

Exhibition Gallery  
Banco de España, Madrid

# flowers and fruits

Colección  
Banco de España

25  
OCTOBER  
2022

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## Flowers and fruits in the Colección Banco de España

Motifs of flowers and fruits have formed part of the iconography of Banco de España ever since it was founded in 1782. Symbolised by the cornucopia or horn of abundance, these subjects, which have served as tokens of prosperity or celebrations of generosity since remote times, are not only to be seen on banknotes, share certificates and administrative documents, but are also repeated on the sculptural decorations that adorn the façades and interiors of the bank's buildings, or on the stained glass ceilings of some of its halls. Furthermore, they appear on many pieces in our collection, from tapestries, carpets and clocks to paintings, photographs and sculptures. The same subject is also central to a work that is not only a still life but a complete allegory of the magnanimity of nature: *Pomona and Vertumnus* (1626) by Juan Van der Hamen, the starting point of an exhibition which, without attempting to be exhaustive, analyses the ways in which these still life genres have persisted and altered in time.

It was in the first decades of the seventeenth century that the representation of fruits, flowers and other inanimate objects was liberated from its ancillary function in narrative scenes. It then began to try to speak to us, sometimes reminding us of the most central aspects of life and death. Since their emergence, these pictorial genres were the “poor relatives” in the family of the great academic classifications, which situated them at the opposite pole to historical, mythological or religious painting. This was an art of “small” things which focused on the insignificant, but which eventually acquired a revolutionary hue for the history of painting, as is demonstrated by its revival in a part of modern and contemporary art.

In the show *2328 Reales de vellón*, with which we opened this exhibition gallery in 2021, the human figure formed the core of the discourse through the portrait and all it implies, including the narrative, the unique or the exceptional. These themes are now displaced to make way for nature and the apparently unimportant, the anonymous and the fragile, for in the words of Norman Bryson, “still life is the world minus its narratives or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest.” YR

This exhibition is dedicated to José María Viñuela (1944-2022), the conservator of Banco de España from 1982 and 2015, and a key figure in the history of its collection. Many of the works displayed here entered the collection thanks to his knowledge, curiosity and sensitivity towards the art of our time.

## Flowers and fruits for thinking the image: unimaginable still lifes

The combination of works from the past with other more recent pieces is the most remarkable aspect of this exhibition, which tries to explore the ways in which the genre of the still life has persisted and been transformed. In this respect, this first group of contemporary works invites us to reflect upon the relationship already established in Baroque treatises between the representation of fruits and flowers and the status of the image, including such notions as the debate between the copy and the original, *trompe-l'oeil*, the complex relation between reality and representation, and even what is known today as *appropriationism*.

In this section, we encounter the transformations of the genre in works related to the field of photography, the quintessential medium of fugacity. In many cases, these are still lifes that would have been inconceivable as such to the mentality of the seventeenth century, the period when the genre took shape. Strictly speaking, however, that is what they are, although they speak to us of another time and different concerns. The elements that make up these compositions are diverse and unexpected, reflecting the dynamics of use and wastage in consumer societies, introducing elements from other latitudes, or enunciating subtle thematic shifts that update the genre while leading it towards new territories.



Vik Muniz

1961

*Still Life with a Bouquet  
of Fruit, after Caravaggio,  
from the series Pictures of  
Magazines 2*

2006

Chromogenic print on paper

101.6 × 127 cm

Edition 1/6

Colección Banco de España



In his process of appropriation of the most famous and recognisable works in the history of art, the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz (São Paulo, Brazil, 1961) began a series, *Pictures of Magazines 2* (2006), in which the material for the first phase of the production process is the glossy paper of fashion magazines. Many of these pieces were begun during the numerous flights taken by the artist between the United States and Brazil. As it is not permitted to take scissors or cutters onto an aircraft, he has to tear out the small pieces of paper – in this case, little circles – with his hands, so using an artisanal photomontage technique to create a new image that imitates the appearance of the original artwork. There are works in this series that recall the first visual impression made by paintings like the bathers of Edgar Degas, or pictures by Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, Jasper Johns or Caspar David Friedrich. The photomontage is afterwards photographed and enlarged to a giant format.

Vik Muniz obliges the viewer to accumulate the reception of two successive moments of the gaze, near and far, playing ironically with the public's ritual of approaching an Impressionist painting to analyse its brushwork. These photographed

photomontages first present the recognisable appearance of the original work, always a very famous painting, and then the details of the thousands of images hidden in the folds of the figure in a peculiar interpretation of mass culture. The two readings generate a tension between image and process and between memory and vision.

In the case of the photograph in the Banco de España Collection that concerns us here, the referent is the famous still life painted in oil on canvas by Michelangelo Caravaggio in 1596, *Basket of Fruit* (*Canestra di frutta*, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan). The wicker basket is full of summer fruits, among them peaches and apples gnawed by worms and about to rot. The basket furthermore rests precariously on a window ledge, and could easily be blown off by a gust of wind. In this way, the Baroque painter emphasised the thin line separating the place of the representation from that of the enunciation while at the same time narrating an instant in suspense. In terms of Erwin Panofsky's theory of covert symbolism and his iconological method, Baroque still lifes refer to the fleetingness of existence, as expressed in the macabre cemeteries of the Capuchin

monks: "What you are, we were. What we are, you will be."

I should like to end by pointing out an intriguing reference made by Muniz's photomontage to the still life by Caravaggio. The recent examination of the Baroque canvas with X-rays has shown that its material was reused, a common practice at the time. What has been discovered under the still life in this case is a series of decorative grotesques painted by the Milanese artist in a vein similar to those painted by his great friend Prospero Orsi (Prosperino delle Grottesche), which reproduced the architectural ornamentations of classical Rome.

If the fruits were fragile, so too are the small pieces of paper torn out by hand. If Caravaggio recorded the instant of a still life that would soon lose its freshness, Vik Muniz similarly takes his aim at a moment that he too considers unique. While capricious adornments with fantastic animals or semi-human creatures are hidden under the Baroque painting, the work produced by the Brazilian artist reveals, when we approach it, a rich universe of fragments of legs, faces of famous personalities, unconnected letters or smiling mouths advertising toothpaste, like an unnerving and apparently endless set of Russian dolls. IT



## Wolfgang Tillmans

1968

### *New L. A. Still Life*

2001

Chromogenic print on paper affixed to Forex

134 × 202 cm

Edition 1/1

Colección Banco de España

The Banco de España Collection holds two photographs by the German artist Wolfgang Tillmans (Remscheid, Germany, 1968), a still life and an abstract monochrome piece. Although he started to produce these images from almost the beginning of his career, it was not until later that he showed them in public, as he concentrated during the 1990s on making himself known through the striking and provocative photographs of gay nightlife in Hamburg that were published in the British magazine *i-D*. Tillmans was then trying to offer a true likeness of the contemporary lifestyle that he was experiencing himself, with its youth culture of acid house and clubbing. He soon broadened this outlook to portraits of everyday scenes: "My starting point is to take contemporary images, to make art that

makes you feel what it is to be alive today."

*New L.A. Still Life* is a still life dated in 2001. Unwilling to be considered strictly as a photographer linked to pop culture, the German artist began to present still lifes whose fundamental referent is the still life of the Spanish Baroque. In particular, this photograph shows a domestic environment. Framing it on the right is a rock crystal vase that holds a long rod from which a pineapple hangs precariously, liable to lose its balance and fall to the floor at any moment, ruining the entire contrivance. It is a modest construction that destabilises the observer. Next to it, scattered untidily on the table, are remnants of food – a carrot, some ripe bananas, a crystallised sugar lollipop, and what may be a rotting cucumber – pouring out of what looks like a black garbage bag. Beauty in dirt and grime. These are images that play at appearing casual but are planned down to the last detail, walking "a thin line between the things that are aleatory and those which are absolutely precise." The silence emanating from the photograph seems to precede catastrophe. The frozen time does not prevent us from imagining what will come next, as in Joseph Beuys's *Terremoto in palazzo*, an installation mounted by the German artist with the remains of an earthquake in Naples.

This photograph is a *vanitas* in the Baroque sense of the term.

The image shows perishable goods on their way to death, and therefore malodorous, captured at the instant of their decadence. Materially and essentially, they are the same objects which shortly before were beautiful and desired, and had been presented in the domestic space of the dining-room on a carefully laid table that sought to accentuate their power of seduction. The photograph records the remains of a wreck: leftover and even wasted food, with the smeared makeup of objects that have lost their freshness. Wolfgang Tillmans seems to agree with Paul Valéry's assertion that there is nothing deeper than the skin when he makes the following remark: "To be satisfied in the present, but not complacently. To appreciate and study what is there, yes, what is there. The precise observation of the surface of things is the key to understanding something in this world."

This crude and voracious depiction of reality relates him to the nineteenth-century French painter Gustave Courbet in his search for the passing and contingent (in other words, angels, though not many of them), but also to artists linked to the neo-Dadaisms like Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Sigmar Polke. In this respect, it is important to point out that Tillmans does not see his production as part of a history of photography but as an entry in a general history of art. IT

Sandra Gamarra

1972

### *Cabinet No. 43 (Tillmans)*

2006

Oil on canvas

120 × 120 cm

Colección Banco de España

*Cabinet No. 43 (Tillmans)* is an oil painting that at first sight shows a traditional still life, with a glass on some vitreous dishes and a pair of partially metallic teaspoons that allow the painting to revel in reflections, transparencies and gleams with the accustomed skill of the still life painter. These objects are accompanied by fruits that permit an interplay of colour contrasts, with primacy for orange-yellows, blues and maroons. All this is laid on a tablecloth alongside some remnants of food and a used and crumpled napkin. A closer look at the frame of the work, however, makes us revise our first impression, as it does not coincide exactly with the edges of the painting. Two horizontal white stripes separate the scene from the upper and lower frame respectively. This warns us that the simple classification of this oil as a still life might lead to confusion. In fact, the work is a painted recreation of a photograph by the German artist Wolfgang Tillmans, the winner of the 2000 Turner Prize, who has an extensive series in his turn dedicated to photographs of still lifes that has earned him consideration as a contemporary icon of this genre. Gamarra's piece is therefore a copy, an appropriation, and also a translation of the language of photography to that of oil painting which involves the semantic transformation of the original work. Even the apparent realism of her painting warrants a re-examination



of this concept fundamental to the history of western art, for it evokes its possible variations, which always refer us to the multiple meanings that can be adopted by verisimilitude in the imitation of the real. In her art, Gamarra revisits both the significance of these artistic notions legitimised by history and the very process of perception and recognition of the great figures of contemporary art. In this case, that figure is Tillmans, one of whose still lifes, *New L.A. Still Life* of 2021, forms part of the Banco de España Collection.

This work by Gamarra belongs to the *Cabinet* series, a line of work in which she proposes a dialogue between her own painting and art as image and object of exhibition and merchandising. The series consists of paintings based on the appropriation of the work of various artists such as Manet, Modigliani, Bosch, Olafur Eliasson, Dan Graham, Andrés Serrano and Franz West, ultimately constituting a sort of collection of "painting for museums". On some occasions, these paintings are accumulated alongside other furnishings and objects on the walls of an installation that recreates a collector's cabinet, which also contains

other paintings showing stands at art fairs, museum galleries and their viewers. She thus builds up a reflection on the elements that form the art system, its modes of exhibition, the attitudes of its public, its reception and consumption, and the *mise en scène* that characterises every exhibition space. However, she also questions the notions of the originality of the artwork, authorship, copying and appropriation. Gamarra's work engages with the technology of the gaze and the hierarchical and codified nature of expository discourses.

In some of her still lifes, the artist combines pictorial and verbal language. Over a depiction of flowers half concealed behind a curtain in one of her pictures, for instance, one reads: "Still life is the limit made picture". In the meantime, one of her landscape oils contains another significant motto over the painting: "A picture is like a mirror of nature that makes things that apparently do not exist really exist and deceives in an amiably acceptable and honourable way."

*Cabinet No. 43 (Tillmans)* was shown at the Galería Juana de Aizpuru as part of the exhibition entitled "Cabinet" in October 2006. MM



## Hannah Collins

1956

### *White Passage*

1994

Gelatin silver print on baryta paper  
mounted on cloth support

165.5 × 214 cm

Edition 1/3

Colección Banco de España

During her first years of residence in Barcelona (1989-2010), the British photographer and film-maker Hannah Collins produced a series of poetic and cryptic images with surrealistic overtones. She constructed theatrical sets by connecting what were always recognisable as everyday objects whose significance seemed to go further than their first direct reading. She presented some of these series in 1993 in a solo exhibition at the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica in Barcelona, in whose catalogue Iwona Blazwick pointed out that Collins's abundant images with tables and still lifes on white tablecloths bore a relation to the Baroque *vanitas*. *White Passage* (1994) appears to be linked to these still lifes in its references to transition and death. The image presents two tables covered and connected by a large white sheet. On both are two heaps of lawn from which plastic tubes emerge. Collins

republished this photograph in her book *Finding, Transmitting, Receiving* (2007), indicating its sense by relating it to other images in a series she entitled *Ghost*, which made reference to both memory and disappearance. This was a collection of old photographs of the *carte de visite* type which she found in a shop in Nizhni Nóvgorod, in Central Russia, emphasising that these were people who wanted to be remembered after their death. This find coincided with the clearing of her family home after the death of her mother in 2004. She found drawings made during her childhood forty-five years ago that she also saw as "a leap into the past, like a bridge in time." IT



## Maria Loboda

1979

### *The Ngombo*

2016

Digital print on Hahnemühle  
cotton paper

76 × 61 cm each (× 4)

Edition 1/3

Colección Banco de España

Maria Loboda, a conceptual artist who employs various media such as sculpture, mural painting or the object, presented the series of photographs *The Ngombo* in 2016 at the Galería Maisterravalbuena in Madrid in the context of her exhibition entitled "Domestic Affairs and Death". Interested in the texts of Sigmund Freud and the legacy of psychoanalysis, and especially in aspects related to fetishism and individual rituals, Loboda here undertakes an approximation to the Freudian death instinct and a sort of eros contained among the icons of the most prosaic modernity: objects. To this end, she approaches the contemporary western subject from two genders and formats. Through a variety of everyday objects, man is shown as secluded in aluminium suitcases, while woman is represented in *The Ngombo* by one of the articles with the most intimate significance and connotations in terms of gender, the handbag.

As though they had been emptied in a desperate search for one of the objects they hold, the handbags, all of which contain some natural element like leather or cane, have part of their contents poured out onto mats of different weaves and materials that suggest a context different from the one in which these accessories are habitually used, perhaps the interior of a cabin in an imaginary tribal environment. The content revealed by this act of emptying out also proves surprising, as it combines the two concepts of the exhibition, domesticity and death. Alongside the usual objects to be expected in a bag, such as a biro, a wallet, a set of keys, a toothbrush, a makeup mirror, a lipstick or a blister bag of pills, other more unnerving items also fall out of the interior of

each one: a wing, some small bird's claws, and a large number of little bones that powerfully suggest some kind of magical practice, an interiorised voodoo that appears to explain the inclusion of these organic elements as a fetish or votive offering inside the most ordinary of receptacles.

The title of *The Ngombo* is a reference to a practice of the Chokwe ethnic group of Central Africa. Translatable as "shaking the divining basket", it is a soothsayers' art based on objects that incarnate a guardian spirit, an ancestral protecting spectre.

In line with Loboda's habitual practice of contemporary archaeology and anthropology, this combination of consumer items with others of a ritual content from other latitudes seems to point to their indistinctness as protective elements against a lack of differentiation and panaceas for the fear of death, omnipresent but silenced in contemporary societies. Pills and nutritional supplements homologated by modern science are thus coupled with feathers imbued with the promise of ritual salvation, and a cigarette

lighter with the vertebra of a mammal thrown into the air by a shaman, while the lady's handbag is converted through being emptied into a divining basket that reflects a whole context in which the strangeness of ritual violence lurks among the recognisable and reassuring outlines of domestic objects. Loboda thus establishes a connection between archaic and contemporary forms of esotericism and superstition, of the search for protection and the modern subject's confrontation with intimate and atavistic fears that do not seem to have disappeared, no matter how much the owners of those handbags are immersed in the channel of progress and productivity.

To summarise her statement, the artist takes as a reference Lord Dunsany's evocative and illuminating tale *The Sphinx in Thebes (Massachusetts)* (1915), which begins with the following words: "There was a woman in a steel-built city who had all that money could buy, she had gold and dividends and trains and houses, and she had pets to play with, but she had no sphinx." CM





## Gonzalo Puch

1950

### *Le Corbusier with Pineapple*

2005

Digital print on paper

180 × 225 cm

Edition 1/5

Colección Banco de España

This is one of the few works which Gonzalo Puch has titled in the course of his career. Although he began as a painter, his best-known work is centred on photography and installation. Gonzalo Puch recreates ephemeral scenarios that he generally mounts at home or in the spaces he frequents, such as the classrooms where he teaches at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cuenca. They tend to be stage settings in the form of small landscapes with a variety of fragile white constructions in foam board.

However, there are no sleights of hand in Puch's photographs. Fiction is shown here head on. Ironical and comical, the futuristic and spotless white city of tall buildings traversed by flyovers that is built for *Le Corbusier*

*with Pineapple* (2005) becomes surreal when we immediately notice that everything revolves around an open fridge, that the wooded areas are actually plant pots, and that the image is finished off with a pineapple resting on a shelf like a monument. Here is a giant pineapple in the city dreamed by the Swiss architect, who believed that city planning and architectural design could change the world. The ironic treatment of the great icon of the Modern Movement in architecture is evident, as is the artist's game with another moment in the history of art: the Baroque still life and its recollection of everything perishable, a genre that seems to penetrate this imaginary city to contaminate Le Corbusier's utopian intentions. IT + CM

João Maria Gusmão  
and Pedro Paiva

1979 / 1977

*Seasoned Egg*

2013

Chromogenic colour print

140 × 113 cm

Edition 4/6

Colección Banco de España

*Seasoned Egg* (2013) is a large photograph taken by the duo made up of the Portuguese artists João Maria Gusmão (1979) and Pedro Paiva (1977). Both chicken's and ostrich eggs are recurrent elements in their works. They have fried them in slow motion in a video, *Fried Egg* (2008), and included them in installations like *Eye Model* (2006). In *Seasoned Egg* (2013), they have enlarged a photograph of the egg that focuses on its yolk, of which they have taken an extreme close-up while leaving the rest out of shot. The yolk appears floating on a sky blue background.

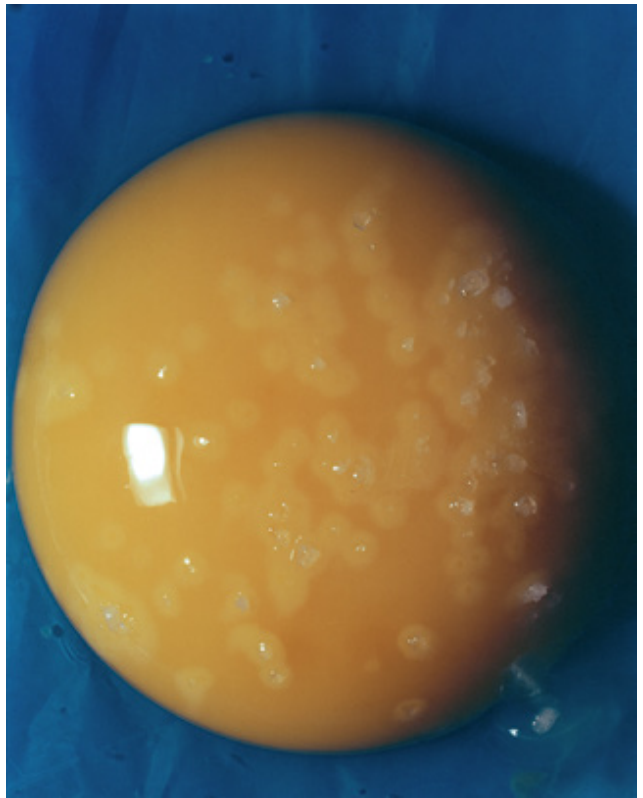
We know full well what an egg is like because it is a staple of many of the world's cuisines. The yolk, the nutritional element of the egg, floats suspended on the chalaza, a set of protein threads, and although it is enclosed within the shell, it is separated from it by the vitelline membrane of the white. The function of eggs is to safeguard and feed the embryo, but if they are not fertilised, they maintain their properties intact as a result of the erratic ovulation of chickens. There is therefore something of a humorous intention in causing an effect of strangeness with such a recognisable object. Gusmão + Paiva come so close to the yolk that the grains of salt flavouring it attain bodily substance. To use an analogy, it is as though those transparent dots were accidents recorded by an astronomical photograph of the sun, or we were being shown the floating worlds of microorganisms through the lens of an electronic microscope. The universe and the microcosm resemble each other in a "poetic-philosophical fiction" that blends science and fiction through an everyday object seen from a different perspective, creating

a metaphor of the origin of life. It is an extraordinary world whose primal referent is very simple, is to be found in all our homes, and has fed us since we were children.

However, there are other possible interpretations. We can compare this photograph with the aforementioned installation *Eye Model*, which recreates an optical experiment by René Descartes. In this piece, a broken ostrich egg takes the place of the pupil, the part of the eye in which the objects we look at around us are reflected, and through which we gain much of our knowledge of what the world is and what we are. To quote the painter Camille Pissarro, who adopts a less philosophical and more poetic perspective, it involves "looking into the humble, where others see nothing." Such an understanding is born of the heterodoxy of realising that science and art come from the same place, as both are attempts at comprehension in order to bring us closer to what we are and what the world we live in is.

Through this method of presentation, Gusmão + Paiva try to

reveal what is *a priori* indiscernible, allowing us to appreciate thousandths of seconds and tiny details that would otherwise be imperceptible. The verifiable in scientific research and the qualitative and creative in the arts and humanities are two parallel formulae that occasionally intersect when it comes to interpreting the world. In this respect, the duo from Lisbon follow the words of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who maintained there are things that reason cannot attain and which poetic intuition nevertheless brushes against. Hence their literary references and influences, from Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe to Jorge Luis Borges, or their echoes of Surrealism and its results and modes of production. In this sense, these Portuguese artists go a step further. They are suspicious from the start of the system of beliefs from which we observe the world, but their attitude is a light-hearted one that Rocío de la Villa has called the "white humour of nonsense". IT



## The still life: academe and avant-garde

The birth of the still life is based on the highly realist concept of painting that emerged during the Baroque. It is therefore surprising that this genre should reappear so forcefully during the twentieth century, precisely when the realist imitation of nature started to break apart. Nevertheless, the development of the avant-gardes and their offshoots is not unconnected with a genre that was retrieved precisely because of its historical consideration as a minor art form. In many artists, from impressionism to abstraction, one finds a keen interest in motifs which, because they were more descriptive than narrative, opened up the way for radical formal experimentation, something especially apparent in the Paris School. In the meantime, another group of artists found that the genre gave them a way to make the realist emulation of nature persist in a more traditional sense. The still life was thus used by the so-called "Madrid realists" to initiate a kind of new academicism. Both the avant-garde notion of the radical rupture and this tendency towards greater continuity shared the delicate influence of the masters of the past, and particularly those of the Spanish Baroque. These works are permeated by features like interplays of reflections and transparencies, the obsessive observation of natural forms, or reflections on the fleetingness and immanence of all living things.



Rafael Zabaleta

1907-1960

### *Still Life of the Window*

1944

Oil on canvas

99 x 80 cm

Colección Banco de España

Among the numerous still lifes painted by Rafael Zabaleta, special attention is merited by the type appreciable in this *Still Life of the Window*: a mixture of an interior scene, in which the still life is situated, with a window that permits a view of an exterior landscape. In this case, what is seen through the doors of the balcony is a street with buildings. The combination of an interior with an exterior landscape was frequent in the modernist Cubist tradition, and cultivated especially by Juan Gris. Even so, the trace of the new realisms of inter-war European painting can also be detected in this oil. The table in front of the balcony presents mixtilinear forms and elaborate decoration. On it is a motley combination of dishes, vases, a fruit bowl, flowers, fruits, a tablecloth and a white sphere. Part of the composition appears to be dominated by different tones of grey, in contrast with the reds, pinks, yellows, greens and oranges of the organic elements of the still life, and the blues of an attractive vase and the cloths on the wall in the background. The rhomboid and floral motif of this wall decoration is one frequently to be seen in the artist's pictures, and coincides with one he used to decorate some rooms in his house and studio in Quesada, Jaén, his birthplace. By virtue of this, it is possible to see how his private surroundings found their way into his painting. Instead of the flatness



and the elusive language cultivated by the late Cubist painters, Zabaleta opts for a more realist depiction and a spatial representation more adjusted to perspective, though making fairly free use of its rules. He also chooses to represent the shadows of the objects, something which Cubism had ignored. The composition of this oil is prolix, displaying a peculiar taste for exuberance and sumptuous painting.

Also appreciable in this still life is another characteristic feature of Zabaleta's painting, the use of strongly marked outlines, which respond to the role of a guide played by the drawing as, to use his own words, the "skeleton of the picture to which the colour then has to be added." Eugenio d'Ors, one of the greatest enthusiasts of his work, wrote that he had the ability "to incorporate in the refined painting of an artist the robust and substantial artisanal virtues of a wall painter."

The *Still Life of the Window* belongs to a moment in Zabaleta's painting when he had already

left behind the eclecticism that accompanied his assimilation of European avant-garde painting. In his most prolific period, from the 1940s onwards, he worked towards the definition of a language of his own that would eventually lead to what critics have called "glowing expressionism". The still life was a genre he often worked with, and there is no doubt that Zabaleta used it determinedly to confront the task of convincingly uniting the representation of an interior scene with an exterior view. Usually, unlike the case here, he based such depictions on the rural landscape of his native surroundings. In this mission, skill in the handling of lighting is crucial, as can be appreciated in the *Still Life of the Window*, which recreates the fall of the exterior light on one of the shutters of the window, by contrast with the relative darkness of the cloth on the back wall. In his repertoire of still lifes, there is a substantial number of nocturnes besides these daytime scenes. MM



# Francisco López Hernández

1932-2017

## Still Life

1964

Patinated bronze

61 × 53 × 20 cm

Edition 5/5 (there are other versions in terracotta)

Colección Banco de España

The Banco de España Collection holds a fairly representative sample of the work of the Madrid-born sculptor Francisco López Hernández, as it includes pieces ranging from the 1960s, when he started to work on commission for major Spanish institutions, almost until the present day. Moreover, besides producing plaques in both low and high relief, he demonstrates at the same time that he is not only a great sculptor but also an exceptional draughtsman. López Hernández connects with tradition in his choice of disciplines and materials, fundamentally bronze, terracotta and plaster, and in his use of the genres that marked the French academicism of the eighteenth century, among which we here find the still life and the landscape. The realism embraced by López Hernández offers contemporary solutions. The artist's work is not a sculpture or painting of the instant but of the accumulation of time and emotions. In pieces where human beings are absent but show with their traces that it is their territory which is being represented, this omission generates a strong charge of

restraint and silence encapsulating a certain idea of eternity. In this respect, *The Quince* (1983-1986) follows the tradition of the Baroque *vanitas* as an allegory of death, but the objects accompanying the fruits in this high relief – a small bag, a chain with a medal – are contemporary and situate the scene in the here and now.

This artist is a master of the bas-relief. He learned the technique in his father's workshop and developed it into what has become a long and illustrious career in the design of medals. In this connection, the Banco de España commissioned two bronzes from him in 1983 for the inauguration of its headquarters in Cádiz. For these pieces, the Madrid artist chose the representation of two trees, a quince and a fig, as symbols of life and abundance. With their simplicity and detail, as well as their lack of a context, these trees recall the Pompeian painting the artist knows so well. *The Garden* (1970) is another landscape, in this case an urban oasis whose wall indicates that this hideaway is ultimately located in a private space. IT

## Pancho Cossío

1894-1970

### *Still Life with Ace of Clubs*

1955

Oil on canvas

73 x 91.5 cm

Colección Banco de España



Seen next to the corner of a sofa is a table on which various objects are resting. These include a pair of glass fishbowls through which the prongs of two metal forks and a piece of a playing card with the ace of clubs can be seen, a spherical form and a few papers. Between the corner of the sofa and the table, a nebulous object with a cylindrical base and pointed top is discerned, though it is hard to identify. The tabletop has sinuous forms, and its base is barely insinuated, as though it had hardly any support. The composition is organised around two very marked diagonals, and is notable for its boldly decentred framing of the subject, with the objects strongly outlined and the table reaching forward onto the picture plane, all of which endows the scene with a restless severity. The paint is thick, the strokes are deliberately evident, and the transparent objects allow for an interplay of refractions and transparencies that is frequent in the still lifes of Pancho Cossío, a genre he frequented assiduously throughout his artistic career, and in which the influence of late Cubism is palpable. Distinguishable on the darkest areas are small white dots that help to add a peculiar spatial ambiguity to the scene, as though he were using them to accentuate the presence and the reality of the picture

surface between the image and the eye of the viewer. This white speckling is very characteristic of some phases in Cossío's painting. The ochre and brown tones stand out among the measured colouring of this oil. Also recognisable in this *Still Life with Ace of Clubs* is another of the constants of his style, the insistent application of glazes and transparencies.

Pancho Cossío painted this canvas in 1955, a moment in his career when he was already consolidated as one of the leading representatives of the new art, the modality of Spanish art in the first half of the twentieth century that fell between the avant-garde and the modernist. He was one of the foremost painters of the Paris School, a set of artists who were specially impacted by a journey or sojourn in the capital of the twentieth-century artistic avant-gardes. Its representatives were apt to combine the reception of the languages of the first avant-gardes, fundamentally advanced Cubism, with the need for a return to order or tradition that arose in modernist art after the First World War. Together with Borel, Cossío is one of the chief exponents of a modality of this school indebted to the second phase of Cubism and known as "lyrical figuration". In the Paris of the 1920s and 1930s, he and others like Borel himself had formed part of a group

championed by the magazine *Cahiers d'Art* and the critic Tériade, who saw them as one of the most fertile ways to restore vitality to the hesitant paths modernist art was following at that moment. The type of figures to be appreciated in this still life, which give the impression of being on the point of dilution in a dense magma of material with a highly characteristic reduced palette, had been one of the keys to his Parisian painting. His meeting with Juan Gris at that time appears to have been decisive for his choice of a painting which, in his view, ought to tend towards flatness without forgetting its reference to real objects, as is frequent in most of his still lifes. Hence, in all probability, his tendency to work on the effects of refraction of objects, which was to give rise to his personal "inventory of deformations" and the evanescence of the subject, which affects the nebulous identity of some of them. Also palpable in this picture is the attention paid to the "pictorial matter", and the possible influence of the discourse on this subject that had been spearheaded by Giorgio de Chirico. In the last decades of his artistic career, this led Cossío to a painstaking use of traditional pictorial techniques, going so far as to make his own colours by hand. MM

## Pancho Cossío

1894-1970

### *Still Life*

1962

Oil on canvas

46.2 × 55.1 cm

Colección Banco de España



The outstanding feature of this *Still Life* is the dense and pasty texture of the paint in a composition dominated by earthy, ochre and golden colours with a few grey and greenish touches. From this, the figures emerge: some fruit, like a pear situated on the central axis in the lower part of the canvas, or those contained in a transparent fruit bowl or dish located on the left, barely insinuated with brushstrokes that outline its semi-circular edge. On the right of the central pear, it seems possible to make out the light outlines of the faded silhouette of a glass. At the top right corner is another receptacle whose contents are not entirely clear. Next to it, in the upper strip, is an arrangement of other forms that may be more fruits accompanied by something which could be deciphered as a bottle, or another glass object, of which only a fragment appears, as it is cut off by the upper edge of the canvas. Two energetically traced oval forms cross the central area of the picture, their identity even more enigmatic. One of them might be read as the figure of a banana, but the faintly descriptive character of its right-hand end loses definition as it is prolonged to the left, almost removing any certainty unless we assume the fruit is being transmuted into something else. At the same time, it allows the receptacle on that side to be endowed with a transparent and therefore crystalline quality.

The difficulty in fully discerning these figures, together with the fact that they emerge from a flat surface, is the result of a deliberate pictorial policy. In this oil, one almost discerns a procedure that Pancho Cossío had already adopted during his Parisian residence of the 1920s, and whose result is a premeditated indecision between the option of defining the objects and that of ceding protagonism to the purely pictorial elements. Hence the figures are merely suggested while the canvas is taken over by the touches of the brush and palette knife, their density and their trace, and the interplay of textures, glazes and transparencies. Cossío sometimes moves to the edge of abstraction, never renouncing the real referents to which these simplified figures allude, yet endowing them with a fluctuating character that blends with the pictorial space.

The composition is thus extremely bold, with some objects sharply outlined against an absence of spatial depth. In the meantime, the range of earthy colours is a hallmark of Cossío's painting, as is the fine drizzle of small white dots on some of the darker portions of the canvas.

Pancho Cossío painted this canvas at a point in his career when he was already consolidated as one of the leading representatives of the Spanish "new art". In the 1960s, as we can appreciate in this work, this

veteran of "lyrical figuration" and the Paris School displayed a bold creative freedom. Also palpable in this picture is his enormous interest in the "kitchen of painting", which materialised in the meticulous use of traditional pictorial techniques that led him to make his own colours by hand. This was decisive for giving his painting that oily appearance which is so characteristic of his language.

Cossío returned to the still life, the genre of modernist painting *par excellence*, throughout his artistic career. The Banco de España Collection holds another still life by this artist, *Still Life with Ace of Clubs*, from a nearby date, 1955. In a lecture on the artist given precisely in 1955, "Pancho Cossío and the pictorial tradition", Juan Antonio Gaya remarked that he continued the history of uncluttered order of the Spanish still life tradition, virtues which were nevertheless also characteristic of Cubism, "and it is logical that a post-Cubist should be well equipped with them." He also pointed out another of the features found in the two still lifes in this collection: his taste for oval organisation and the curved line, which submerges us in a spherical world of roundnesses like "an endangered ship, like a towering wave, like an excessively low and dangerous cloud." MM



## Francisco Bores

1898-1972

### *Nature morte au pichet* [Still Life with Jug]

1961

Oil on canvas

91 x 72.5 cm

Colección Banco de España

In an interior scene, several objects rest on an oval table top: a jug, a fruit and a cranium, all schematised. The composition is outstanding for its skilful colouring in yellow, ochre and red tones that harmonise with greens and greys. It is a good example of the luminous painting of Bores, of his manner of merely suggesting objects, of the plastic value he attached to colour and brushwork, and of his goal of attaining the enjoyment of painting in itself. Even so, there is something intriguing about the inclusion of the skull in such a luminous environment. Bores, who, like other avant-garde artists of his time, was a great painter of still lifes, thus ties into one of the classic traditional types of this genre, the *memento mori* ('remember that you die'). This presence is perhaps less surprising if we bear in mind that any allusion to death is also necessarily a reference to life, which converges in this oil on the *jouissance* of purely pictorial values that was a constant in Bores. The twentieth-century avant-gardes often return to the subject of the *vanitas* as an allusion to the fleetingness of time, though they evade the strident religious rhetoric of some Baroque painters. This is the line followed by this still life, which exudes the artist's habitual sense of balance and atmosphere of intimacy.

When he executed this painting, Bores was already an established painter and his work had entered its final phase known to critics as "the white manner", not so much because of a predominance of that colour as because of his method. As he stated himself, he aspired towards greater luminosity while at the same time disembodiment the figure. Such



an aspiration was similar to that of abstract painting but brought about by figurative means, and it sought above all to achieve a special transparency. As seen here, it led him to a light painting with a free and loose composition. Since settling in Paris in the mid-1920s, Bores's language had been characterised by an emphasis on light and colour united with a "lyrical figuration". From the 1930s onwards, the painter endowed this type of figuration, of which he was one of the chief exponents, with certain particularities that he summed up under the name of "fruit painting", a reference to the notion of painting as a sensual act. In Paris, his work had been permeated by the consequences he drew from late Cubism, following especially Juan Gris's method of approaching the picture as an abstract composition in which allusions to reality

gradually appear. The overt inclination on the picture plane of the tabletop in *Nature morte au pichet* is a good example of this personal assimilation of the Cubist lesson. The need to add spontaneity and intuition to Cubism that he felt from the 1920s and 1930s onwards remained as a substratum up to his still lifes of the 1960s.

The canvas was painted in the same year as his intimate friend and patron Tériade published a monograph on him with a text by Jean Grenier. Dating from this same period is the *Still Life* in gouache on paper that joined the collection of Banco de España more recently. Both works reflect the persistence in his late pieces of the main tenets of the Paris School, and they are excellent testimonies to his renewal of the genre of the still life in the modernist art of the twentieth century. MM



## Antonio Saura

1930-1998

### Head

1958

Oil on canvas

60 × 72.2 cm

Colección Banco de España

"A picture is above all a blank surface that has to be filled with something. The canvas is an unlimited battlefield. Before it, the painter engages in a tragic and sensual hand-to-hand combat, transforming an inert and passive material with his gestures into a passionate cyclone, a cosmogonic energy that is now forever radiant." These words written by Antonio Saura in 1958, around the time that he produced the works in the Banco de España Collection, present a new concept of the pictorial work in which the lead is taken by the corporal, the dramatic and the idea of struggle. It was precisely in the second half of the 1950s, in relation to the foundation of the group El Paso in 1957, that

Saura situated himself in the lineage of Spanish Baroque painting, where he found a telluric connection and a "national" root for his work in blackness, drama and the tragedy of the dislocated human body. This led the enthusiastic critics of the period to see him as mingling the dramaticism of El Greco and Goya with the robust austerity of Zurbarán. However, this affiliation does not erase a more transnational component linked to the late Surrealism that infused his early work. The two works at the Banco de España are in fact representative of two distinct approaches to the "convulsive beauty" preached by André Breton, which proved so enticing to the young Saura.

*Head* dates from 1958, the year when Saura represented Spain at the Venice Biennale. It cannot be separated from the Surrealist taste for the phantoms of amputation whose remote origin lies in anatomical studies. It is a head of very lightly sketched outlines, detached from its body, which attains a high degree of dramaticism through its association with a sort of expressive and tormented skull, or with a severed head of John the Baptist, one of the first metamorphoses of a fantasy that was especially successful in the Spanish Baroque. Perceptible

in the work is a certain compositional interest that approximates it to a still life or *vanitas* sieved through the filter of the fatalist post-war Picasso, as well as through the graphics of an artist like Robert Matta, to whom it is linked by that lively constellation of sgraffito lines, the sign of a Saura who was still searching for a gestural poetics of his own. Once developed, this language would lead him to recoup the theme of the head detached from the body as an intermittent motif until shortly before his death. Given its early date, it is possible that the work was intended as a "self-portrait", understood in Saura's own way. There are several facts to support such a hypothesis: the self-portrait was one of the practices that originated his interest in the motif of the head in the late fifties; it is extraordinarily similar to other works like *Self-portrait* (1959, R. Stadler Collection, Paris), identical in size and with almost the same features; and finally, a clue was given by the artist himself: "In not referring specifically to a particular face, and having sprung from my own hand, I thought these works would reflect something of myself, opting for this equivocal title which still arouses a certain demythologising jubilation in me." CM

## Joan Hernández Pijuan

1931-2005

### *Small Blue Still Life*

1969

Oil on canvas

33 x 24 cm

Colección Banco de España

This is one of the sparest contemporary still lifes in the Banco de España Collection. In the lower half of the canvas, on its central axis, are a realistically depicted egg and a goblet, or its bright shadow, endowed with an evanescent substance. Much of the paint surface is occupied by a flat, dark space that is nevertheless speckled with small white dots that allow glimpses of the weave of the canvas and create a peculiar atmosphere. A horizontal strip of more uniform black at the foot of the canvas seems to serve as a support for these objects, which would otherwise appear to be gravitating in a vacuum. The egg is arranged on this support in such a way that it seems to be detaching itself from the picture surface, as though about to fall off the front into the real space occupied by the viewer. Its situation on this horizontal plane recalls a habitual technique in countless Baroque still lifes. The silent and motionless figures of this *Small Blue Still Life*, with their austerity and stillness outlined against a dark and silent background, harmonise with the great still life tradition of Zurbarán and Sánchez Cotán.

Two years before painting this picture, in 1967, Hernández Pijuan, one of the foremost Spanish painters of the second half of the twentieth century, confessed to feeling lost in his Informalist investigations, a path which had led him to concentrate especially on the pictorial material. As this interest diminished, he felt increasingly attracted by empty surfaces, deserted spaces, and the need to establish a relationship between objects and such spaces. Objects must have an existence of their own, he reflected, but their balance can only be explained in relation to space. He admits to

having finally resolved the problem when he realised that his true material was space itself. This picture is one of the pictorial materialisations of that solution. Hernández Pijuan had just undertaken the execution of a series of still lifes in which the repertoire of objects was limited to just three icons: a pared apple and, as in this case, a goblet and an egg. They were about to announce a return to the traditional still life, but his compositions were detained at the exact point where he ascertained that space was the actual object of the picture. This was a key discovery for his poetics, as Hernández Pijuan was to confess that his greatest and most constant preoccupation had been to convert space into the protagonist of his painting. He thus situates these objects as the focus of attention in large empty spaces, making this type of composition the nerve centre of the mutation that is taking place in his pictorial space. These were familiar objects, invariably painted with realism on dark backgrounds that acquired a metaphysical dimension. They also responded to a need to "retrieve what I had lived, what I knew, what I loved, what was close to me, what I understood." This limited repertoire was immediately joined by his working

tools, "things" that were just as close. The naked presence of the objects encounters the intimate and placid resonance transmitted by the everyday. Unlike other still lifes which he painted in this period, the goblet here is distanced from his naturalist goal to become a kind of light shadow or ungraspable or intangible figure. In any case, they are always very simple objects with a high degree of formal perfection that transmit a sensation of isolation, integrity and exactitude. "I painted these first objects with the purpose of giving a support, as minimally expressive elements, to the monochrome vacuum on which they are situated. They configure boundaries or references to space." Independently of their essentially pictorial origin, these still lifes by Hernández Pijuan reverberate with the stripped-down atmospheres of some works in the history of painting which give the impression of being traversed by the fluttering of a soul.

The Banco de España Collection holds another work by Hernández Pijuan, *Les albes de Segre* (1982), an example of his way of suggesting landscapes during a later period in his artistic career by means of a mixture of memory, experience and emotion. MM



## Carmen Laffón

1934-2021

### *Bronze Cupboard I*

1995

Patinated bronze

71 × 43.3 × 30 cm

Colección Banco de España

When the Andalusian artist Carmen Laffón (Seville, 1954-Sanlúcar de Barrameda, 2021), who had produced paintings up to the 1990s, started to sculpt, she made many of her three-dimensional pieces, like the one here, in bronze, a noble material common in other Spanish realist artists of her generation. Nevertheless, she also used poorer materials, such as the plaster of the vines she presented in her unforgettable exhibition at the Benedictine abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos (2006).

With a frontal presentation and strong pictorial references, *Bronze Cupboard I* (1995) portrays the same objects in this simple piece of furniture as can be found in her paintings. The cupboard is made to a popular design, with no ornamentation whatsoever to be observed as it is a functional object. It holds some modest pieces of crockery whose primal referent could be clay, the material in which the sculpture was in fact originally modelled. A bowl and jug on the top of the cupboard are accompanied by other objects kept inside, among which we see a large jar, as one of the doors of the cupboard is open. Humble though it is, the cupboard can be locked with a key, as things which are worthless to some are treasures to others. The simplicity presented in this still life runs parallel to her formula for painting landscapes. As she described it herself in her speech when inducted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in 2000, this is "a landscape without adornments. I think the quality that ennobles it is its simplicity, that apparent simplicity of infinite horizontals which divide the spaces of sea and sky and configure the strip of the Reserve. In my view, it is in the clarity and purity of the drawing of these lines that its harmony, vigour and force reside."

Carmen Laffón presents a minimalised vision of the everyday crockery of a modest family. These simple objects for daily use are laid out in line, in this respect recalling the arrangements of the still lifes of Zurbarán. In this cupboard and its crockery, the passage of time is frozen in an instant, and the whole of a life experience is liable to be summed up in that second. These cupboards, like the suspended time of her paintings, can therefore be interpreted as an accumulation of instants, in this case of experiences in the home. The pieces transmit a sediment of life that eternalises the daily routine of the women of our recent past, for whom one day was similar to the next and the one before: days of oil soap cleaner, breadcrumbs with garlic, a brazier in winter and a fan held to the breast in the blazing Andalusian summer. From an early age, the artist in fact lived in La Jara, a district of the town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda near Cádiz, where she continued to reside in what was originally the family's summer home near the estuary of the River Guadalquivir (described by Lorca as having "maroon whiskers"), and from which she serenely observed the living

beauty of the Doñana Nature Reserve for eighty-seven years, from her childhood until her death last year.

This cupboard also has the appearance of a *lararium*. The *lararium* was a small Roman altar with elements that materialised the guardian spirits of the home and the memory of its forefathers. In a *domus*, it would be located in the *atrium*, at the entrance to the house, but in more modest dwellings it was kept in the kitchens, near the stoves. The protecting gods and energies would slip in among the pots and pans, into the ingredients of the food, and into the affectionate work of taking care of others, as the Spanish mystic Teresa of Ávila was to express centuries later with the phrase: "The Lord also walks among the stewpots" (*Fundaciones*, 5, 8).

The humble objects and shelves of Carmen Laffón, whose bronze epidermis holds unplumbable depths of times, evocations and memory, were felicitously retitled by the Spanish art historian and critic Francisco Calvo Serraller as "*almarios*", or "cupboards of the soul", because, as he wrote, "they are laden with invisible presences, with phantoms that escape through their half-open doors." IT





## The Baroque: flowering and fruitfulness

Van der Hamen's *Pomona and Vertumnus*, the crowning work of his production, forms the central nucleus of this exhibition together with its pendant, on loan from the Museo del Prado: *Offering to Flora*, an analogous composition, though arranged as a symmetrical mirror image. Both works, together with others also on display in the exhibition, probably hung in the palace of Jean de Croy, a major personality in the Spanish court at that time. The receptions he held at his residence were aimed at heightening the loyalty of the Flemish elite to the new king of Spain, Philip IV, which involved a great show of hospitality towards the illustrious travellers who passed through Madrid. In this way, the still life contributed to the formation of a distinct urban aristocratic culture in seventeenth-century Madrid, on the one hand by creating a fiction of abundance that disguised the economic realities of the Spanish capital, and on the other by flaunting the prosperity that Flemish subjects like Jean de Croy continued to enjoy under the new public regime.

Nevertheless, despite the rise of the still life and the representation of flowers in the Baroque, the genre was still held in low regard among the academic categories, as it was considered to be neither as technically complex as the portrait nor as morally elevated as religious or history painting. This was despite the fact that behind those fruits and flowers, artists were able to conceal powerful metaphors of a philosophical or speculative nature, as well as reflections on concepts like hospitality, mysticism and fragility.

# Manufactory of Gerard Peemans, after cartoons by David Teniers III

## *The Months of May and June*

c. 1679  
Tapestry  
418 × 476 cm  
Quality 85/90 threads/dm  
Inscriptions: "MAIVS.JVNIUS"  
"G. PEEMANS"

## *The Months of September and October*

c. 1679  
Tapestry  
418 × 476 cm  
Quality 85/90 threads/dm  
Inscriptions: "SEPTEMBER.OCTOBER"  
"B.B / G. PEEMANS"

These two pieces belong to a series of tapestries dedicated to the months of the year, grouped in pairs. The months are represented by female figures who hold the distinctive attributes of each one, following the conventions fixed by the iconology of Cesare Ripa in the sixteenth century. Moreover, each month is accompanied by its corresponding sign of the zodiac and a cortège of putti or winged children who play with the flowers or fruits proper to each season. They are highly representative pieces of the work of the Flemish tapestry makers, who had dominated the European market since the end of the fifteenth century and still preserved their fame and manufacturing vigour during the Baroque. Because of both their rich materials and their visual impressiveness, they were greatly

favoured for palace decoration, and more highly appreciated even than painting. Moreover, their compositions were provided by renowned artists, which added still more prestige to the product. At the same time, the cartoons from which they were woven allowed successive issues in order to satisfy the demand of an international clientele keen to enjoy the aura of the work of recognised artists.

Such is the case of this set dedicated to the months, whose first series was commissioned by Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria after his arrival in Brussels as governor of the Low Countries. The compositions were designed by Jan van de Hoecke between 1647 and 1649, and he also provided the drawings that were used to make the cartoons. These were

executed by a group of artists who distributed the work according to their speciality. Pierre Thijs and Thomas Willeboirts took charge of the figures, while the animals, fundamentally birds and fishes, were entrusted to Adriaen van Utrecht, and the flowers to Jan Brueghel the Younger. The series was woven in about 1650 in the Brussels workshops of Evrard Leyniers III and Gilles van Habbeke. This first cycle was made up of a total of ten tapestries, as the group of six dedicated to the months was completed with another four representing *Day, Night, The Four Elements* and *The Four Seasons*.

This *princeps* series for Archduke Leopold Wilhelm ended up in the Imperial Collections in Vienna after being inherited successively by Archduke Charles Joseph of



Habsburg and Emperor Leopold I. The prestige it acquired is demonstrated by the fact that several further sets were woven, of which the only one preserved in its entirety is the one kept at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. Subsequently, David Teniers III produced some new cartoons, refashioning Van der Hoecke's initial designs, in which he included scenes inspired by other compositions by his father, David Teniers II. Several editions of these new compositions were made on the looms of the tapestry manufacturer Gerard Peemans to commissions from various patrons. Significantly, two of them were commissioned by the holders of important Spanish noble titles. The first of these is recorded as having been woven for the Duke of Pastrana, and the second, the

one shown here, for the Duke of Villahermosa. This set, belonging to the Banco de España Collection, and the one at Prague Castle remain intact. There are records of other incomplete series of *The Months*, with varying numbers of tapestries, at Waddesdon Manor (Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire) (four tapestries dated between 1680 and 1700), Holkham Hall (Norfolk) (two pieces), and the set that was kept until 1979 at El Quexigal (Ávila) (three pieces). There is also a fragment of *September and October* in the Art Institute of Chicago (1938.1309, after 1675).

According to contemporary documentary testimonies, the tapestries for the ninth Duke of Villahermosa, Carlos de Aragón Gurrea y Borja, were being woven in

1679. The agreement reached with Peemans established the production of "six pieces with a height of six *anas*. The duke pacts a price of 25 and a half florins per *ana*." The coat-of-arms located on each one under the cartouche with the names of the corresponding months is that of the city of Mons (Bergen in Dutch), the capital of the region of Hainaut (Belgium). During his term as governor of the Low Countries, Villahermosa had managed to raise the French siege of this city in 1678, a feat for which he was awarded the Golden Fleece by Charles II. The Latin motto which accompanies the shield of Mons makes reference to this honour attained through arms by the count during the so-called Franco-Dutch War. Its translation, according to García Calvo, is: "The victory in Hainaut





conceded the glory of the fruit and the colours of the blood." This is the principal motif that shows the tapestry in the collection to be identifiable as the one commissioned by Villahermosa, who would have sought to decorate a room in his family palace with a series that commemorated the event which won him the highest distinction of the Hispanic monarchy. After passing through various owners, they ended up on the antiques market. Having been offered in 1933 to the Duke of Alba, they were finally acquired through the mediation of Livinio Stuyck, also the director of the Royal Tapestry Factory in Madrid, for the central headquarters of the Banco de España. The bank's General Assembly Room was later refurbished to enable their correct display, and this arrangement is maintained today.

Since this is a set dedicated to the different phases of the year, the allegories used the vegetable repertoire associated with the changing seasons. To the winged personifications of Van de Hoecke's original design, Teniers added complementary popular scenes taken from his family's iconographic repertoire. The pagan fable is thus intermingled with idyllic visions of the activities proper to each month. In the tapestry of *May and June*, he therefore added a villagers' dance, signifying the joy provoked by the abundance and benign climate of spring. In the meantime, *September and October* shows the wine harvest. The display of flowers and fruits, among which the infantile putti fly and play in animated postures, dynamically offsets the more solemn figures of the deities of the months. AAF





# **Juan van der Hamen y León (Workshop)**

1596-1631

*Still Life with Melons, Cardoon, Sweetmeats, Meat and Fish*

*Still Life with Fruits and Goat's Head (Kitchen Still Life)*

1625

c. 1625

Oil on canvas

71 x 123 cm

Colección Banco de España

These paintings depict a wide variety of foodstuffs – fruit, half a goat's head, a cardoon, a piece of pork, cold beef cuts and sausages, sweetmeats, wine, and even a sea-bream. All could be found in the kitchens of the wealthy people of the time. They are exhibited in combinations that do not appear to follow the conventional arrangements of foodstuffs in larders, and even contradict today's health and safety advice: in one picture, a raw cardoon lies alongside some sweetmeats and a glass of wine, while suspended above them are a piece of pork, a sea-bream and some sausages, while in the other, half a goat's head hangs over a bowl full of quinces. Nevertheless, it is essentially a question of pictorial arrangements in which the artist aimed at visually maximising the variety and scope of the foodstuffs as proof of his skill at representing them. Moreover,

what unifies the elements here is the idea of abundance. The pictures try to show a wealth of foods that transmits a sense of well-being to the viewer. The luxury items which are the central pieces of the pictures – two elaborate bowls, one of ceramic and the other of crystal, both incrustated in gold – are of key importance in this respect, setting an appropriate tone of opulence and social refinement. These objects may well have been inventions created by the painter. The owners and viewers of the pictures would not have minded, as they continued to symbolise the trappings of a comfortable lifestyle in which the consumption of the foodstuffs depicted was the norm. In this way, the images could even function as a sort of wish-fulfilment on the part of the owner and viewer, especially in the cultures of the early modern age, when the risk of poverty was a permanent one.

The composition of this pair of pictures, which show a dominant central motif flanked by a series of elements on a stone shelf and others hanging from a beam, typifies the *mise-en-scène* of many works painted in the 1620s in response to the success of Juan van der Hamen, who has been attributed with these paintings in the past. Evidently, the central motifs recall the use made by this artist of the incrustated blue crystal bowl seen in the picture of fruits and sweetmeats in the Banco de España Collection, which is exhibited here. The long rectangular form of the pictures made them ideal for hanging over the doors or windows of a house of the period, a habitual place for still lifes and landscapes at that time. These canvases exemplify a type of composition that made them easy to read in such settings, with isolated elements in the foreground emphasised with strong lighting against a black background, and arranged in a relatively clear and simple pictorial structure.

The pictures are compositions of elements studied separately, and it is unlikely that the artist took studies of all the objects from life. The luxurious bowls in the centre of the works do not appear to have been painted on the basis of real objects but of other representations, and the ormolu mounts are treated somewhat schematically. However, the surface details of some of the other objects suggest that they are the fruit of observation. See, for example, the details of the surface of the cardoon, or the rich range of colours on the head of the fish and the rind of the melon. The good state of preservation of the still lifes allows full appreciation of the assured and fluid brushwork in these paintings, similar to that of Alejandro de Loarte (1590/1600-1626). Regrettably, the signature to the left of the bowl of melons has been repainted and is now practically impossible to decipher with the naked eye: "Ju<sup>o</sup> frt Jn / fap<sup>o</sup>". PC

## Juan van der Hamen y León

1596-1631

### *Still Life with Vase of Flowers and a Dog*

c .1625

Oil on canvas

228 × 95 cm

Museo Nacional del Prado



This picture forms part of a pair of works. Its companion piece, Juan van der Hamen's *Still Life with Vase of Flowers and a Puppy*, is preserved at the Museo del Prado. The works are first documented in the Madrid collection of the Flemish nobleman Jean de Croy (1588-1638), second Count of Solre. De Croy was the captain of the royal guard known as the *Archeros de Borgoña*. Van der Hamen was a member of the guard and painted De Croy's portrait. Solre's *post mortem* inventory records the pair of works in an antechamber leading to the main gallery. The ambiguous description in the inventory, which gives the canvases as hanging "along a door", is open to interpretation. Either the pictures hung on each side of the door, or else they were attached in some way to the door itself, perhaps on each of a pair of double doors. If they really concealed the door itself, the viewers would effectively have walked "in" and "through" these spaces, and they would themselves have formed part of the entertainment of visiting the gallery. A special decorative use of this type would explain their vertical format and their unusual compositions. They were acquired for the Royal Collection in the sale of the Count's goods after his death in 1638, and have always remained together since the artist's death.

The circumstances in which they were painted are unknown, but given the degree of familiarity between Van der Hamen and his client, they may have been done as a "caprice" at the painter's own initiative. Van der Hamen probably knew enough about Solre's personal tastes to satisfy him with his pictures. The guard dog – a large Bernese mountain dog – and its playful puppy may well have belonged to his patron himself. The clock seems to be a real object. The spectacular blue glass vases set in ormolu mounts, which contain ingenious radial arrangements of ornamental flowers, come from the Grand Ducal workshops of the Medici in Florence. However, neither of these objects appears in the *post mortem* inventory and sale of the contents of Croy's house. This suggests that Van der Hamen chose generic objects from his habitual repertoire that symbolised luxury and a noble lifestyle. Italian glassware, for instance, was fashionable in the Spanish court. Owing to the great demand for it and its scarcity in Madrid, the Grand Duke regularly sent

consignments to his agents at the court of Philip III to be strategically distributed as gifts in return for political favours. In real life, these objects were suitable accessories for the social level to which Solre belonged, and like other viewers of his class, he would have recognised their prestige value. Indeed, in view of the social importance of the objects represented, it may be that Van der Hamen's paintings were bought for the Royal Collection by Philip IV. Evidently, both collectors also appreciated the aesthetic value of Van der Hamen's depiction of these objects and the fictitious presence in the artwork of material items which they, like us, perhaps never saw or touched in real life.

The canvases contain two of the most varied and abundant arrangements of cultivated flowers in Van der Hamen's oeuvre, and it is possible that he created them in response to Solre's interest in horticulture. In this respect, the attractiveness of the pictures matches that of the *Flora and Pomona* in the Banco de España Collection, which may also have been in the possession of Solre, and which contains some sixty varieties of flower. Solre's garden in the outskirts of Madrid was the *locus amoenus* of his leisure activities, and he probably enjoyed identifying the flowers on the canvases. The botanical knowledge they contain, despite the relative simplification of the floral structures by the painter, endows these works with a scientific dimension. One of the flowers in the picture with the puppy, in the middle ground to the left of the sunflower, is unfinished, showing the earthy colour of the priming of the canvas. The variety and large number of flowers on a single plane, no doubt too many to fit into a real vase, was also a source of delight for connoisseurs of painting, who saw this artificial and synthetic representation as an art that surpassed nature itself. The drooping white petals, which alert us to the natural processes of decay to which all living beings are subject, form part of the painting's ironic rhetoric.

The argument, based on the discourses of northern European painting, that the objects depicted in these works represent the senses seems rather far-fetched in the view of the current author. It is more likely that what is intended here is the idea of sociability. The tables on the sides of Solre's pair of canvases are arranged with a silver tray with cakes and

candied fruits on one, and cherries in syrup and boxes of quince jelly on the other, as though laid out for a social occasion, together with fine crystal vessels and a silver wine bucket. The extraordinary virtuosity of Van der Hamen's depiction of reality comes into play here once more in the combination of social and pictorial forms in his paintings. Van der Hamen's treatment of the subject creates the illusion for the dining viewer of a "real" situation owing to the size of the canvases, the elementary rules of linear perspective and the faithful "life-size" depiction of the objects. The spectator is invited to enter these pictorial spaces and taste the sweets on offer, accompanied by the pleasant "smell" of the flowers. The "living" figures involve the viewer in this interplay of gazes: the large dog looks at us, and the puppy evidently wants to play with the ball. The ludic treatment of the subject of the pictorial illusion is in total consonance with the ludic tone of the social occasions in which it was presented. In providing an entertaining prologue on the power and pleasures of painting, they constitute a suitable introduction to the art gallery, which was the most interesting room for the most cultured visitors to Solre's home. The concept of *trompe-l'oeil* – deceiving the eye so that it will perceive painted objects as if they were real – inscribed at the heart of the still life genre from its beginnings in classical Antiquity is here revived in a particularly original and ludic way, and is aimed at a specific public at court. PC



## Juan van der Hamen y León

1596-1631

### *Still Life of Fruits and Sweetmeats*

c. 1621

Oil on canvas

84 × 104 cm

Colección Banco de España

This picture was purchased by Banco de España in 1967 from the heirs of the pioneer in the study of the Spanish still life, Julio Cavestany, Marquis of Moret. Its companion piece, *Still Life with Basket, Boxes and Jars of Sweetmeats*, signed and dated in 1622, was similarly acquired by the Museo Nacional del Prado in 1999 (P7743). William Jordan assigned the Banco de España canvas the earlier date of c. 1621 on the basis of its style and the handling of the paint. The modelling of the forms in the picture is much less summary than in another version of the composition in a private collection, which is signed and dated in 1621, and he sees this as proof that it is the principal version. If it were so, it is possible that the picture remained in the artist's studio for some years in order to serve as a prototype for new copies and versions. The motifs of the still life shown here and in its pair appear in other works by Van der

Hamen, in accordance with his practice of producing replicas and variants of his compositions in response to market demand. Nevertheless, it would have been practically impossible for the artist's unversed contemporaries to tell whether the paintings were direct representations from life or partially recycled on the basis of other autograph images, as there was really no perceptible loss to be appreciated in their apparent "naturalism".

In *Still Life of Fruits and Sweetmeats* and *Still Life with Basket, Boxes and Jars of Sweetmeats*, the motifs are presented in generally symmetrical compositions within a fictitious window frame, a format invented for still life compositions by Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560-1627). These are very forceful pictorial compositions, as they are made up of relatively few objects in clear and attractive arrangements with the understanding of structure and plasticity of form habitual in the artist. Indeed, the formal character of the artist's still lifes won him an enthusiastic contemporary public when his works were rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century. Van der Hamen isolates the life-size motifs inside the window frame and shows them with a strong light projected onto a dark background. A striking interaction is thus set up between the empty darkness of the upper part of the canvases and the insistent volumes of the foreground objects that emerge from it. Van der Hamen exploits the

projection of the object over the front edge of the window ledge – the crystallised carrot and the bread roll on the canvas shown here, and the box of sweetmeats in its pair – to create the illusion of the continuity of the pictorial space in our own, thus strengthening the apparent "reality" of what is depicted.

Although the still lifes are presented in relatively sober and austere pictorial settings, the foodstuffs represented evoke the cheerful social occasions on which they were – and still are – consumed in Spain. As he worked in Madrid, Van der Hamen sought to attract the attention of urbane clients among the members of the court administration and the nobility by selecting motifs associated with a refined and cultivated lifestyle. The most evident result of this strategy to be observed here is the elaborate fruit bowl of blue glass incrustated in an ornamental stand of gilt silver. In fact, this became one of the artist's characteristic motifs, repeated in many of his still lifes and moreover imitated by his competitors. The common or garden fruit – apples, plums, a lemon – is presented in the bowl as it might be arranged on a distinguished table, adorned with plum branches. Next to it are dishes with pedestals, full of sponge cakes and candied fruits. The most intriguing motifs of the composition are the three small lobulated fruits on the left, which look like tomatoes or red peppers. In either case, they are among the rare



examples of American flora to appear in still life painting in Spain.

The ludic twinned arrangement of this picture with the *Still Life with Basket, Boxes and Jars of Sweetmeats* shows us the fruit in its natural state and as candied sweetmeats. The pair shows a basket laden with sponge cakes, a sugar *rosquilla* (a hard pastry), and crystallised oranges, plums, sweet potato and carrots, flanked by a jar of honey and wooden boxes of marzipan or quince jelly and a jar of preserves, the latter motifs also appearing in *Still Life with Dog*. The candied fruits were relatively expensive products in Madrid at that time (and still are today), and were associated with the tables of the wealthiest. Although the painter is said to have been annoyed by the way in which his still lifes of sweetmeats eclipsed his artistic reputation in the ostensibly "more elevated" genres of narrative painting and portraiture, he fed the demands of collectors with a large number of pictures and a wide range of themes. Indeed, still lifes of sweetmeats were one of the innovative authorial "brands" he developed for the market. It is possible that they were painted in response to imported pictures like those of Osias Beert I (c. 1530-1624), a painter from Antwerp. In the case of Van der Hamen, related to the Flemish community in Madrid, it comes as no surprise that he should have had extensive knowledge of northern European art. An unfinished still life of "*bizcochos* (sponge cakes) and chocolate", recorded in Van der Hamen's *post mortem* inventory, suggests that he was the first to paint still lifes with chocolate, which would later become a staple theme of the genre in Spain.

Despite Van der Hamen's own uneasiness at his ambiguous contemporary artistic category in the humble genre of still life painting, his name remains associated with it. Today, more works of this type are known by his hand than by any other painter of his generation. They are still admired for their aesthetic qualities, and of all of them, the *Still Life with Basket, Boxes and Jars of Sweetmeats* remains one of the most outstanding. PC



## Giovanni Battista Crescenzi

1577-1635

### *Metal Dish with Grapes and Pears*

1626

Oil on canvas

35 x 50 cm

Madrid, Colección Colomer

This is the only still life so far to have been identified as an autograph work by the Roman nobleman and dilettante artist Giovanni Battista Crescenzi. The painting originates in the collection of Cassiano dal Pozzo, an illustrious Italian scholar and collector who came to Madrid as secretary to Cardinal Francesco Barberini during his extraordinary legation of 1625 to 1626.

The precise inscription on the reverse of the canvas, now hidden behind a later relining and known through photographs, informs us of Crescenzi's authorship, of the date of its execution during his stay in Madrid, and of the fact it was a gift from the artist himself. In 1695, it appears inventoried in the collection of his heirs, maintaining the attribution at the turn of the eighteenth century but confusing the pears with quinces: "*un quadro di tela da mezza testa per traverso rappresentate un Rampazzo di Pergolese Sopra d'un piatto con due cotogni con sua cornice fatta a cassa dorata liscia, originale del Crescenzi*".

Nevertheless, authors like W.B. Jordan have questioned the true filiation of the work on the grounds of the literal coincidence of the motif with that depicted in works by Juan van der Hamen. The metal dish with pears thus appears in an identical arrangement in two paintings signed by Van der Hamen in 1629. However, the supposed authorship of Van der Hamen is denied by the firm assertion made in the Latin inscription added by Dal Pozzo.

His statement is further supported by the artistry of the canvas itself, with an atmosphere and colouring that are unusual in Van der Hamen. The repetition of the subject in works by different artists must therefore have an explanation in accordance with the pictorial ambience that Crescenzi had created in Madrid.

The coincidence certainly confirms that the two artists knew each other. Furthermore, Van der Hamen made use in that same year, 1626, of this combination of grapes and pears in the basket that Vertumnus offers to the goddess of gardens and orchards in *Pomona and Vertumnus* in the Banco de España Collection. Once more, his pictorial graphics are different from those in Crescenzi's picture.

The reason for the similarity may lie in the academic practices at the palace of the Italian nobleman in Madrid, where there are reports of sessions of copying from life. These exercises allowed the painting of prototypes which could be used in definitive works. The creation of complex still lifes involved the juxtaposition of separately copied images which were then orchestrated

in a single composition. This accounts for the recurrent repetition of certain motifs by different specialists.

The fact that the motif was well known is reaffirmed by the existence of a new version of the *Metal Dish with Grapes and Pears* at the Museo Nacional del Prado (P006942). The painting in the Prado is rather smaller, but the boxing of the image indicates that it might have been cut down. Where the paintings of Crescenzi and Van der Hamen are concerned, it also differs in its perspectival focus, with the dish slightly more frontal and without projecting beyond the stone border.

This characteristic of forcing instability by making part of the metal dish surpass the surface and advance towards the viewer is a frequent device of naturalism, used here to heighten the fiction of the third dimension. The arrangement of the fruits, with the stalks pointing to the right, leaves the sprigs of the rachis visible, while the juicy density of the black grapes is appreciable on the other side. The iridescent skins of the globular grapes suggest their aqueous interior by contrast with the terse skins and hard consistency of the pears. Such a simple composition may hide an erudite evocation, since in the tradition of ancient Greece, guests were offered natural fruits and objects called *xenia*. The gift of still lifes between collectors of refined taste, especially when Dal Pozzo was a self-declared lover of Antiquity, no doubt contains a reference to those gifts known from the narratives of Pliny and Philostratus. AAF

## Juan van der Hamen y León

1596-1631

### *Pomona and Vertumnus*

1626

Oil on canvas

220 × 149 cm

Colección Banco de España.

Gift of Juan de Zavala

### *Offering to Flora*

1627

Oil on canvas

216 × 140 cm

Museo Nacional del Prado

*Pomona and Vertumnus* is regarded as a companion piece to the *Offering to Flora* (Museo Nacional del Prado). The paintings depict the goddesses of autumn and spring, they are of similar size (although the Prado painting appears to have been cut away at the sides, as indicated by the truncated cornucopia), and their compositions mirror each other in their symmetrical arrangement. On the other hand, they are dated in consecutive years and the treatment given to the mythological subjects differs considerably. It is possible that they hung as a pair in the collection of the Count of Solre, but the documentation is ambiguous in this respect. These are some of the most ambitious works by the artist to have been preserved. The distinctive features of both pictures are the cornucopias of fruits and flowers, for which Van der Hamen took advantage of his experience and fame as a painter of still lifes. The cornucopias are fundamental narrative elements in his treatment of historical subjects, and include the widest variety of fruits, vegetables and flowers ever painted by him, personifying the bounty of nature itself. The *Offering to Flora* represents nearly seventy varieties of flower. Its botanical diversity formed part of the “cultivated” attraction of such motifs for a select number of viewers, while most others would have been struck primarily by its impact on the senses – principally that of sight, in its visual variety, and that of smell, in its imagined potential. Van der Hamen was probably inspired by the rivalry with northern art in the royal collections. For example, Rubens's *Ceres and Pan*, painted in c. 1620 and sent to Madrid in 1623 in a dispatch of Flemish pictures for Queen Isabella of Bourbon, contained a cornucopia of fruits and flowers that was painted by Frans Snyder, a specialist in still lifes. Van der Hamen complained that his figure paintings were less appreciated by the market than his still lifes, and the pair of pictures under discussion here elegantly resolve this dichotomy by demonstrating his skill at both.

The poetic subjects of *Pomona and Flora* are doubtless the result of Van der Hamen's immersion in the literary world at court. He is said to have written verses himself on the theme *Ut pictura poesis*. Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, 14, 623-697) tells the story of Pomona, a virginal wood nymph and goddess of the *poma* or fruit of the trees, who









devoted herself to her orchards, and Vertumnus, a god of the changing seasons, who unsuccessfully wooed her under several disguises. Finally discarding the last of these, that of an old woman, he returned to his youthful self and seduced her, and she agreed to share her orchards with him in marriage. This story of unrequited love, seduction and final triumph suggests a reading of the picture as an allegory of marriage, a state exemplified by the interdependence of the elm and the vine, visible behind the protagonists, which Vertumnus used to persuade Pomona of his honourable intentions. Here, Vertumnus appears disguised as a gardener and shows decorous moderation in offering Pomona a basket of fruits as a love token, to which she responds with a peach from her cornucopia. The pornographic print drawn by Perino del Vaga, on the other hand, shows Pomona giving one of her apples to the mature and naked Vertumnus. Although Ovid makes his enamoured protagonist say that what he wants is her, not her fruit, this detail probably refers to the eventual surrender of her virginity in marriage. Pomona is an idealised figure of physical perfection. Her features in profile, like those of Vertumnus, are based on engravings by Antonio Tempesta after drawings of fantastic heads by Michelangelo. Pomona's cold and marble-like flesh and her gown of silvery white silk, which ironically invites touch, are chromatic articulations of

chastity and demureness. Hers is a fictitious costume of high breeding, hanging loose – her breasts are outlined by the folds of the fabric – with a notable absence of lace, and showing partial nudity in the bare arms and unshod feet.

Van der Hamen's Flora is differentiated from Pomona in being a portrait of a real model, which can be understood in terms of the *mythological portrait* in the European courtly context of the time. The writers of myths identified Flora with a Roman courtesan, Laurentia, whose sanctified cult became that of the goddess of spring. Van der Hamen's representation of the unknown seated woman may be a pictorial equivalent of the poetic resource of using names *all'antica* to hide the identities of the mistresses of great figures. An outstanding example of this is the case of the courtesan Margaret Lemon, the lover and model of Van Dyck, who portrayed her as Flora. The ideals of beauty, love and marriage could help to explain her role. Van der Hamen's work may even be a nuptial portrait or an epithalamium. Significant in this respect is the age of the model, together with her loose hair – an attribute of a maiden – and the sacred basket of roses for Venus. An almost contemporary pastiche of Van der Hamen's *Flora*, which forms a pair with a variant of his *Pomona and Vertumnus* and belonged to the collection of the Marquis of Leganés, converts the

figure into an extravagantly dressed noblewoman who is offered flowers by two classical cupids. In both pictures, Flora's low neckline, a form of 'undress' in the Spanish context, is in keeping with the Flemish and French fashion, a detail that may be of significance as regards the model's identity. Van der Hamen's Flora is seated in a modern walled garden with a classical fountain, rich in traditional symbolism as a place associated with sociability, leisure and well-being. The cut of her gown recalls the formal portrait, but is partly fictitious and indicates an indeterminacy between the worlds of reality and myth. This brightly coloured dress is perhaps of the type used in the Roman festival of the Floralia, and the saffron-coloured skirt may evoke the nuptial colours of ancient brides. The changing hues of the silk evoke the varied palette of spring, as well as the image of painting itself. The garland of flowers is the attribute of Flora and also of its inventor Glycera, whose love was celebrated by the ancient painter Pausias in his portrait. As is to be expected of a portrait, Flora looks towards the viewer, probably a man, who is placed in the role of admirer, suitor, husband and painter, and whom she may be thanking for his gift of roses. She seems to dedicate herself to him, with her right hand on her heart, and she points to the fertile "spring" of love in the mass of flowers, immortalised, like her beauty, by the painter's art. PC



**Juan de Arellano**

**1614-1676**

*Vase of Flowers*

*Vase of Flowers*

c. 1668-1670

Oil on canvas

81.5 × 60.5 cm

Colección Banco de España

During the Baroque, it was very common for still life painting to be organised in pairs or series, often with a purely decorative purpose. Sets of this kind abound in the catalogue of Juan de Arellano throughout his entire production, whether of vases, baskets or garlands. A consummate specialist in a genre that was on the rise in the Madrid of Philip IV and Charles II, part of his success was due to his ability to design compositional prototypes and a floral repertoire that permitted numerous variants when skilfully combined. Moreover, the creation of these sets was facilitated by the use of canvases with standardised measurements.

The pair of vases in the Banco de España Collection has been recognised as prototypical of this formula, now in

a phase of full maturity. In his earliest known vases, he generally used pieces in precious metals to hold the bouquets of flowers. In the course of the 1660s, however, he started to opt for increasingly simple glass vases that did not detract from the colourful display of the flowers, the true protagonists of these compositions. To underscore the connection between the floral arrangements, he tended to repeat the same type of vase, although he would vary the positioning or the species shown. In this case, the variation lies in the form of the glass receptacles, as only one has a foot while both contain a very similar botanical selection. They are structured in the same way, with a blue lily at the apex surrounded by red carnations and tulips. Indeed, the position of some flowers is practically



repeated in both, such as the bluebells or *belle de jour* superimposed on the body of the vases, the tulip with the drooping corolla on the right, or the rose in the centre. Distributed between the two is Arellano's habitual floral repertoire, which includes, besides the species already mentioned, yellow daffodils, anemones, roses of different colours and peonies.

These, then, are tried and trusted models that develop a well learned strategy for giving a casual effect to arrangements with an identical colour scheme, with the brighter colours (white, pink and yellow) in the centre and the more intense ones (red, blue and purple) towards the edges. The diverse morphology of each species is rendered with great liveliness, from the stalks submerged among

the reflections on the glass to their spread outwards in all directions until they almost touch the edges of the canvas. While there is a sufficiently close rendition of each plant for it to be recognised, this is not based only on copies from nature, as a knowledge of other painters is also discernible. Arellano forms part of a renewal of this subject matter in Europe that follows in the footsteps of Jan Brueghel, Daniel Seghers and particularly Mario Nuzzi.

The signed picture is a literal reproduction of an earlier piece by the painter, a picture of *Flowers in a Glass Vase* signed in 1668, which entered the Museo Nacional del Prado (P007921) in 2006. The canvas in the Banco de España Collection dispenses only with the worn appearance of the stone base in the Prado picture in using the

same surface for the two vases. In the meantime, the second painting, unsigned as is usual in these groups, is a very close variant. Given their technical and compositional proximity, they must be very similar in date.

Although these works' striving for ornamentality is evident, some authors have interpreted the fallen petals of the red and white tulip on the right of the second picture as a reflection on the fleetingness of life. While symbolism is undeniably present in the Baroque aesthetic, the detail can also be explained as a means of accentuating the realism of the depiction. AAF

## Gabriel de la Corte

1648-1694

### *Vase of Flowers*

### *Vase of Flowers*

c. 1687-1690

Oil on canvas

103 x 83 cm

Colección Banco de España

This pair of canvases constitutes a characteristic example of the work of Gabriel de la Corte, a specialist in the floral sub-genre in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. When they entered the Banco de España Collection, they were both still attributed to this master from Madrid, but a deficient state of conservation, with considerable dirt accumulated on the surface, oxidised varnishes and the distorting effect of previous restorations, made it difficult to view the picture and catalogue it correctly. These difficulties were compounded by a scant knowledge of this artist, on whom there had been virtually no new information since the seventeenth century, and by the limited production attributed to him. All this, together with a typology clearly inspired by the vases painted by the more famous and extensively studied Juan de Arellano, led to doubts on the old attribution. The set was therefore prudently reassigned to an anonymous follower of Arellano, and was given a broad dating (1660-1690) on the basis of the recognition of formal coincidences with Italian artists of the end of the century.

The works have remained with this assignation in the successive editions of the catalogue of the Banco de España Collections, as has Gabriel de la Corte's consideration as an "almost unknown" artist. However, their restoration in the workshops of the Museo Nacional del Prado in 2020 has necessitated a complete revision of this approximate classification. Similarly, advances in the study of the pictorial corpus of Gabriel de la Corte have contributed new pieces for comparison which allow his technique to be more precisely defined in the twenty-first century.

The restoration has revealed work of considerable quality, allowing



both canvases once more to be properly read. The loose and spontaneous brushwork, the luminous colouring that accentuates the fresh appearance of the plants depicted, and the impression of movement and organicity are now fully recognised as features of this artist from Madrid, and all are detectable in the Banco de España pictures. So too is the dense impasto, occasionally far from meticulous, with which he sought to capture the effect of life rather than the taxonomic details of the flowers. This did not detract from the material quality of the work, as examination has detected a careful superimposition of brushstrokes and transparencies with which he suggested the varied tactility and body of the flowers. Other coincidences include certain technical details like the use of canvases with a broad weft. All this makes it possible to include the paintings without any doubt in the catalogue of Gabriel de la Corte.

The lifting of the varnishes allows us to discern a restrained looseness in the brushwork rather than unkemptness and a vivid colouring that approximates both vases to what are accepted as De la Corte's most outstanding compositions, two floral garlands

signed in 1687 (Madrid, Universidad Complutense). They also coincide with them in their measurements, practically the same.

The same is not the case of the compositional organisation, which here depends on the traditional typology of the vase as the base of a radial arrangement of flowers. There is an evident debt in this case to Juan de Arellano, whose repertory abounds with flowers arranged on plinths or cubes of worn stone, like the pair preserved in the Banco de España Collection. Strongly lit against a neutral dark background, glass or metal receptacles are shown with exuberant bouquets of flowers springing from them. The combination of colours and vegetable forms reaches the edges of the canvas, and leaves and flowers sometimes even hang down to rest on the stone base. On the basis of this pattern, the works were often designed to form groups of two or even four paintings, as demonstrated both by preserved sets and by archive references to collections in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Madrid.

In his brief biography of Gabriel de la Corte, Antonio Palomino





mentioned that he painted “many sets in different houses, both of baskets and vases of flowers, and of plaques and garlands.” To avoid the monotony of a repetitive pattern and make the images more suggestive, it was common in pairs of canvases to introduce variations in the types of vase and in the repertoire of botanical species, also a frequent practice of Arellano’s.

Such an intention is appreciable here in the representation of two glass vases with different bronze attachments, in whose globular interiors it is possible to make out the straight stalks of the flowers submerged in water. De la Corte repeated this pattern in a well-known and securely attributed pair of vases whose concept and measurements are analogous to this one. These are two canvases in the Abelló Collection which have been dated to the last decade of the artist’s life. Their generally warmer and earthier tones justify this late date, unlike the Banco de España paintings, which are closer to the aforementioned garlands at the Universidad Complutense.

As regards the species depicted, they also refer us to those frequently painted by Arellano. Nevertheless,

as we have indicated, their spongier and looser formal execution distances them from the precise definition of the master from Santorcaz. The latter is also evoked by the strategic distribution of the colour masses, concentrating the lighter flowers – white or pale pink – in the centre of the arrangement, while the darker and contrasted tones, like reds and greens, are situated on the edges of the radial structure. In this case, for want of technical corroboration, but in view of other works by De la Corte, it is quite possible that some pigments in this area have darkened owing to their composition.

In the first of the canvases, the receptacle gains prominence only through its voluminous decorative foot, above which there rises a bouquet centred on some white roses combined with others in subtle pink or yellow shades. Arranged around them are anemones, white and red tulips and yellow daffodils together with a blossom of the same colour, perhaps broom. Finally, the outer circle is formed by a succession of carnations, red roses and some peonies, together with more anemones and small bunches of orange flowers. Some of these

flowers surround the richly gilded stem of the recipient and brush the plinth, like the carnations, the blue iris and the belle-de-jour hanging to the right of the viewer. Although the treatment is delicate and very attractive, the main interest is in the idea of a set rather than the individuality of each specimen, sometimes making specific identification difficult. De la Corte concentrated more on dynamic and colourful softness, which in the terms of the Spanish Baroque, as reported by Palomino in his biography, would have been the “*gentil bazarria*”, or “charming extravagance”, which attracted his public so much. The treatise writer mentioned that the models for his flowers varied, as some were copied directly from life while others reproduced those already painted by Juan de Arellano or Mario Nuzzi.

The second vase is more reminiscent in its forms of the models most frequently used by Juan de Arellano. The structure of a turned bronze foot supporting a spherical glass body, itself embraced by a second chased metal ring, was used by him on many occasions, most notably in the pairs belonging to the Naseiro (1664) and Abelló (1667) Collections, both in Madrid. As regards the arrangement of the bouquet, it repeats the rhythm of its companion, though with a greater predominance of white and some variations in the species. Among those identifiable in this case are mock orange and white narcissus. Like its pair, the lack of extreme detail does not detract from the credibility of the motifs, as the artist uses different applications of the oil for a skilful rendering of the different textures or reliefs of the petals. Short or paint-laden strokes are used to simulate stiffening, while lushness is suggested by broader and flatter strokes. This aligns him with European artists of his time like the Milanese Margherita Caffi (1648-1710), and where the vibrant orchestration of a motley floral arrangement is concerned, with the Neapolitan Andrea Belvedere (1652-1732).

Both compositions were designed as a complementary whole with a clearly decorative purpose, being objects where nature was brought indoors and isolated from the urban environment. Arranged and illuminated as though in small painted theatres, effigies of flowers arranged in fictional compositions now started to adorn courtly mansions and palaces. AAF

**Anonymous**  
**(possible attribution to**  
**Karl August Kuntsch)**

**Vase from the Manufactory**  
**of Carl Thieme, Potschappel,**  
**Dresden (History of Servius**  
**Tullius)**

c. 1890

Modelled and painted porcelain

Measurements with pedestal  
190 x 50 x 41 cm

Measurements without pedestal  
145 x 50 x 41 cm

Colección Banco de España



This large vase in the form of an amphora presents a whole range of decorative features typical of Saxon porcelain: sculptural groups, flowers and fruits in relief, modelled elements on the handles, and paintings on the surfaces with narrative scenes and flowers. Where the modelled elements are concerned, we first find a sculptural group with the figures of Mars and Minerva on the upper part of the lid. At their feet, a garland of small flowers frames a painted scene. On the shoulder of the body, we find a second group with allegories of the seasons, with Spring and Summer in the form of two female figures, one with a basket of flowers and the other with some ears of wheat. Between them is a crown on a cushion over which they scatter flowers. The acanthus-shaped handles sprout from two masks on the body that could be interpreted as the face of Myrrha. From the neck to the base of the body, a garland of large fruits and flowers frames the principal painted scene. On the foot, we once more find the repeated figure of Spring with a basket of flowers, which could also be interpreted as Flora, and an Eros or Cupid on the left side. Between the two, another garland of flowers and

fruits frames another painted scene. On the octagonal base, a further garland of fruits and flowers modelled in relief divides each of the eight faces, serving as the frame for several paintings. The painted parts are divided between the front face, which shows various mythological scenes, and the rear, on which several floral sprays are distributed.

The painted scenes on the front are based on mythological paintings by Angelica Kauffmann. The main scene painted on the belly of the vase is the history of Servius Tullius. The future king of Rome is the child who appears asleep with some flames emanating from his head. A woman tries to put them out with a bowl of water while a man raises his hands to prevent her. On the lid of the vase is a depiction of Cupid tied to a tree by the Three Graces, Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne, also taken from Kauffmann's work *Etiam amor criminibus plectitur*. On the neck of the vase, two flying putti bear a wreath with one hand. On the foot is a painted scene from the work *The Mirror of Venus*, also by the same painter, with Venus attended by the nymphs in the company of Cupid. Further references to love are found on the octagonal

pedestal, which presents three scenes. On the left is the story of Rinaldo and Armida, a scene inspired by Torcuato Tasso's literary work *Jerusalem Delivered*; on the left is Jupiter disguised as Diana, about to seduce the nymph Callisto; and in the centre is Helen presented by Venus to Paris. On the back of the vase are small floral sprays painted on the lid, neck and foot, and on the rear panels of the octagonal base. On the body, a large bouquet occupies the whole central surface with French roses, honeysuckles, tulips, primroses and other flowers.

Together with the use of gold, the rich palette, with pinks, oranges, blues, greens and turquoises, recalls Rococo models, very frequent throughout the nineteenth century in the Saxon porcelain factories, which repeated decorative formulae that had already been successful in Meissen in the previous century, sometimes combining elements from different periods. Such is the case of this piece, where we find sculptural groups or flowers and fruits in large relief garlands, mythological scenes and painted sprays of flowers in the Rococo taste alongside more classical features, such as the scrolled border painted in gold and the pink and turquoise palmettes in relief on the lower part of the body.

Kauffmann's mythological paintings were very widely disseminated at that time thanks to their publication as prints by Thomas Kirk, Francesco Bartolozzi, William Wynne Ryland and Thomas Burke. Her works were used in several European porcelain factories throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including those of Meissen and Vienna.

The blue mark of a T and an X under the base of this vase indicates that the piece comes from the factory of Carl Thieme in Potschappel (Dresden). This mark was used by the factory between 1888 and 1901, coinciding with the period when it was directed by Karl August Kuntsch, the son-in-law of the founder of the factory. Kuntsch was a recognised modeller and painter, and this work can probably be attributed to him. His sculptural work recalls some of the compositions of the eighteenth-century sculpture groups of Johann Joachim Kaendler. His paintings are also notable for their careful draughtsmanship and rich combination of colours.

This imposing vase is further embellished by the carved and gilded wooden pedestal on which it rests. FG

## Botanical cabinet I: flowers from another world

In the Early Modern Age, precisely when the genre of the still life was being developed, colonial expeditions and encounters with new species led to the development of practices that combined art and science, such as the visual registration and classification of plants, flowers and fruits. Stemming from the powerful metropolises of Europe, these disciplines have left their sediment in the discourses of many artists, who have cast a decolonial gaze in recent decades over practices whose effects are still felt today.

Situated between a critique of the exoticising and a recovery to various ends of that taxonomic mentality, this section brings together a series of artists who subscribe to the criticism of the processes of inequality and abuse that began during the colonial period, and who also invite us to redraw the borders between disciplines and their relationship with power. Plants, flowers, seeds and fruits often serve as metaphors for human beings. Among the leaves that make up this strange botanical cabinet, there are suggestive reflections on forced migration, endangered communities, and ways of living with nature that are resistant to the mass exploitation of resources and its consequences.

## Lothar Baumgarten

1944-2018

### *Pilgrim*

1969

Chromogenic print on paper

64.8 × 82.6 cm

Edition 2/10

Colección Banco de España



Together with *Finsternis gekreuzter Schatten*, *Pilgrim* is one of the two photographs by the conceptual artist Lothar Baumgarten (Rheinsberg, Germany, 1944-Berlin, 2018) in the Banco de España Collection. He produced this image in 1969, when he had not yet finished his Fine Arts studies at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. A pupil of Joseph Beuys for a year, his beginnings were strongly influenced by his readings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. His father was in fact an anthropologist, so he was accompanied from an early age by an abundance of critical literature on ethnography and anthropology. The questioning both of languages and of disciplines for two-dimensional and three-dimensional representation, the opposition between nature and culture and the rejection of the art market imbued these early works, characterised by the production of ephemeral sculptures that remain in existence only in the form of photographic documents. At that time, this was a political stratagem of not making objects that could be sold.

A year before producing *Pilgrim*, Lothar Baumgarten anticipated what would later be called “institutional critique” in the 81 slides that make up his piece *Unsettled Objects* (1968-1969). Baumgarten had made a selection of the artifacts held at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, a museum set up in the nineteenth century, and had photographed them in order to

project his images in a palimpsest-like chain by means of a carousel projector. The German artist was making it evident how western museums choose, keep and present objects belonging to cultures which they *taxonomise* as belonging to the “other”, generating supposedly objective methods of study with disciplines like ethnology and anthropology. *Unsettled Objects* was the first piece in which Baumgarten juxtaposed text and image. The words over the images clash with the scientific taxonomies that have been used since the Enlightenment to create a colonial narrative of “the other”, a displacement that transforms utilitarian items into aesthetic objects and incomprehensible forms enclosed in a display case. Such a narrative is questioned in a piece like *Pilgrim*, which takes us back to what Foucault in *The Order of Things* called popular taxonomies, individual methods of organisation free of consensus.

In these pieces, Baumgarten was already pointing forward to his later career as an ethnological and anthropological artist, although here the journey (let us recall his sojourn of almost two years with the Yanomami Indians of the Amazon jungle of Venezuela in the 1970s) was a metaphorical simulacrum in which he took pictures in the back garden of his house in a forest near the Rhine. The German artist used found objects which he modified slightly to make his own sculptures. In the case of *Pilgrim*

(1969), he used a small toy fawn, a European deer, which he modified by crowning it with a blurred element that might appear to be a tropical plant or a huge moth. In this way, he used a very visible and almost inoffensive trick to question the theoretical objectivity of photography. In this series, finished in 1972 and entitled *Kultur-Natur, Manipulierte Realität*, he sought to fuse the two objects. Here this leads us to interpret that this small pilgrim is a mythological animal, a winged mammal walking towards a holy place in an act of devotion and spiritual belief.

As Baumgarten himself has stated, “ethnographic accumulation, the collection of greatly coveted rarities, gives visible form to the desire for power, which is achieved through the adaptation and manipulation of the foreign. This addiction to capturing the unknown through appropriation became programmatic under colonialism. Isolated and stylised as museological fetishes, these objects have all too often been reduced to little more than their aesthetic surplus value. To the sounds of dubious applause, they eke out an exotic existence as relics of poorly understood or misunderstood sunken worlds. The desire for knowledge and control led to an unsuspected series of activities and ways of ordering these ethnographic artifacts, some of which I present as representative of the historical activities of museological practice.” IT



## Sheroanawe Hakihiwe

1971

### *Prukunama*

2019

Acrylic on Lanquarelle cotton paper

55 × 76 cm

Colección Banco de España



### *Wakari [Sweet Fruit of the Jungle]*

2019

Acrylic on cane stucco paper

50 × 70 cm

Colección Banco de España



The work of the artist Sheroanawe Hakihiwe refers to the cosmogony of his culture of origin, that of the Yanomami peoples of the Upper Orinoco in Venezuelan Amazonia. In these paintings, we see three plant species painted on vegetable fibre paper, specifically Lanquarelle cotton paper, mulberry paper and cane stucco paper. Knowledge of the support is significant, as the artist began his career with the Mexican Laura Anderson Barbata as an apprentice in the manufacture of paper with vegetable fibres native to the Amazon jungle. Sheranawe paints the figures of several plants on these vegetable supports: a ceiba tree, a *prukunama*, and the three sweet fruits of the jungle or *wakari*. The original titles are in one of the Yanomami languages. As is usual in his work, he uses a very restricted palette of flat colours, often limited to reds and blacks (the tones applied by the Yanomami to bodily ornamentation in community celebrations) in combination with the natural colour of the paper. In all three cases, the support has an equivalent value to what is represented, since the surface left unpainted by the artist occupies a large space in all of them, allowing the paper to become a participant in the composition and exhibit its own natural qualities. Sheroanawe Hakihiwe's

brushstrokes are clear and firm, endowing his paintings with elegance and delicacy. His compositions are figurative but remote from western naturalism, and his synthetic purpose gives his images a schematic appearance close to abstraction. For example, the profile of the ceiba in black is a highly successful synthesis of some of the most characteristic features of this tree, such as the thorns on the trunk, its horizontal top and its large tubular roots.

The art of Sheroanawe Hakihiwe is always the result of work centred on his environment, that of the Yanomami communities of the Amazonian jungle, their traditions, culture and lifestyles, with special attention to their ways of relating to nature. He is inspired by the symbols, ornamental motifs and species that this culture uses in its everyday life: the plants it uses for medicine, magic, food and rituals, or with which it makes dwellings and creates perfumes; the graphic signs used in body painting and basketry, consisting of straight and curved lines, dots and spider's webs; or the natural and supernatural phenomena present in its everyday mythology.

These three pieces belong to his work *Urihi theri*, which means "the place of the jungle". It consists of compositions constructed on the

basis of the analysis and knowledge of Yanomami practices of hunting, fishing, sowing and harvesting, inseparable from their forms of spirituality and their mythological tales.

As in the rest of his artistic production, the painter here focuses on and draws inspiration from the Yanomami culture with the aim of preserving memory and making a record of collectively accumulated values and knowledge in a precious environment under threat from exploitation, deforestation, mining, epidemics and natural disasters. The artist thus manages to transmit this fragile equilibrium and his profound respect for an ecosystem and lifestyle offering an alternative to those imposed by the economic order of globalisation. In Sheroanawe's works, the vegetation of this region of the Amazon is translated into its most essential and least exotic version, becoming a series of graphic signs rendered with firm outlines and pure colours resonant with a timeless rhythm remote from the linear pressure of time exerted by the western order. Sheroanawe's art is both a personal interpretation and a vindication of the tradition and identity of his native culture in a bid for mutual understanding between the Amazonian communities and "others". MM



Fritzia Irizar

1977

*Untitled (Yucatán  
Jungle Plants)*

*Untitled (Yucatán  
Jungle Plants)*

*Untitled (Yucatán  
Jungle Plants)*

2020-2021

Dollar bill ash ink on cotton paper

56 × 76 cm

57 × 38 cm

57 × 38 cm

Colección Banco de España

The three *Untitled* drawings (one subtitled *Yucatán Jungle Landscapes* and the other two *Yucatán Jungle Plants*), dated during the pandemic in 2020-2021, are executed with a peculiar technique closely related to the processual character of Fritzia Irizar's production. This is ink made from dollar bill ashes on cotton paper. The conversion of dollar bills into various artistic materials (carbon ink, as in this case, or tiny pieces of paper, as in her project on *Guernica*) points to one of the constants in Irizar's oeuvre, the physical and symbolic transformation of matter, and especially those materials appreciated more for their economic and status value than for their true utility for the subsistence of the species. Nearly all her production revolves around the critical analysis of another art, *chrematistiké* or the art of earning money, particularly when practised through an extractive economy that privileges the exchange value of the planet's raw materials without regard for their use value.

On one of the plates, we see a detail of the vegetable landscape of the jungle of Yucatán. The other two imitate the style of the pages of a classic treatise on botany and show two different species of shrub on which we read the words *kucheel* and *tank'as aak'* in gold lettering applied with manual calligraphy.

*Kucheel* or *kuche* is the Mayan name for the cedar (*Cedrela odorata*),

and derives from the conjunction of the particle *ku*, used to refer to the divine, and *che*, which means 'wood'. The cedar has a fragrant wood whose properties make it especially suitable for carving, and it has therefore traditionally been used in the Maya culture for sculpting sacred images or objects. *Tank'as aak'*, another Mayan term, is the name of a climbing plant which, like the cedar, has medicinal uses. In its eagerness to order vegetable and animal species, western science devised new names and applied its systems of classification without regard for those used by the native populations of the regions constituting the habitats of those species. The elegant italic calligraphy of Enlightenment origin, similar to Copperplate, used by the artist in these drawings, together with its gold colour and its openly western character, produces a sharp contrast with the Mayan words and subtly refers us to conflicts of a post-colonial nature. In many of the projects and installations of Fritzia Irizar, it is not only the arrogant and useless nature of the processes of economic exploitation in her country, Mexico, that is called into question, but also the foreign origin of the firms that reap the profits from them, which moreover cause economic, social and ecological harm to the inhabitants of these regions.

The three drawings of species from Yucatán form part of the project



“Chicxulub, studies of a landscape”, an investigation on the crater of the volcano of the same name in Yucatán that was carried out during the SARS-CoV-2 lockdown. In the artist’s own words, “it attempts to provoke reflection on the idea of extinction and power relations between species.” The state of emergency caused by the pandemic is thus linked to the Chicxulub crater, formed by the asteroid that put an end to the era of the dinosaurs and gave rise to “the last great reorganisation of power among species, which placed human beings in a privileged position that we have retained up to the present day.” This is a reflection on the imbalance between the costs and profits of the current urban and tourist development projects in Yucatán, one of the most fragile and authentic ecosystems on the planet, and precisely the territory where the last great extinction took place. The drawings of this series show endangered or extinct natural areas and plant species in the state of Yucatán. MM

Federico Guzmán

1964

*Theobroma cacao*

2000

Watercolour on paper

243 × 122 cm

Colección Banco de España



Federico Guzmán (Seville, 1964), an artist who began working in the mid-1980s, is characterised by his commitment to the contexts in which he lives. On the basis of his personal experience, he gains a critical, sensitive and emotional awareness of these places, both as a social fabric endowed with memory and as a natural environment, occasionally carrying out collaborative interventions of an activist nature that question the notion of authorship. Indeed, he regards himself as an extension of nature both as an artist and as a human being, and this idea is evident in his production of recent decades.

These experiences occur in places that were once very far-flung but today, in a globalised world, are just a few hours away, like South America and the Western Sahara. Particularly because they are well represented in the Banco de España Collection, we can draw special attention to a number of pieces that emerged from his experiences in Colombia, a country with which he has held very close ties since the 1990s: *Yagé* (2000), a painting that follows the patterns of a photograph; *Theobroma cacao* (2000), a scientific drawing with post-colonial overtones; *La dueña de la yuca* (The Lady of the Yucca, 2000), a psychedelic collage; and *Bacano* (1998), drawings and texts scrawled on a background with motifs that recall the jungle and make reference to a place that Guzmán found “*bacano*”, meaning pleasant.

On occasions, his works are based on indigenous rituals to propitiate favours from the gods. For example, he carried out an artistic experiment whose central element was the yucca. To ensure a good harvest, the following liturgy is performed: the “lord of the yucca” invites neighbours, friends and relatives to the harvest of this tuber and oversees its production and distribution, while the “lady of the yucca” has a similar role with the woman guests, though under the supervision of her husband. The consumption of the drink *yagé* also forms part of this rite, which connects two of the pieces in the Banco de España Collection.

For the cacao tree, present in this exhibition in the form of the piece *Theobroma cacao*, Federico Guzmán evades depicting the fruit, reducing it

merely to a large leaf. The Andalusian artist sublimates it not only by enlarging it but also by presenting it upright and frontally, occupying almost all the paper, as though it were a divinity, a kind of Romanesque *pantocrator*. This work by Fernando Guzmán also takes a sideways glance at botanical treatises, whose illustrations were often done by women.

Cocoa is known to have been used for at least 3,500 years in what is now South America, which aligns it with the very history of mankind in a similar way to worldwide foodstuffs like beer and bread. Cocoa recipes are extremely diverse, ranging from bio products to a very wide range of chocolates and to pure garbage in which the manufactured product barely has any more of the fruit than its name. In pre-Columbian cultures, however, cocoa formed part of numerous religious rites and bitter and intoxicating potions (sweetening it with sugar cane came later, under colonisation, when it was called ‘pig water’ because of its colour). It was also considered to have medicinal properties, which is of some consequence today because it is still an appetiser for the soul that helps in stressful situations. Moreover, it came to be used, like salt, as a currency for commercial exchange. For centuries, millions of intercontinental voyages between America, Asia, Europe and Africa (the continent that is today the world’s largest producer) have been woven around the production of cocoa. Indeed, in some places it is not a trace of past times but a commodity showing that colonisation persists in modernised forms, and that cocoa is still harvested in labour conditions bordering on slavery. Cocoa is a raw material that moves millions of euros each year in an export industry whose product is nevertheless mostly manufactured in western countries. In this respect, *Theobroma cacao* assumes the critical positions of post-colonial discourses. IT

## Alberto Baraya

1968

### *Still-Life Fruits. Sicily Expedition, plate 20*

2018

Botanical plate and floral centrepiece

Ceramic, photograph and pencil on board

112 × 80 cm

30 × 50 × 43 cm

Colección Banco de España





This work is made up of two pieces: a ceramic fruit bowl, made by a Sicilian artisan, and its decomposition in a plate where each of its artificial fruits is represented and ordered in accordance with a kind of scientific classification. This plate simulates the style and nature of the scientific plates in botany books and herbariums like those of Celestino Muti, the results of European expeditions around the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These collections of samples of plant species, either drawn or subjected to a process of conservation, were organised in accordance with a taxonomy that was generally accompanied by other data, like the name of the person who had collected it, the date and place of its collection, and the habitat in which it was found. The notion of the taxonomy, a word of Greek origin formed from *taxis* (ordering) and *nomos* (norm), refers when applied to botany to a western epistemology associated

with the universe of explorers and European colonialism, and especially its "appropriation of the New World". Baraya considers himself a "traveller" who pretends to behave like those explorers, though his goal is to use large doses of irony to challenge and critically examine the action and gaze that has been projected by western man over the centuries in his description and domination of the world. It can thus be inferred that the presumably objective and universal tools of European scientific knowledge applied by the European explorers were privileged accomplices in the colonial process, if indeed they are not fully identifiable with it. Their discourse reveals the character as a construct, not merely a passive reproduction, of the scientific illustrations of the flora of America, and the projection of the study and diffusion of the vegetable kingdom in the construction of other identities, those of Latin American nations like Colombia. The exuberance

and exoticism appreciated by the Europeans in the vegetation of the American continent seems to have been displaced to the character and identity of its inhabitants.

Baraya often works with depictions of plants, showing an interest in the use of this false or artificial vegetation in everyday life. This is the case of *Still-Life Fruits*. *Sicily Expedition*, which forms part of a project carried out during the artist's residence in Palermo in 2018. Sicily is famous for its white or multicoloured pottery, and especially for its *testa di moro* (the head of a Moorish nobleman severed by a handmaiden), its pine cones of good fortune, and its suns or lamps. They constitute the souvenir-trophy *par excellence* of the tourists who visit the island. Baraya has explained that in one of these pottery studios, Santo Stefano in Camastra, he came across a still life fruit bowl by a local craftsman, Tommasino, who allowed him the use of his own

studio and plaster moulds to separate the fruits (the parts) from the still life (the whole) for his *Herbarium of Artificial Plants* series. This was an artistic project on artisanal vegetable reproductions *made in China*, the result of his processual labour as an “explorer” and the consideration of his expedition as one of the fine arts. The Sicilian project recreates the catalogue resulting from Baraya’s collection of false or artificial flora during his stay on the island, with special attention paid to the floral offerings associated with cultural traditions and rituals of different communities. The artist works on the basis of the notion of nature as a cultural construct, and these pieces therefore constitute a way of raising questions related not only to the representation of nature but also to the problem of the nature of representation itself. The work was shown in the biennial Manifesta 12, held in Palermo in 2013, and at the Galería Fernando Pradilla in Madrid in 2019. MM



## Antoni Muntadas

1942

### *Exercises on Past and Present Memories. Malas hierbas*

2021

Ten stoneware dishes

La Cartuja de Sevilla

23-27 cm Ø

Ed. 1/5

Colección Banco de España



Muntadas's piece is made up of a set of nine stoneware dishes with drawings of various plants whose names are written in several languages to form a circular frame. The tenth dish contains a text which reads: "This collection of plates forms part of *Malas hierbas* [Weeds], a set of crockery that focuses on the importance of plants in processes like travel, displacement and colonisation. It raises the question of how history, legends, orality and fiction contribute to considerations relating to local and trans-national culture. A combination of research and speculative fiction, the set of crockery shows how these plants, native to the Americas, reached the Philippines via Acapulco on the Manila Galleon during the period of Spanish colonisation, which was administered in Mexico City for the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Muntadas, New York, 6-10-2021".

Muntadas's work is thus situated at the intersection between botany and colonial processes on which part of contemporary art is working in order to examine matters of a trans-national nature. The crockery forms part of the project *Exercises on Past and Present Memories*, undertaken in 2019 as a critical review of the colonial past of Spain and the Philippines and its significance for contemporary history. It looks back at the merchandise embarked on the so-called Manila Galleon, a name used to refer to the ships that crossed the Pacific between Manila and certain ports in the Americas, which activated the circulation and exchange of goods, techniques, plants, knowledge, capital, missions, traders and soldiers, and with them cultures and visions of the world that were decisive for the formation of the colonial imaginary. Begun in

the sixteenth century, it lasted for two hundred and fifty years and was one of the greatest trade routes in history, connecting Seville with Mexico City and Acapulco to reach the port of Manila, which was linked in its turn with China, South-East Asia, Japan and India. This route is regarded as crucial for the beginnings of the process of globalisation. Muntadas's artistic proposal thus offers a reflection on the genealogy and exchange of knowledge between East and West, as well as the colonial processes that govern the construction of hybrid identities whose effects are still palpable in the present. In *Exercises on Past and Present Memories*. *Malas hierbas*, the porcelain, stoneware or ceramic involved in those exchanges is used as a support for drawings of plants whose generic title refers to the nature of the species that travelled in

the galleons from Mexico to Manila, taking root in new ecosystems, and in the process becoming invasive species with the potential to harm native growth. Muntadas regards these dishes as “critical crockery” owing to their representation of the aggressive effects of colonialism on indigenous communities. To emphasise their historical connections, the dishes were made in La Cartuja, the famous Seville ceramics factory whose products also travelled on the Manila Galleon. The design of each dish is based on historical botanical drawings like those of *Flora de Filipinas* by the Augustinian friar Manuel Blanco (first published in 1837, and later reissued in an illustrated edition), and they thus bear the mark of the inventories of natural sources carried out in the past by religious orders and scientific expeditions as an inherent part of the colonial project.

“Exercises on Past and Present Memories” was Antoni Muntadas’s first exhibition in Manila (2021-2022), the fruit of collaboration between the Ateneo Art Gallery and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. The *Malas hierbas* [Weeds] were shown in this exhibition along with other items, which the artist called “presents”, that formed part of the commercial relations between the Philippines and Spain. These include the *Mantones de Manila* [Manila shawls], which Muntadas uses as supports alluding to episodes in the history and popular culture of the Philippines, and the medallions entitled *Portable Monuments to Emigrant Anonymous Workers*, together with maps, images of galleons and plates from herbariums. All of them form part of the set of “artifacts” or pieces to be activated that are normally presented in his projects. MM



## Botanical cabinet II: seeing without smelling

The genres touched on in this exhibition raise issues related to human perception, illusion and the representation of reality. From the beginning, staging and artificiality have been central elements of the still life. This final section therefore explores the role of photography as *artifice*, showing how this medium revives the *mise-en-scène* that was a central component of the traditional pictorial still life.

We are now living through the time of so-called post-photography, when traditional photography has become *something else* – that is, an instrument that questions its own veracity, an element of mass production and consumption thanks to its digital development, and a giant question mark hanging over the implications of our relationship with reality and its image. Floral representations have turned out to form an important part of this new photographic and sociological context, which calls for a questioning of reality and its simulacra, perhaps because of the importance already granted to such representations in the history of our gaze. The work of these artists raises issues such as the relationship between photography, truth and verisimilitude, or the debate between nature and artifice in a society that worships the biological while at the same time destroying it.

## Joan Fontcuberta

1955

### Herbarium

1982-1985

Six gelatin silver bromide prints  
with slight selenium toning

26 x 22 cm

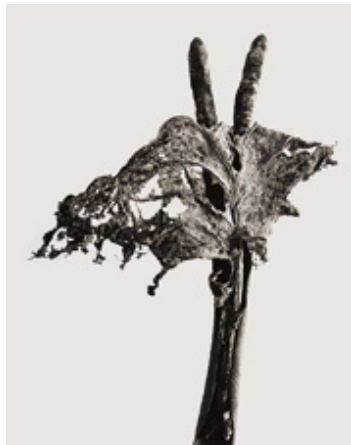
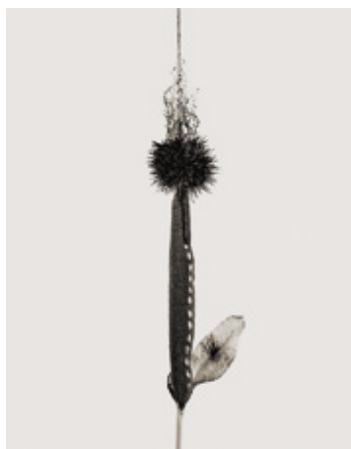
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From left to right and from top  
to bottom: *Cardus flpladissus*,  
*Benedictus pupus-Nizozemska*  
*Osrama*, *Phisotegia afeitata*, *Dendrita*  
*victoriosa*, *Philosifux hyemale*,  
*Braohypoda frustrata*

Some of the most representative texts of postmodernism were published between the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the following decade, and were compiled in the books *Cultura y simulacro*, by Jean Baudrillard (1978), and *Postmodern Culture* (1983), edited by Hal Foster ("Postmodernism: A Preface"), which includes essays by, among others, Craig Owens ("Feminists and Postmodernism"), Jürgen Habermas ("Modernity – An Incomplete Project") and Fredric Jameson ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society"). The question then was whether the time had come or not to certify the death of modernity, whose crime consisted of having made an "official culture" out of what was initially, in Foster's words, "an oppositional movement that defied the cultural order of the bourgeoisie and the 'false normativity' (Habermas) of its history." The re-reading of the grand narratives in a light-hearted if not ironic

tone also marked artistic practices, gilded reflections of what was already occurring in society and politics.

Between 1982 and 1985, Joan Fontcuberta developed *Herbarium*, his first complete and autonomous series. With it he established a new canon: that of the questioning of truth in a medium, photography, recognised for its ability to emulate what it reproduced veraciously and efficiently. Photography has never been innocent, and it was far from it then, but Fontcuberta took arms against the credibility and almost sacred trust between the artist and the audience. What we saw was not what it seemed. Where we were supposed to see a set of strange and unusual but true and therefore surprising plant species, there was a set of constructs made out of remains of objects, rubbish and the occasional organic component found in the periphery of pre-Olympic Barcelona. If the books by the sculptor



Karl Blossfeldt, *Urformen der Kunst* (1928) and *Wundergarten der Natur* (1932), represent German New Objectivity, Fontcuberta's series opened a road to the questioning of grand narratives, including those associated with photography. In his words, "both for Blossfeldt and for me, photography serves to make the most extraordinary hybrids pass illusorily for plausible. *Herbarium* pretends that those montages are real plants, whilst Blossfeldt photographed real plants so that they would look like architectural ornaments. In neither case can we evade a hallucinatory allure inasmuch as the photographic image permits what is false at the level of perception to be true at the level of its presence in time."

Indeed, "its presence in time" has continued up to now, strengthening what was then a prophetic gesture that established a genre of its own. The six

photographs in the Banco de España Collection, which belong to a larger series, employ titles that try to broaden the notion of verisimilitude but at the same time magnify still further the power of their fiction. *Dendrita victoriosa* (1982), *Braohypodafrustrata* (1984) and *Cardus-fi-pladissus* (1985) are some of the titles that simulate a scientific vestige but nevertheless maintain a profound wish to overturn reality through humour and play. For Fontcuberta is an inveterate player capable of inventing a game full of complex instructions and entertaining twists, and of changing the rules half-way through the match. Over five decades, the photographer, essayist, populariser and *magician* that is Fontcuberta has managed to arouse the most effective of anxieties in those who view his works: the one which questions us as spectators and as subjects. AA

## Linarejos Moreno

1974

### *Art Forms in Mechanism XX*

### *Art Forms in Mechanism XXVI*

2016-2022

Photographic print on baryta paper in methacrylate display case on flax backing

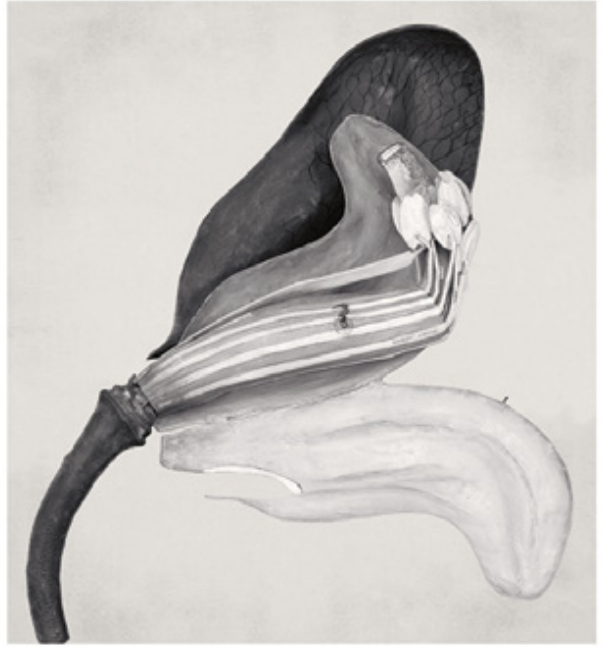
191 × 131,6 cm

191 × 174,2 cm

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The two photographs from the series *Art Forms in Mechanism* (2009-2016) correspond to a constant working method of Linarejos Moreno based on the relation between history and the present in such diverse fields as art, science, architecture and industry. The artist frequently follows lines of research that take examples from the past in order to update them, re-reading them from different points of view and making them her own. The photographs are just one part of the results of these broader processes, but they determine their conceptual and artistic characteristics, anchoring them to scenes and installations of a markedly personal nature.

The origin of *Art Forms in Mechanism* is a book by the sculptor Karl Blossfeldt, *Urformen der Kunst* (1928), which, together with the later *Wundergarten der Natur* (1932), represent two milestones of the German New Objectivity in photography. The first, whose English title is *Art Forms in Nature*, is interpreted by Moreno through the replacement of the concept of "nature" with that of "mechanism" or "machinery". However, that is not all. The artist's photographs represent vegetable fragments constructed by herself. While Blossfeldt took examples from nature, isolated them and turned them into models that could then be recreated for use in architecture, Moreno constructs artificial plants that question the natural function of landscape as well as evidencing the omnipresence of the constructive in everyday life.



The photographs, like those of other series of hers, are produced in black and white and mounted on long pieces of burlap. The transition zone between the photographic paper and the cloth is completed by a white painting whose outlines fade into the textile. The same technique is also used in *STOP VULEVO PRONTO STOP* (2020), *Double Entry* and *The Cloud Chamber* (2018), among other series. Like some of these, books are decisive for an understanding of the magnitude of the project, its historical links and its artistic goal. Two volumes form a part of the full installation. One is a copy of the second edition in English of Blossfeldt's book, a cloth-covered hardback on which the title and a synthetic symbol are stamped in red. Next to it is a copy produced by the artist with the title of her series and a similar symbol, also stamped in red on the almost identical cloth cover of the hardback. The interior of this volume has been manipulated, with the

word *nature* replaced by *mechanism* throughout the original text.

When seen from close up in the large format of the copy, the constructive details of the photographed plants show the manual labour that has made these images possible. The edges of the burlap, with its organic character, also give the pieces a vegetable appearance, as though support and represented forms were seeking to accommodate themselves physically to one another in a natural marriage. More generally, the installation (as shown, for example, at the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid during PHotoEspaña 16) displays other features characteristic of the artist, such as the joining of objects and images with woollen threads, or stockings with long objects inside them that emerge directly from some of the photographs. In her installations, space acquires the general appearance of a graphic where two-dimensional pieces stand alongside functional objects or scraps of history. AA



Paula Anta

1977

*Busan 02*, from the series  
*Artificial Paradises*

2008

C. Print

188 × 158 cm

Colección Banco de España

In Asian culture, a fascination with the identical copy and the emulation of the surface of things is viewed as the most efficient way to reach their depths. The visible part is not only a covering of other hidden parts but a way of summarising and extolling what is invisible or underlying. Wim Wenders devoted part of his documentary *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) to singing the praises of the 1:1 copies made in Japan of the dishes of food in its restaurants, whose replicas are as exactly faithful to the originals as they are attractive as pieces of art. In a similar sense, the natural and the artificial are related with the strange familiarity of the recreation, and at the same time with the difficulty of discerning between original and copy.

The series of photographs *Artificial Paradises* (2008) by Paula Anta (Madrid, 1977) shows shops of artificial plants and flowers of surprising lushness and resemblance to their natural originals. Taken in the South Korean cities of Seoul, Busan and Daegu, the interiors portrayed appear to exude life. Compositionally, the scenes are very similar, with a frontal shot centred on the passageway that leads to the jungle-like back of the store, and next to which all kinds of brightly coloured vegetation flourish as though it were a river. The metaphor can be extended, and the river-passageway can thus be compared with a paved path that makes the autochthonous vegetation deriving from its own materials sprout on both sides, like an artificial fantasy world that regenerates itself. In *Busan 01*, for instance, the ceramic paving imitates wooden boards, so closing the circle of perpetual artificiality. A large variety of hanging plants recreates a kind of vegetable scenario, an evanescent vertical garden, among



the white light characteristic of these locales. The same occurs with *Busan 02* and *Busan 03*, composing a trilogy that generates a style. The elegance of the second, with its ample terrazzo floor, contrasts minimally with the third, where we also see the worn entrance steps and the plants spreading outside the store in search of the main current. Anta's gaze composes the rest: a catalogue of surprises, an equalisation (owing to its small differences) of the extraordinary that nevertheless becomes a common copy.

In his essay *Shanzhai*, Byung-Chul Han explains the widespread culture in China centred on imitation, copying and the creation of new originals with minimal details that nevertheless differentiate them sufficiently to make them into autonomous pieces. "*Shanzhai* products do not try to deceive anyone.

Their attraction is precisely that they themselves expressly indicate that they are not an original but are playing with one." *Artificial Paradises* raises the dichotomy of what turns out to be originality in a copy, but does not judge its validity as a simulacrum or its deception as an element of reality. In fact, it proposes the solution as a genuine possibility of seeing our environment as a succession of elements which are the visible face of the grand industrialisation of the world, whether adapted or indebted to it. Finally, Anta seems to question the gravity of the photographic medium, which purports to perpetuate the brief flowering of a still life or a *vanitas*, posing as the reliable witness to its time. What she shows here is the truth of a detained time, of a blossoming at its height that will never fade: a beaming smile immortalised. AA

Hans-Peter Feldmann

1941

From the series *Blumenbild*

2007-2017

Photograph mounted on Dibond

123 × 88 cm

Colección Banco de España

Cataloguing is one of the key principles of photography. It is able to make any theme referential and any secondary motif into a protagonist. Close to archival science, it makes narrative out of what is barely shown as a footnote, and its productive continuity persists in a fanciful and phantasmagorical goal of visually completing the world. Jean-François Chevrier put it clearly: "The uniformity of the image is opposed to the heterogeneity of objects and materials. [...] The image brings equality to what it groups together." Since the late 1960s, Hans-Peter Feldmann (Düsseldorf, 1941) had been doing precisely that: classifying images in his *Bild* and *Bilder* notebooks. The elements were equalised by their adherence to a format and their treatment as visual narrative. While anyone can understand them, there is also an underlying intertext that launches these works (and others employing the same procedure) into a larger reading where context is a fundamental key. In the accumulation and classification of photographic referents, is it possible to see a desire brought on by a lack of resources, by an absence derived from socio-political processes of transformation in times of scarcity?

The series *Blumenbild* [Photography of Flowers] also functions as a section of a larger and broader classification that is traversed by kitsch, another of his principal tools for subverting the notion of taste. In this case, the image depicts an archetype. On a limpid background of indigo, a bunch of *Lilium* or lilies of various colours display different phases of bloom. Three of them have already opened, each with a different colour and tone. Another seven or eight are still in the embryonic state of the bud. As in classic archival processes, the series is more clearly understood if we



observe several of the photographs taking part in this eloquently shaped collection of samples. For Feldmann, kitsch is an extension of the battlefield of art, the place where general popular taste converges with the irony of the constructed and educated gaze. In previous projects, the artist had used bright primary colours to paint a series of replicas of classical Greco-Roman sculptures commissioned from specialised sculptors. Such questioning seems not only to seek friction among the supposed 'experts' in contemporary art, but also the shock of the polychrome origin of classical sculpture and architecture, which permits a return to the origin and creates a rift between what once was and what academe has since pronounced it to have been.

As with his aversion to catalogues that contain excessively technical or cryptic texts, Feldmann aspires to spartan simplicity in his

artistic projects. What is seen is what there is, and in turn is exactly what he wanted there to be. His radically simple action relates to the works of conceptual art whose titles describe precisely what they show. The photographs of flowers are just that, photographs of flowers. As such, they heighten their quality as *beautiful* objects, with their variety of colours, their perfect composition and the right choice of background contrasting with the foreground. In the process, however, we have learned that no image is innocent or merely what it says it is, but that it explodes like a cluster bomb in every possible direction, among them the visual history of art, its still lifes and its *vanitas*. With Feldmann, there is always a sensation of something hidden beneath the appearance, even if it is merely a desire to play with whoever is looking at the simple beauty of the photograph of a bunch of flowers. AA

## Miguel Ángel Tornero

1978

### *Untitled (The Night in Vain)*

2019

Collage on board, hand painted  
wooden frame

190 × 110 cm

Colección Banco de España



Contemporary photography found an accurate simulation of the world in techniques of enlargement and new ways of exhibiting and mounting images. That story by Borges that suggested creating a map so faithful to the territory that it would show it on a 1:1 scale fed into a possibility, albeit fragmented and dependent upon photographic printing techniques, of showing everything around in its true size. However, there is nothing less real than an image of itself, for the image will always be a space of thought and analysis, a more or less premeditated distance from what it announces. In some way, what makes an image real is its surface, as was pointed out by Godard in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and quoted by Didi-Huberman in *Images in Spite of All*: "Even completely scratched / a simple rectangle / of thirty-five / millimetres / salvages the honour / of all the real."

Miguel Ángel Tornero's work *Untitled* belongs to a series of pieces grouped together under the umbrella title of *The Night in Vain*. To do something in vain is to do it unnecessarily. In these photographs, however, there is a notable persistence in doing things that involve an effort, perhaps a useless one but not without its connotations, and in doing so at a slow pace. The impetus behind the work lies in showing marginal plants like thistles and pitas, which grow on the borders between fields and roads or paths, and offering them up as protagonists. At the same time, one striking aspect of this symbol of marginality is the use of blurred focus through overexposure to a flash that does not calibrate the proportion between the brightness of the light and the distance of the objects. Moreover, this is done under cover of night.

The darkness of night is a hole that swallows up everything which seemed important and significant in the daylight. It frees it from the pressure of limits and diffuses its contours. The light projected by the flash thus restores a certain centrality to what it illuminates. It takes it out of its blackness and bestows a form upon it, albeit a flattened and limited one, as well as an importance, even if questioned. With regard to the use Tornero makes of artificial light, Iván de la Torre has pointed out that "it has been used particularly to signal focal points of special interest. It therefore proves paradoxical for the viewer that



the splash of light provoked by the flash [...] should serve to illuminate the anodyne trunk of a tree, the backs of some unknown people, the corner of a building, the edge of a track in the darkness of the night. Where, then, is that supposed interest?"

These aspects seem to indicate that the interest may lie precisely in converting secondary and liminal elements into protagonists, and in according a foreground function to what is destined to inhabit the margins: the least beautiful flowers, the coarsest grasses, the most overbearing personalities. In the same way, the artist cuts out the images and places them on a cardboard backing. The arrangement not only recalls collages, which are undoubtedly a reference, but it also brings to mind the theatrical. Made up of layers of superimposed photographic images, the work acquires the volume of a topographical map, indicated, drawn and symbolic. If the photograph indicates, the superimposition of various layers symbolises. If the images relate, the theatrical aspect of the composition represents.

The frames which collect, protect and delimit the compositions of this series are painted by hand. This detail once more relates to the artist's desire to attach value to the manual component, imperfect and emotional. Torno's first photographic compositions performed these operations digitally. At that point, he decided to recover the direct pulse of a work that employs the digital printing of images with the manipulation of their contours cut out by hand, allowing glimpses of the white interior of the paper as well as his hesitant approach to broken forms without profiles. Indeed, the use of the flash not only heightens the centrality of the unusual or the unnoticed but also explodes their contours and whitens and burns out their colours and forms. It seems to tell us that the toll to be paid for this protagonism accorded to the marginal with more insistence than ever before is a loss: that of its colours and forms, and that of its precise function and location.

AA



## Xavier Ribas

1960

### Untitled (*Flowers*), from the series *Sundays*

1994-1997

C-print (Kodak Endura Matte)

120 x 140 cm

Edición 3/6

Colección Banco de España

In the 1970s, Susan Sontag described a specific character of photography that on the one hand distinguished it from pictorialism, and on the other opened up the thematic and conceptual field of the technical image with regard to the painted scene. This was the unlimited interest of photography in all that surrounds it (and us). Thanks to increasingly precise technology, it was possible to record what went unnoticed by the human eye, and this leap without a net led to a broadening of the world's margins. If painting was the *end* (in the sense of a goal) of certain important historical events and of various constantly changing but remarkable people or places, photography became a *means*, and its logic was to make every slight gesture and every possible change into something noteworthy.

A new factor that was added to this equation in the 1990s was the increasingly feasible possibility of reproducing the world full-scale. In this way, we found ourselves in front of artificially created worlds that nevertheless, and in spite of their differences, derived from the real one. This perceptive shift made us more alert as viewers, while at the same time, as Peter Osborne put it, it turned photography into a "post-conceptual" language conscious of its space and its time. What had been residual themes became great subjects, the grand narratives gave way to "micropolitics", and in each and every one of these actions, photography was there to fill a decisive place. The social sciences like anthropology, sociology and ethnology resorted to the visual, just as artists made lax use of their research methodologies.



This was observed by Hal Foster in his compilation of essays *The Return of the Real*.

Xabier Ribas belongs to the type of artist who combines anthropological research with a visual *mise-en-scène*, particularly in his most recent projects. This photograph belongs to the generic series *Sundays*, produced between 1994 and 1997 and made up of 31 images. In them, there is an attitude of curiosity towards actions that convey a certain elimination of class, taking form in transitional spaces between the urban and the rural at limits defined by difference. Here too, Ribas situated himself at the centre of the debate, as interstitial and liminal spaces between production and leisure, between the built and the yet to build, and between the voiced and the silenced became a major theme in contemporary art. There were certainly many photographers who tried to find a visual rendition for what Marc Augé called the "non-place", something so obviously present in contemporary cities that it had not yet been defined.

In *Sundays*, Ribas's gaze is both unwitting and premeditated, and converging on these images are various decisive aspects, including the autobiographical, the contextual and the historical. The photographer has known the spaces represented since his childhood and youth: "In the late sixties, line four of the metro of Barcelona was built to link the district of Poble Nou with the city centre. [...] The general feeling in the district was that it would no longer be necessary to go to Barcelona as they were now already in it." At the same time, the date of the series belongs to the years after the great socio-cultural boom of Barcelona in 1992, when it started to become possible to see the stitching in the party dress of a city that was constantly being reinvented. On the other hand, these Sunday trippers seem to countermand the geopolitical limits of the city with simple everyday actions. The public space is recovered for gatherings of friends, improvised hosting or real conversations. In the meantime, the continual passage of the inhabitants has created a path through the tall grass to reach the council estate. In *Sundays*, like a Marcovaldo with a camera in his hands, Ribas finds his place in the fine balance between the expectation of the well-known ritual and the unexpectedness of the fortuitous encounter. AA

## Maria Loboda

1979

### *A Guide to Insults and Misanthropy*

2006

Flowers

Variable measurements

Courtesy Galería Maïsterra  
Valbuena

"I'm interested by the human impulse to cultivate nature, our proud belief that it sends sacred messages to human beings in the form of clouds, smoke, the flight of birds, etc., like in those religions which conceive nature as a goddess. But a brutal dichotomy is produced: nature feels a colossal lack of interest in humanity."

With these words, Maria Loboda describes her work centred on the ways in which human beings make metaphors out of certain elements of nature that are actually completely alien to it, and the way in which people press something into their service which, if it could speak, would be utterly hostile to them. Such is the case of something as banal as a flower arrangement uncomfortably stuffed into a vase in which it is living its last hours. An example is the installation



*A Guide to Insults and Misanthropy*, where the dichotomy is subtly defined by the messages that these flowers seem to be sending out to the oblivious viewer.

"My approach to certain phenomena of culture", the artist says, "is rather like a strange archaeology: you discover meanings developed by a certain period or public that have been altered since then." The museum or exhibition gallery offers a space of security, but also the space for reading the world's objects in another way, as what is presented there can be potentially threatening, sinister or subtly terrifying. In those spaces, Loboda exhumes the secret contents latent beneath certain moments of civilisation, periods marked by a particular sense of beauty, pomp, elegance, and silently luxuriant display. In this case, she casts her eye on the Victorian period, the moment when the great metaphor of the language of flowers was developed and fixed. According to some of the many codes that evolved, flowers are substitutions for certain words, serving them as an arcane signifier. However, these associated terms are not, as one might expect, necessarily celebratory or flattering, but can also designate bitter feelings or insults: horror (the iris), hate (basil), disdain (the yellow carnation) or simplicity and mental vulgarity (the marigold).

The message of Loboda's works seems to contrast openly and intentionally with the aesthetic or epic dimension with which we associate certain objects. In this case, the flower

arrangement is nothing but a chain of foul words that would scandalise the audience at any public occasion on which they were presented, whether in the Victorian period or today. Loboda has made different versions of this "guide to insults and misanthropy", from the model for a flower bed at the entrance to an establishment (at Ludlow 38, New York, 2012) to others in delicate Chinese vases, making it a work without a definitive form and therefore without a specific text.

The arrangement of the flowers inside each vase (or sometimes in window boxes) is also intended to make their juxtaposition uncomfortable and ugly. Playing with the length of the stalks and the way they obstruct each other, Loboda arranges these bouquets in the opposite manner to the way a florist would, trying to make them detract from each other's beauty rather than enhance it through a harmonious grouping. New insults and incitations to misanthropy are hurled out from every bouquet, but all enunciate not only the contrary of the everyday gesture of giving flowers but also that of their idealised representation through the floral still life. We imagine these flowers not only elbowing each other in the confinement of the vase but also, in an even more disturbing image, insulting one another. In these flowers, with their doubly familiar and perturbing image, Freud's *Unheimlich* thus emerges, the menace lurking in the everyday, together with an enigmatic sense of grief, loss and paradoxical nostalgia with which Loboda tinges much of her work. CM

Images on inside covers  
Juan van der Hamen y León,  
*Pomona and Vertumnus*, 1626 (detail).  
Paula Anta, *Busan 02*, from the series  
*Artificial Paradises*, 2008 (detail).



1. Flowers and fruits for thinking the image:  
unimaginable still lifes
2. The still life: academe and avant-garde
3. The Baroque: flowering and fruitfulness
4. Botanical cabinet I: flowers from another world
5. Botanical cabinet II: seeing without smelling





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