



ARTUR RAMON ESPAI D'ART

# All the world's a stage

Curated by José A. Aristizábal

17.03.22 - 29.04.22



Nicolau Raurich, *Fantasia de carnaval*, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 56 x 66,2 cm.

# Theatre, the object of art

José A. Aristizábal

There are different ways of establishing links between plastic arts and theatre. The most obvious is to look at the sets and stage designs of renowned artists: Pablo Picasso and his works for the Ballets Russes, Joan Miró and the sets and costumes for the Diaghilev company, or Oskar Schlemmer and the costumes he created for the Triadic Ballet, when he was director of the theatre department of the Bauhaus. But what if instead of exploring the influence of art on theatre, we look at the influence that theatre has had on art?

*The whole world is a theatre* includes works by renowned artists in an extensive timeline that goes back to the 18th and 19th centuries with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Mariano Benlliure, Eugenio Lucas Velázquez or Ricard Urgell; and more recently to the 20th century with Nicolau Raurich, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart, Mariano Andreu, Antoni Clavé, among others. The interest of the proposal lies in recognising how the artist, consciously or not, has used theatrical elements to create his work, to find his own voice, which has inevitably led us to find a new reading of some pieces. Likewise, this exhibition encompasses different languages: painting, sculpture, engraving, photography and objects —such as the masks of the *Noh* theatre of Japan— and is organised around three thematic axes: costumes, characterisations and scenography. The selection also includes works produced as part of theatrical projects: drawings, specific plans for staging, sketches of sets and costumes which, in addition to their artistic value, stand out for their historical-documentary content.

## Theatre as a source of inspiration

Three artists make up what we have called “theatre as a source of inspiration”: Nicolau Raurich (1871-1945), Antoni Clavé (1913-2005) and Ricard Urgell (1874-1924).

In *Fantasia de Carnaval* (c. 1910) Nicolau Raurich presents an indoor scene, a room where costumes, masks and fabrics have been swirling around behind the scenes. The artist does not dwell on people or street parties, but on the reality behind the carnival, which he arranges as a burlesque, almost grotesque world. The artist’s personal style, best known for his landscapes, is characterised by coarse forms and strong colours to intensify the perception of reality. The carnival motifs have allowed him to deploy his interpretative force without limitations, revealing an ultimate interest: painting, as life can be dense, deformed. Raurich superimposes a dramatic gaze on the theme of theatre, which in his landscapes can be perceived with a certain romantic melancholy, but which in *Fantasia de Carnaval* is charged with a more sordid note, always under the shadow of James Ensor.

Antoni Clavé’s works are also theatrical in inspiration. Between 1946 and 1955 the artist worked with various theatre companies and produced about twelve pieces on this theme. The three we present here are made up of traces and scraps, done with great freedom of interpretation and depicting ghostly scenes of dancing skulls, almost decrepit. They are crude representations like Raurich’s, but

instead of the thickness of the pictorial material there is a juxtaposition of fabrics, papers and paint. In both the two works entitled *Carmen* (n.d.) and *Revanche* (1950) the significance lies in the plastic interpretation of a scenic presentation, an abstract and turbulent world underlying the figures, where the drama of the moment is sensed.

Finally, none of the artists in this exhibition has as close of a relationship with the theatre as Ricard Urgell, since performance was the way in which he found his own path, coming to specialise in theatre scenes and ballets. Urgell's interest seems to be in movement and light, in the happening of the scene. The vibration of what unfolds on the stage is what leads him to a certain abstraction, leading to a post-impressionist style. Likewise, his paintings are executed from the spectator's point of view, given that the scene does not end on the stage, but encompasses the audience, or, in *Audició al teatre Gayarre* (c. 1905-1910), the director who witnesses the actress's audition.

## Costumes

Exploring the reciprocal influences between theatre and the plastic arts, one of the most relevant thematic axes is costumes and clothing, from the conventional to the experimental. Traditionally, theatre adopted costume as a symbol of social, economic or religious status. Clear examples of this are the drawings and gouache work by Mariano Andreu (1888-1976), made for the plays *Much Ado About Nothing* (1949) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (1952), both by William Shakespeare. Other costumes have arisen from the theatrical sphere, such as the Colombina, a character from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, which has its exponent here in a piece of Alcora manufacture dated between 1750-1770.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Oskar Schlemmer, director of the theatre department of the Bauhaus school, designed the costumes for the Triadic Ballet. His aim was to create costumes that limited human movements, insofar as they resulted in a reading of the scene. The result, clearly influ-

Antoni Clavé, *Carmen*, mixed media on paper, 30 x 40 cm.





Ricard Urgell, *Audició al teatre Gayarre*, c. 1905-1910, oil on canvas, 51,5 x 62 cm.

Ángel Ferrant, *Monigote. Estudio para relieve*, 1955, pencil and colour pencil on paper, 21,9 x 15,9 cm.



enced by the concerns of the time, was figures that moved through space executing various rhythmic and gymnastic movements. Following Schlemmer's ideas, we interpret the drawings of Angel Ferrant (1890-1961) as a search for a form within the human movement.

If, on the one hand, realist theatre adopted human proportions and movements and established with them an idea of class and gender, and the *Commedia dell'Arte* achieved an authentically theatrical costume, on the other hand, in the theatre of the Bauhaus, which in our exhibition has its equivalent in Angel Ferrant's drawings, the costume is the desire to liberate the expression of the human body, the transcendence of the being beyond its natural limits.

## Characterisations

Characters in the theatre assume a role based on a psychology that defines their features and makes



"Noh" theatre mask, c. 1850, tempera on wood, 22 x 13 cm.

them unmistakable. Rather than the chronology of the plays, we are guided here by the recognition of forms that represent a character.

In *Arlequin au masque* (1957), Modest Cuixart (1925-2007) presents an imaginary, fantastic being floating in an undefined space. The compositional elements, such as the pirate's hat and the mask, reveal a complex symbolism disguised by an apparent naivety. A magical, mysterious dimension arises. In the same way, the magical elements are much denser in *Suite Al·lucinacions III* (1947) by Joan Ponç (1927-1984). His anthropomorphic figures evoke a primitive character, conveying an organic, vegetal presence. If Cuixart's figures are constructed on the basis of certain symbolic elements, Ponç's seem to be living, breathing beings. Thus, if in one the image

Leopold Samsó  
 Photograph of *Divina Commedia's Inferno*, 2019, 23 x 35 cm.



is enveloped in a dreamlike atmosphere, in the other it takes on a tribal force.

Different, but in line with the characterisation of characters, are the masks of the *noh* theatre and the series by the photographer Leopold Samsó (1946) of the actor Albert Vidal interpreting the songs of the Inferno from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Although close in conception —*noh* theatre dates from the 1300s, as does the writing of Alighieri's poem— they have nothing to do with each other. The masks presented here date from the Meiji period (1868-1912) and were used by professional actors in their performances. In the exhibition, the reason for this relationship lies in the discovery of a gestural theatre. In contrast to spoken and written theatre, which is the product of an author's composition, and to stage theatre, in which a discourse of form and colour takes precedence, in this type of theatre the burden falls largely on the performer. It is the performer who assumes, on stage, the meaning of the play. In the same way, Samsó's photographs focus on gesture. Far from the limits proposed by language, the purest freedom of interpretation emerges. His photographs remind us of the ritual aspect of theatre, that of its beginnings, when it consisted of the action of an actor permeated by a spirit that transformed him, living alone the experience of trance. If in the ritual the experience belongs to the one who lives it, in this case, the photographer's sensitivity has made of this transitory moment a tremendously suggestive image, as if sculpted in stone.

Finally, as part of the characterisations, we include two contemporary artists, but from different geographies, united under the thread of realism and naturalism. On the one hand, the work of Edgard Chahine (1874-1947) is a representative sample of Parisian life in the Belle Époque. In *Lerand dans le rôle de Rodin du juif errant* (1903), an engraving depicting Rodin in Eugene Sue's novel, we see an elegant character brimming with life, as well as his drawings and engravings of circus performers, acrobats, clowns and tightrope walkers. With great precision, Chahine captured a moment of beauty, coquetry, sadness or defeat in his characters. The freshness and spontaneity of the motif is also due to the fact that he used copper plates larger than paper, making his compositions appear to have been drawn directly on the paper.

On the other hand, we present *Los Monaguillos* (1883) by Mariano Benlliure (1862-1947). This work



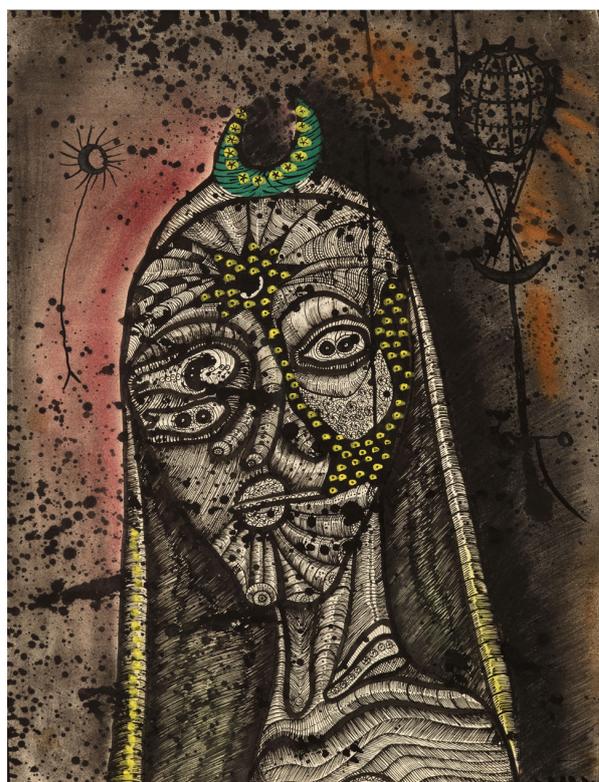
Mariano Andreu, *Wardrobe for Beatrice*, 1949, gouache and pencil on paper, 41,5 x 33,5 cm.

belongs to the artist's early period, devoted to capturing the agricultural, provincial and peasant world in a realistic manner. At the same time, in the theatre, Anton Chekhov, as a representative of the realist and naturalist movement, creates characters who seem to be on the fringes of everything. His protagonists, timeless and constructed in an isolated and solitary manner, could be anywhere in the world, like the characters of Chahine and Benlliure. There is something of the adventurous in all of them, as if they have been given one role today and another tomorrow, and their forms crystallise beautifully in this mundane, naive and simple reality.

## Scenographies

Realist scenography usually attempts to bring everyday objects to the stage: sofas, beds, tables, etc. But what would happen if we wanted to think of a theatrical space outside this logic? We would then have to work with light and space as compositional elements; to see the stage as a painting, as a blank canvas. Under this idea we come to the works of Bruno Yvonnet (1957) and Mariano Andreu, one presents light as the protagonist, the other the form. Yvonnet, known for his shady views, seems to structure his spaces according to classical values. His work is analytical and his aim is to reveal the ambiguity of spaces. On the other hand, Andreu's interest is in forms: architectures that project a sense of space. We could say that it is the design of a scenography with gothic and neoclassical elements but, in the end, the objective is not the architectural components, but the space which is formed between them.

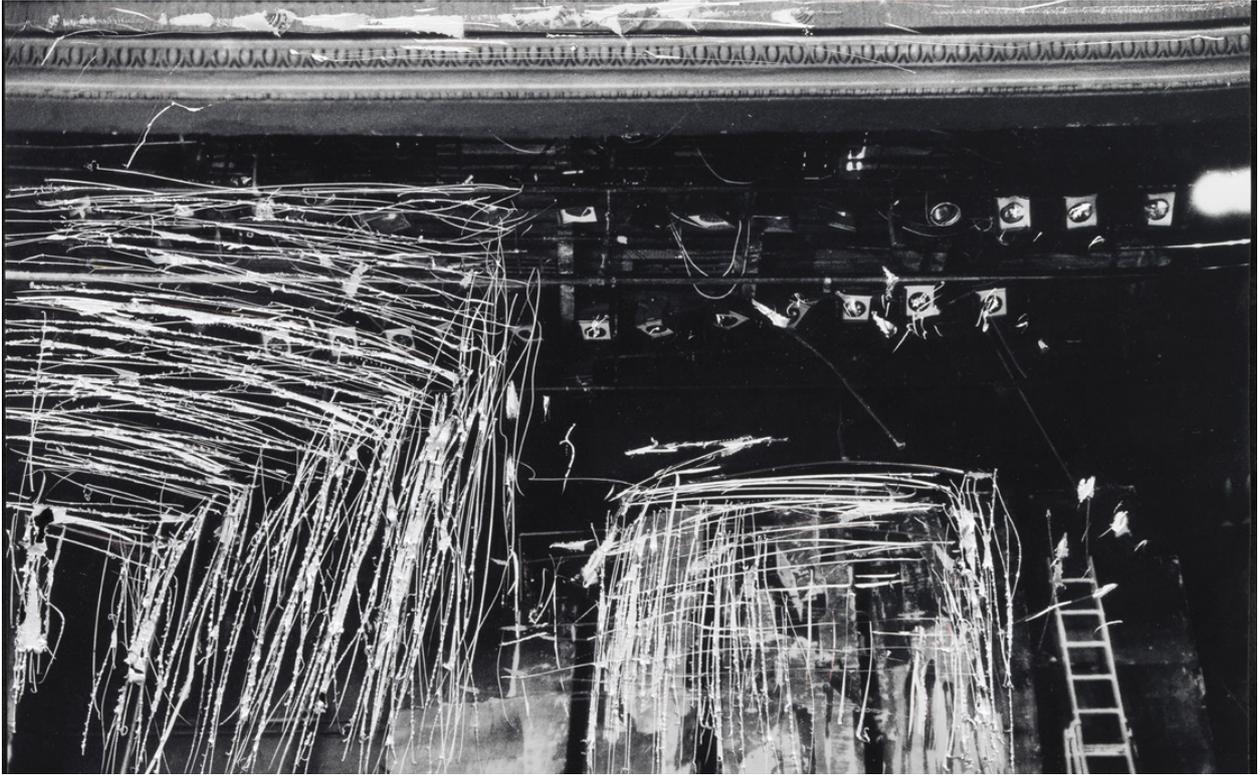
On the other hand, the works of Luigi Rossini (1790-1857), Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) and Mihail Moldoveanu (1953) are presented as a reflection on the technical conditions of theatre. Moldoveanu's photographs show the performance of American theatre director Robert Wilson's plays. Wilson's scenic field is determined by new technical inventions, which invite the most daring fantasies in lighting and image projection, without abandoning traditional elements such as rhythm and movement. The spirit that guides us to relate it to the views of the Roman theatres by Rossini and Piranesi is the fact that they allow us to see that the theatre is a mirror of its time. Rossini's and Piranesi's engravings are views of the Colosseum and the Teatro Marcello in Rome, respectively. Here, the theatre is



Joan Ponç, *Suite Al-lucinacions III*, 1947, mixed media on paper, 49 x 40 cm.

perceived as a place that resists oblivion, perennial in memory. Architectural elements such as barrel vaults and Roman columns give way to show how nature and time devour everything. If in the first group, with Yvonnet and Andreu, the artists' interest in "using" artistic styles in order to find a place of scenic representation was made evident, this second group shows how architectural and scenographic constructions are dictated by their time, which determines a style, a way of seeing.

Finally, the exhibition includes a significant number of works that touch upon a dark and gloomy aspect. We are interested in the work of Mario Sironi (1885-1961), *Untitled* (n.d.), from which we propose two narrative threads, one that introduces abstraction with the work of Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (1817-1980) and the other that recreates a world with a certain parody, in which the spectacle of entertainment is present, with two engravings by Francisco de Goya (1746 - 1828). All three artists dwell on scenes with satirical overtones, their works sharing a historical evocation and at the same time a sinister and fantastic air.



Frederic Amat, *Escenarios*, 2007, original on knife shredded photograph, 40 x 61 cm. Maly Theatre in Saint Petersburg.



Mariano Benlliure, *Los Monaguillos*, 1883, clay, alt. 34 y 31 cm.



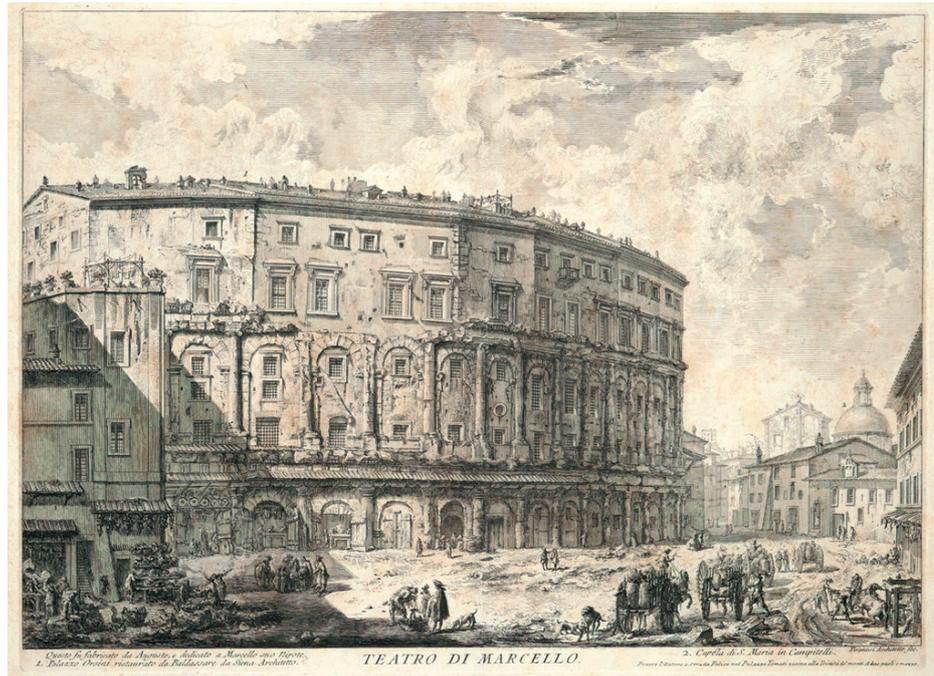
Ceramics of l'Alcora, *Colombina*, c. 1750-1770, 21 x 12 x 11 cm.

The exhibition culminates with the work of Frederic Amat (Barcelona, 1952), whose work is part of the idea of those painters who have placed themselves at the service of the performing arts, without being stage designers themselves, along the lines of William Kentridge or David Hockney.

The theatre here has been not so much a pretext as a way of delving into a gaze that the theatre provides. Common elements such as costumes, scenography or character can be seen in an interdisciplinary context, in which even the simultaneity of their development gives rise to the construction of a reciprocal knowledge. While these works can be read through the eyes of the theatre, they can also serve to interpret theatrical phenomena. For us, simple spectators, to whom the world itself is sometimes presented as a theatre, it is necessary to discover that behind the subject there is always a way of seeing, a dramatic, narrative, creative intention, an object of art.



Mihail Moldoveanu, *Wings on Rock*, Robert Wilson. 1998, c-transfer, 18 x 26 cm. Copy 1 out of 5.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Teatro Marcello*, 1757, etching, P. 40,5 x 55,3 cm; pp. 49 x 65 cm.

Eugenio Lucas Velázquez, *Capricho alegórico*, 1850-1870, reed ink and black wash on paper, 440 x 315 mm.



**Published by** Artur Ramon Art.  
 Bailèn 19, 08010 Barcelona  
**Photographs:** Guillem Fernández-Huerta  
**Graphic design:** Mariona García  
**Coordination:** Mònica Ramon.  
**Translation:** Anna Garcia and Lara Lejolle.

Front page: Modest Cuixart, *Arlequin au masque* (fragment), 1954, watercolour on paper, 31 x 48 cm.

Bailèn, 19 · 08010 Barcelona  
+34 93 302 59 70  
[art@arturamon.com](mailto:art@arturamon.com)  
[www.arturamon.com](http://www.arturamon.com)