



RAMON CASAS. THE DESIRE FOR MODERNITY

Press Release

CaixaForum Madrid

From 8 March to 11 June 2017



CaixaForum Madrid presents a retrospective devoted to this key Modernista (Art Nouveau) artist, which also includes works by several of his contemporaries

RAMON CASAS

THE DESIRE FOR MODERNITY

The celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ramon Casas (1866-1932) provides a magnificent opportunity to rediscover the work of a painter whose work reflects the birth of a new era, one in which modernity came knocking on the doors of history. Through his attitude, at times bohemian, at times irreverent and ironic, Casas positioned himself decisively within a movement that emerged during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This is illustrated by his use of such inventions as the bicycle and the motorcar, which embodied his optimism regarding the technological possibilities offered by the myth of progress. Halfway between desire and reality, then, Casas' work was open to a vast range of influences: poster art, photography, Japanese prints and so on. The exhibition, first presented in Sitges and now opening at CaixaForum Madrid, features 145 works by both by Casas himself and a number of his contemporaries. Organised by "la Caixa" Foundation in coordination with the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC) and the Museums of Sitges, the show was produced with support from the Government of Catalonia, Barcelona Provincial Council and Sitges City Council.

Ramon Casas. Modernity Desired. Dates: from 8 March to 11 June 2017. **Concept and organisation:** "la Caixa" Foundation, Sitges Heritage Consortium and National Art Museum of Catalonia. **Curators:** Ignasi Domènech, Head of Collections at the Museums of Sitges, and Francesc Quílez, Coordinator of Collections at the National Art Museum of Catalonia. **Place:** CaixaForum Madrid (Paseo del Prado, 36).

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Madrid, 7 March 2017. At CaixaForum Madrid this morning, Elisa Durán, assistant general manager of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Pepe Serra, director of the National Art Museum of Catalonia, and Vinyet Panyella, director of the Museums of Sitges and curator of Ramon Casas Year, presented the exhibition ***Ramon Casas. Modernity Desired***. The presentation was also attended by the curators Ignasi Domènech, Head of Collections at the Museums of Sitges, and Francesc Quílez, Coordinator of Collections at the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC).

Within its cultural programme "la Caixa" Foundation focuses particularly on art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the goal of promoting



RAMON CASAS CARBÓ
Ramon Casas and Pere Romeu on a Tandem, 1897
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

knowledge and appreciation of a key period for understanding the contemporary sensibility. In this respect, the life and work Ramon Casas is particularly important. As a leading artist in the *Modernista* (Art Nouveau) movement, he is the most outstanding representative of art produced in Catalonia during the fertile period around the turn of the twentieth century.

Ramon Casas, Modernity Desired is the central exhibition in the programme of events to celebrate Ramon Casas

Year, which commemorates the 150th anniversary of the artist's birth. The show was previously presented at the Maricel Museum in Sitges, where it was visited by more than 38,000 people, and will later travel to CaixaForum Palma.

The celebrations for the anniversary of this painter provide a magnificent opportunity to rediscover the work of a pioneer in modern art. The exhibition includes not only works by Casas himself, but also pieces by other artists whose influence can be seen in his paintings: Toulouse-Lautrec, John Singer Sargent, Santiago Rusiñol, Julio Romero de Torres, Joaquín Sorolla, Joaquín Torres García and Pablo Picasso, among others.

The curators' aim is to show the work of Ramon Casas in the context in which it was created, grouped into five thematic sections. The resulting discourse is like a hall of mirrors, a two-way route that enables visitors to appreciate the



influences, analogies and shared interests that existed between Casas and other contemporary artists of his day.

This is the most complete exhibition devoted to Casas ever seen in Madrid. *Modernity Desired* features a selection of 145 works that embrace a range of techniques, including painting, drawing and poster art. These works are accompanied by 45 period photographs that help to place Casas within the social and cultural context of his time.



HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC
Portrait of François Gauzi, 1886
Musée des Augustins, Toulouse

The works include a large number of pieces from private collections, as well as loans from Spanish and foreign galleries, such as the Picasso Museum of Paris, the Augustins Museum in Toulouse, the Bordeaux Museum of Fine Arts, the Abelló Collection, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Carmen Thyssen Collection, the Prado National Museum, the Reina Sofía Museum, the Picasso Museum of Barcelona, the Bilbao Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Fine Art of Córdoba.

The photographs, by Frederic Ballell and Antoni and Josep Esplugas, among others, enrich the visit and enable the spectator to discover the existence of shared interests between painting and photography. Similarly, all this material also provides insight into the formal and compositional influence that photography exercised on Casas' work. Ideas about framing, points of view and aerial views are some of the aspects that the painter borrowed from photographic art.

EXHIBITION SECTIONS

The construction of an artistic identity

Casas' early artistic career was strongly marked by his decision to move to Paris at a very early age. Indeed, he went to the French capital to study at the age of just 15 years, and Paris became a permanent reference in his work throughout his life. During this period, the eighteen-eighties, his contact with the main European centre of art provided enormous stimulus, enabling Casas to discover a rich and varied range of artistic languages and movements. The



artist was completely open to all these influences, which he assimilated over the course of a highly privileged formative period since, unlike what might have been more habitually the case, rather than studying local models, Casas took a brave leap and focused on the work of international artists, some of whom (Carolus-Duran, for example) had already achieved great recognition.

In such a dynamic environment, it is understandable that the young Casas should have been astounded by all that he saw and have adopted a highly eclectic, indeterminate poetic approach whilst not yet producing an original, different style. This hybrid symbiosis is apparent in his undefined language and predominant resource to self-referencing exercises in which he mainly made portraits of relatives, of friends, of anything that allowed him to affirm himself as an artist with the aim of achieving self-discovery based on the gaze and on reference to works by other painters. Just a few years later, however, this game of mirrors would become positively reversed, generating a process in which Casas' work became a mirror in which the subsequent generation of Catalan artists would see themselves.

The bohemian impulse

The Barcelona tavern *Els Quatre Gats* opened in Carrer Montsió in January 1897. Adopting and even imitating the model of the famous Parisian cabaret *Le Chat Noir*, the new establishment became a centre for the promotion of an alternative cultural model, one devoted to encouraging artistic freedom and creativity. Throughout the six years that *Els Quatre Gats* was open, the establishment hosted a range



RAMON CASAS CARBÓ
Codorniu, 1898
Codorniu Collection

of events, both artistic and popular –shadow play, puppet shows, boxing matches and so on. Although it had no effect on existing artistic relations, the attitude of the bohemian group, led by Casas, Romeu and Rusiñol, revealed a crisis in the official art system, which was incapable of giving an outlet to the more dynamic, avant-garde movements of the time. Despite being catalogued as “informal”, “irreverent” and even “eccentric” as a way of caricaturing his work and minimising its importance, Casas was intensely productive during this period. His popular pieces helped to create a brand for the well-known tavern and raised the profile of the imagery employed by the group. Although short-



lived, this episode in Barcelona's cultural history represented one of the most original and stimulating contributions made by Catalan artistic modernism.

The paradox of the modern artist

It may well appear paradoxical that a cosmopolitan artist, one receptive to international trends in painting, should be attracted by and cultivate popular themes. The prominent use of "picturesque" motifs in Casas' works, in which he reveals a penchant for bullfighting themes and portraits of "majas" and toreadors, very much in line with traditional Spanish popular art, shows him to be quite open to exploring a repertoire full of local colour, themes greatly appreciated by a clientele who closely identified with such symbolic motifs. Indeed, Casas' work clearly followed a hybrid model in which this modern painter included in his imagery any element that he felt could enrich his art, refusing to accept that there was any difference between high and low culture. The circus, bullfighting, popular shows and so on, leisure activities deeply rooted in the popular imagination, also greatly interested new generations of artists. However, overuse of such themes finally produced a contrary effect, since Casas also had a tendency to use clichéd, stereotyped imagery, having no interest in making any critique of the hegemonic folkloric worldview.

The poetics of the crowd

In 1894, the painting *Garrote vil* [Garrotte] became the first in a series of compositions in which Casas devoted himself to what was known as "social chronicle" painting. Although he had previously started on the path to discovering a new area of subject-matter with the depiction of the public in bullfighting scenes, it was not until this moment that Casas decided to include the motif of the crowd in his work in a much more intense way.

In fact, this theme is linked to the nineteenth-century tradition of historic painting, which clearly influence Casas' own work, though he aimed to surpass the restrictions and overcome the conventions characteristic of the genre. The artist includes a new historical player in these works: the anonymous crowd. In his painting, the brave, virtuous epic hero, the classical model of the *exemplum virtutis*, is replaced by a dematerialised, scarcely individualised mass from which all ethical references have been lost. Over and above the moral implications of the theme, the absence of individual value or the tendency towards social alienation, the narratives depicted in these works enable Casas to explore the aesthetic possibilities of a uniform mass of people gathered together. Similarly, his compositions also reveal the influence of photographic



techniques, an effect that is particularly evident in his use of a fragmentary frame and an open perspective that suggests continuing action.

Ambivalent identities

A great specialist in the portrait genre, Casas made women one of his most frequently used images and motifs throughout his artistic career. The works in this exhibition include a representative diversity of typologies that illustrate the different models which Casas adopted in his quest for the aesthetic ideal of feminine beauty. However, what predominates is his portrayal of the sophisticated, refined, elegant, flirtatious woman in a style reminiscent of the early-twentieth-



RAMON CASAS CARBÓ
After the Dance or Decadent Young Woman, 1899
Museu de Montserrat. Abadia de Montserrat
Donation J. Sala Ardiz

century decorative movement. This ambience of sophistication, luxury and wealth submerges us in a society whose hedonism and cult of aesthetic pleasure are stereotyped values found in late-nineteenth-century decadent art. However, along with this archetypal image, influenced by genre painting and orientalist sensuality, a model of the active, emancipated woman emerges, like something from an advertisement, playing a role more in accordance with modern life, someone who enjoys such activities as reading and sport. In short, a woman far removed from the traditional image. The series of nudes that Casas painted in the eighteen-nineties also represents one of the freest and most stimulating periods in his career. In terms of form, these are exercises that go beyond academic norms to explore ideas of great compositional daring and enormous visual power.



ACTIVITIES PARALLEL TO THE EXHIBITION

LECTURE

Ramon Casas

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8 | 7.30 pm

By the exhibition curators, Ignasi Domènech and Francesc Quílez

PLACES LIMITED / PRICE PER PERSON: €4

TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION

Visit with coffee and conversation

A two-hour activity including an audiovisual introduction and a relaxed tour of the exhibition, considering whatever most interests the group in greater depth. Following this, we can share our impressions with a chat over a nice cup of coffee.

PRICE PER PERSON: €4 / DURATION: 2 HRS

Groups: advance booking required at rcaixaforummadrid@magmacultura.net

PRICE PER GROUP: € 30

Guided tours

From March 8 to April 30: THURSDAYS, FRIDAYS AND SATURDAYS, 6 PM;
SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS, 12 NOON

From May 1 to June 11: THURSDAYS AND SATURDAYS, 7 PM; SUNDAYS AND
HOLIDAYS, 12 NOON

DURATION: 1 HR / PRICE PER PERSON: € 3 / PLACES LIMITED

Tours for groups by arrangement

DURATION: 1 HR / PRICE PER GROUP: € 60 / Booking:

rcaixaforummadrid@magmacultura.net

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

+7 tour and workshop for families

SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS, 11 am

PRICE PER PERSON: €2 / PLACES LIMITED

+7 educational and family area



EVERY DAY, FROM 10 AM TO 8 PM
ACTIVITY OPEN TO ALL. PLACES LIMITED

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

GROUPS: MAXIMUM 30 PUPILS

SINGLE PRICE: €25/GROUP

Advance booking: rcaixaforummadrid@magmacultura.net

Information: www.eduCaixa.com

Visits with activities

A tour of the exhibition to observe and learn about the works through discussion and a series of practical activities.

Groups: maximum 30 pupils. Levels: primary from year three, secondary, baccalaureate and vocational training. Duration: 90 mins

Guided tours

Levels: primary from year three, secondary, baccalaureate and vocational training.
Duration: 1 hr

Presentation for teachers

MARCH 16 from 5.30 to 8 pm

Presentation of educational projects for at the exhibition by José Luis Bravo, artist, researcher, lecturer at the University of Barcelona and author of the educational project. Registration: on Tel. 91 330 73 28 from 10 am to 2 pm, or by email to plopez@fundacionlacaixa.org.



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CaixaForum Madrid

Paseo del Prado, 36,
28014 Madrid
Tel. 913 30 73 00

Times

Open every day
From Monday to Sunday, from 10 am to 8
pm

"la Caixa" Foundation Information

Service

Tel. 902 223 040
Monday to Sunday, from 9 am to 8 pm

Prices

Admission free for "la Caixa" customers
Visitors other than "la Caixa" customers: €4
(includes admission to all exhibitions)
Admission free for minors under 16 years

Ticket sales

CaixaForum.com/agenda
Tickets are also available at CaixaForum
during public opening times

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