Republic. The striking power of *Aixafem el feixisme* (1936) – in which a peasant espadrille tramples and fractures the Nazi swastika – turned it into an emblem of the working classes' violent struggle against international fascism.

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In the field of graphic design, one of the most acclaimed works of the period was *El comisario, nervio de nuestro ejército popular* (1937) by **Josep Renau**, a poster conceived as a celebration of the political commissar, a Soviet-derived role whose wartime function was to ensure discipline and political indoctrination within the troops, in response to the perceived chaos and lack of organisation of anarchist militias at the front.

11

Arturo Ballester was another important Valencian artist working for the Republican cause. Before the war, he was known for his skills as an advertising illustrator and for designing covers for Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's publishing house Prometeo. With the outbreak of the conflict, he redirected his work towards the anarchist ideals of the CNT [National Confederation of Labour], producing dozens of posters and leaflets such as *Un marino, un héroe* (1937). This composition, inspired by Soviet aesthetics, exalts the figure of the Republican naval soldier as a symbol of the working class's heroic anti-fascist struggle.

12

Amado Oliver's poster *La garra del invasor italiano pretende esclavizarnos* (c. 1937), in which a giant hand in the colours of the Italian flag seizes the Iberian Peninsula as war booty, denounces Mussolini's imperialist intervention in the conflict.

ROOM 4

Monsters

The conflict in Spain foreshadowed the outbreak of the Second World War (1939–1945), the most devastating conflict in history, with more than seventy million deaths.

The rise of Informalism in Europe after the war can be understood as one of the expressions of the existential pessimism that permeated cultural life. In contrast to the rationalism of geometric abstraction in the first half of the 20th century, the post-war period turned to automatism, the dream-like, the irrational and the monstrous as foundations for artistic creation, as a way of expressing collective trauma.

Informalism found one of its most significant expressions in the CoBrA group (an acronym for Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam), whose leading figures included Asger Jorn, Lucebert and Karel Appel.

13

The adoption of a rough, aggressive and grotesque pictorial language was one of the defining features of the work of Dutch poet and painter **Lucebert**. In *Triomfator* (1968), a decorated soldier, laden with medals and laurels like a victorious Roman general, is depicted as a deformed creature, an allegory of the barbarity of power.

ROOM 5

Crucifixion

14

In Spain, one of the key figures of international Informalism was the painter **Antonio Saura**. Working with highly charged, automatic brushwork, his compositions convey the existential anguish of a generation marked by the brutality of war and dictatorship. *Crucifixión* (1959), one of his masterpieces, depicts Christ subjected to brutal torture, his distorted face expressing unbearable pain. In this work, Saura moves away from the transcendent idealisation of traditional religious imagery, turning painting into a universal metaphor for human violence and suffering.

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In the field of photography, **Robert Frank** undertook a journey across the United States in 1955 on a Guggenheim Fellowship. This journey resulted in one of the works that transformed both photography and the photo-book format, *The Americans* (1959). For Frank, the United States was far more complex than the image projected by certain social groups. His photographs point to the breakdown of a dominant visual system and of the optimistic post-Second World War imagery, while also revealing, in some cases, the realities of racial segregation at the time.

ROOM 6

Incomplete chronicles of reality

Student protests, the peace movement, civil rights struggles, feminism and opposition to the Vietnam War profoundly reshaped the political and cultural climate of the 1960s. In this context, many artistic practices returned to the image as a tool for critical analysis and political engagement.

16

During his exile in Mexico, **Josep Renau** developed the photomontage series *The American Way of Life* (1949–1976), a sustained critique of the imaginaries of consumption and the “American Dream” promoted by US advertising and mass media during the Cold War. His compositions expose the social and political contradictions of capitalism from an openly anti-fascist and communist position.

The questioning of the “American Dream” and of US Cold War imperial strategy was also central to artists associated with French Narrative Figuration, a movement that included the Spanish painter Eduardo Arroyo. After two decades of formalist dominance, painting once again became – drawing on strategies close to Pop Art – a vehicle for political critique.

Within this context, the exhibition *Le monde en question* was held in Paris in 1967, bringing together 26 artists from the most politically engaged strand of Narrative Figuration. It also included the Valencian collectives **Equipo Crónica** and **Equipo Realidad**, who combined Pop strategies with a critical reading of contemporary visual culture and prevailing political narratives, including anti-American sentiment.

17

In Spain, during the 1960s, cultural opposition to the Franco regime led to a critical reassessment of the memory of the Spanish Civil War. Against the official version promoted by the regime, publications and studies produced abroad began to circulate, recovering narratives suppressed by censorship.

During this period, modern historiography on the conflict produced outside Spain often managed – sometimes clandestinely – to reach readers in Spain, such as *Crónica de la Guerra Española. No apta para irreconciliables*, published in Argentina in 1966 and widely distributed in the country. It became a key reference for **Equipo Realidad** in their own dismantling of the Spanish Civil War iconography through the series *Hazañas bélicas / Cuadros de Historia* (1973–1976).

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A few years later, **Eduardo Arroyo**, in *José M^a Blanco White amenazado por sus propios seguidores en el mismo Londres* (1978), brought the writer José María Blanco back into focus. Set in a scene reminiscent of film noir, Arroyo subtly evokes the drama of political exile. Blanco White – the name adopted by the writer after his departure for Britain – was an Enlightenment reformist intellectual who went into exile following the Peninsular War in 1810, a sombre parallel with the fate of Republican intellectuals forced into exile.

ROOM 7

Challenging the system: from anti-militarism to institutional critique

20

In a France that was beginning to regain momentum after the May '68 protests, **Antoni Miralda**, in collaboration with **Benet Rosell**, produced *Paris, la Cumparsita* (1972), a video installation developed from a performance in public space. Through this playful, celebratory action, they offered an ironic critique of militarism and the symbols of state power: a life-sized toy soldier was carried by Miralda and installed as a mock monument in emblematic sites such as the Champs-Élysées, Les Halles market and the Louvre.

During this period, the museum itself came under scrutiny as an institution bound up with the construction of official narratives and the legitimisation of certain forms of power. From different theoretical and artistic positions, it became clear that the art institution was not neutral, but shaped by political, economic and cultural interests.

Within this context, so-called institutional critique emerged, associated with figures such as Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Morris. Their work questioned not only the museum, but also the very definition of the artwork, its modes of circulation and its commodification. In his text "Anti Form" (1968), one of the seminal statements of post-minimalist theory and practice, Morris referred to the direct handling of materials without tools, as well as the effects of gravity on the work. Post-minimalist practices incorporated fragile materials, open-ended processes and unstable forms that challenged the traditional monumentality of modern sculpture. Works such as *The Point from the Corner of the Room III, IV and IX* (c. 1973–1974), by **Richard Tuttle**, proposed new relationships between material, space and perception, moving away from the geometric rigidity of earlier Minimalism.

21

In parallel, some artistic practices began to understand space not only as a physical reality, but also as a historical, political and social construction. The work of **Gordon Matta-Clark** is a key example of this shift. In projects such as *Underground Paris: Notre Dame* (1977), the artist explored the subterranean layers of Paris in order to reveal the material and historical strata that shape the contemporary city.

22

Extractivism of bodies and territories

From this room onwards, the itineraries dedicated to conflict, ecologies, and gender and identities become more explicitly intertwined. Many of the artistic practices that emerged from the 1960s onwards explored the connections between violence, territorial exploitation, social inequality and the domination of bodies.

23

Robert Smithson was one of the central figures of American Earth Art, whose work moved artistic intervention beyond the museum and towards landscapes transformed by industrialisation and extractivism. In *Spiral Jetty* (1970), created in Utah's Great Salt Lake, he constructed a large spiral from materials found on site – basalt, salt and earth – prompting reflection on the irreversible erosion of the land and the crisis of the industrial systems that transform it.

24

In 1968, the photographer **Sebastião Salgado** documented the Serra Pelada gold mine in Brazil, once the largest open-pit mine in the world, for which he had to wait six years to obtain permission from the authorities of the military dictatorship. After spending 33 days inside the immense crater, he documented the human and environmental violence produced by extractive capitalism.

ROOM 8

Practice and representation of the body

The notion of process was central to many artistic practices developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Body art placed the body, action and direct experience at the centre of the work, challenging both the traditional limits of the art institution and the very definition of the artwork itself. In this context, phenomenological thought gained particular relevance. This philosophical current approached the human condition through lived experience, privileging knowledge derived from bodily and sensory experience over Cartesian rationalism. Works such as *Wall Positions* (1968), by **Bruce Nauman**, document repetitive actions performed by the artist in his studio, exploring the relationship between body, space and perception.

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The affirmation of experiences and subjectivities excluded from dominant narratives was also one of the starting points for feminist practices and gender discourse. The artist **VALIE EXPORT** turned her own identity into a political gesture by rejecting surnames inherited from father or husband and adopting a self-defined name as an assertion of autonomy against the patriarchal order.

27

By the late 1970s, many artists had begun to critically appropriate images produced by the media and dominant visual culture. **Cindy Sherman** used her own body to recreate female stereotypes circulated through cinema and advertising, while **Dara Birnbaum** reworked popular television imagery – such as the series *Wonder Woman* – disrupting conventional narrative structures in order to construct an alternative discourse that exposed the secondary role assigned to women in society.

28

ROOM 9

The AIDS crisis

The HIV/AIDS crisis profoundly marked the 1980s and 1990s, exposing the vulnerability of certain communities to social exclusion, stigma and institutional inaction. In 1987, the activist collective ACT UP was founded in New York, emerging in response to the conservative policies of Ronald Reagan's administration and the lack of measures to address the spread of the epidemic. In 1989, it organised a demonstration at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York, attended by 4,500 people, protesting against the Church's conservative stance, which affected people living with the virus and the broader response to the pandemic.

29

The artist **Pepe Espaliú** addressed HIV in his work through the creation of structures of isolation, such as *Carrying I* (1992), using the body and collective action to reflect on fragility, care and the exclusion of those affected.

On 1 December 1992, World AIDS Day, Espaliú published the text "Retrato del artista desahuciado" in *El País*, denouncing the historical marginalisation of homosexual communities from the social body: "We homosexuals have been forced to invent a parallel world, built around our own way of understanding its laws, its institutions, its beliefs and its conception of love." The illness, which would take his life shortly afterwards, profoundly transformed his artistic practice and political stance.

Globalisation and multiculturalism

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, globalisation gathered pace and multiculturalism came to the fore. The fall of the Berlin Wall, new postcolonial dynamics, the outsourcing of production and the expansion of the internet all contributed to the growing visibility of identities, territories and narratives that had long been positioned outside Western centres of power.

In the artistic field, this shift encouraged new perspectives linked to so-called “new internationalism”, bringing in voices and subjectivities that had traditionally been excluded from dominant narratives. Exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989) and *The Other Story* (London, 1989), as well as biennials outside Europe and the United States, helped challenge inherited cultural hierarchies shaped by Western modernity.

30

Within this context, the work of Argentine artist **Guillermo Kuitca** began to gain international visibility. His installations of beds painted with maps explore the relationship between intimacy, displacement and territory. In *Sin título* (1992), a series of small beds marked with maps of Mexico, Poland, Germany, England and Ireland – without any attempt at literal representation – connects domestic space to a fragmented, deterritorialised geography, where travel operates both as physical experience and as emotional and political metaphor.

31

Another example of an artistic approach to space that moves beyond borders and understands the world as a connected global system shaped by shared pressures, is the work of photographer **Ursula Schürz-Dornburg**. Her practice belongs to a strand of modernism that sees space as a constantly shifting – and at times conflicted – process. Her images show landscapes and sites in a fragile balance between origin and disappearance, underlining the finitude of everything visible. In *Paisaje desaparecido. El Tigris de la antigua Mesopotamia, Irak* (1980), archaic, island-like settlements of reed-built houses appear within a transformed landscape that no longer exists today, offering a view of the local that nonetheless speaks to global conflicts.

ROOM 10

Conflict as an intrinsic condition of the human experience

Conflict runs through contemporary history in many forms: wars, displacement, structural violence, social exclusion, and struggles over memory and identity. Many of these issues persist into the 21st century and continue to be addressed by contemporary artistic practices as a form of critical reflection on the present.

32

In the paintings of **Miriam Cahn**, the body appears as a site marked by violence, vulnerability and trauma. Drawing on media imagery, the artist constructs scenes inhabited by blurred figures, fragmented bodies and wounded presences that evoke the physical and emotional consequences of armed conflict. Her compositions focus particularly on faces and bodily gestures. Vacant gazes, mutilated bodies and the explicit exposure of genitals intensify a sense of fear, fragility and exposure. Set within ambiguous, saturated colour fields, these figures seem to be in flight or in motion, as if escaping an ever-present violence.

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The Austrian artist of Roma origin **Ceija Stojka** began to recount her experience in Nazi concentration camps decades after surviving Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen. She first did so in the book *The Memoirs of Ceija Stojka, Child Survivor of the Romani Holocaust* (2022), and later through a body of paintings deeply rooted in memory and trauma.

Her works, highly expressive in style, stand as direct testimony to the Nazi genocide and the historical persecution of the Roma people – an experience long silenced in official accounts of the Holocaust. Through energetic brushwork and dark atmospheres, Stojka transformed personal memory into a form of resistance against forgetting.

34

Sanja Iveković has developed a practice centred on the relationship between gender, memory and political representation. In *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg* (2001), the artist reinterpreted the Gëlle Fra, one of Luxembourg's most emblematic monuments, dedicated to soldiers of the First World War. Iveković created a replica of the monument, introducing three key changes: she dedicated it to the Marxist philosopher Rosa Luxemburg, executed in 1919; she transformed the classical figure into a pregnant woman; and she replaced the original inscriptions with messages linked to gender, power and the symbolic construction of femininity.

35

Images and their circulation have become increasingly present and influential in everyday life, acting as tools through which narratives are constructed and communicated. The Palestinian artist **Rula Halawani** reflects on the media representation of conflict and the normalisation of violence in the Palestinian context. In *Untitled III (Negative Incursion Series, 2002)*, the image is marked by a strong tension between document and memory, showing how occupation and armed conflict become embedded in everyday experience.

Through fragmented framing and atmospheres charged with uncertainty, Halawani questions the way in which the media construct and circulate images of war, while also foregrounding the emotional and human consequences of sustained violence over time.

36

In the 2000s, **Martha Rosler** returned to her series *House Beautiful. Bringing the War Home*, begun during the Vietnam War, to reflect on the media normalisation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through photomontages that combine scenes of warfare with Western domestic interiors drawn from design magazines and advertising, the artist exposes the distance between the everyday comfort of Western societies and the violence unfolding elsewhere.

Her images confront two seemingly incompatible realities – domestic intimacy and the destruction of war – questioning how media and visual culture turn conflict into something distant, consumable and easily absorbed into everyday life.