

Equipo Crónica



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**BILBOKO ARTE
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Estampa Popular de Valencia and the beginnings of Equipo Crónica

Founded in 1964, Equipo Crónica and Estampa Popular de Valencia presented themselves to the public as two branches of a single project. Essentially, however, they were two different, independent ones and either could have appeared and evolved without the other. Circumstances, however, determined that they were joined at birth.

The Estampa Popular movement first appeared in Spain in the late 1950s. It could be described as an artistic “front” of young artists inspired by three principal aims: the desire to combat the Francoist regime, the defence of a realist aesthetic, and the championing of the print as a means of expression. The desire to combat Franco’s dictatorship acquired new force in the late 1950s due to the economic (and incipient political) crisis and for the first time since the start of the regime now spread to the worlds of art, culture and the universities.

The rise of realism is a general phenomenon that affected literature and the arts throughout Europe in the 1950s and early 1960s. Some of its manifestations (Neo-realist film, the Italian novel or Brecht’s theatre) were enormously influential. In the visual arts, however, and with the exception of photography, abstract tendencies, primarily Informalism, prevailed until the start of the 1960s. In Spain, the new literary trends of the late 1950s and early 1960s called for realism, both in poetry (Gabriel Celaya and Blas de Otero) and the novel (Juan Goytisolo, Sánchez Ferlosio). The same phenomenon is evident in filmmaking (Bardem, Berlanga), in which the use of realism resulted in levels of popularity unprecedented in the history of Spanish cinema up to that point. With painting and sculpture, however, figuration was stigmatised due to its association with the official culture of the regime and that stigma indirectly held back the development of realism. This impediment began to diminish with the dissemination of Picasso’s painting from the late 1950s onwards. The different forms of realism adopted by young painters of the time are almost invariably marked by the pronounced influence of Picasso. The facet of Picasso on which they focused was primarily the contemporary one, the Picasso of the “Communist years”, to use an expression recently coined in Picasso criticism. In fact, the rise of realism in Europe and subsequently in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be understood without taking into account the influence of Marxism. Realism was, in effect, the trend championed and imposed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Beyond the official “Socialist Realism” which prevailed in the Soviet Union, but which was little known and of limited influence in Europe, from the time

of Marx himself onwards there was also a Marxist promotion of realism that continued to be very much alive in the mid-20th century, principally in Italy, France and Spain. While Picasso was perceived during these years as a paradigm of realism, his painting, which was incompatible with official “socialist realism”, required the conception of a new form of realism, a “realism without frontiers”, such as the one proclaimed, for example, by Roger Garaudy in France.

Finally, the championing of the medium of printmaking coincides with another trend typical of the period in question. The market for modern art, which was extremely small in the interwar period, notably expanded in Europe and the United States in the 1950s, a phenomenon that gave rise to the belief that the universalisation of the experience of art was now imminently possible. Numerous artists and art world professionals believed that in order to achieve this it was only necessary to change the economic conditions of artistic production. In other words, it was a question of making works of art widely available at accessible prices. The print, in its different technical manifestations, seemed to offer a way of achieving that end. As a result, the leading modern artists of the post-war period—Matisse, Braque, Chagall, Léger, Miró and above all Picasso—turned to the production of an extensive body of graphic work, primarily intaglio prints and lithography. The one exception was Spain, where the art market did not see any growth and where there was no demand for editions of prints. Nonetheless, the young painters who would come together to form *Estampa Popular* reinterpreted this European trend in their own way. For them, the print would also be a way of reaching a wider public but above all, a means to avoid the bottlenecks imposed by the prevailing model of the art market. This led them to avoid complex, expensive techniques and to focus on the most basic types that did not require technical equipment or only minimally so. With woodcuts and linocuts the artist could create a work without having to make use of specialist printmaking studios, cutting the blocks or plates directly in the studio and printing them with an artisanal press or even, in the case of linocuts, without any type of printing machinery, using a spoon and a great deal of patience in the kitchen at home.

In addition, the advantages of craft printing techniques were not limited to the economic aspect of production and there were also political advantages. If the work cost little to produce and could be sold cheaply it was no longer necessary (or even viable) to distribute it through a system of public exhibition spaces and professional galleries that the regime could control, and in fact did with considerable ease. Exhibiting prints in an unconventional venue such as a university cloister meant that it was possible to introduce critical or satirical messages unthinkable in the context of a conventional space.

There are significant historical precedents for this association between critical and satirical content and cheap prints, for example in the Europe of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. A precedent closer at hand is to be found in Mexico in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mexican artisan printmakers constructed a highly effective narrative of social and political life at the time, disseminating it through cheap prints. For young Spanish artists of the late 1950s this historical phenomenon, which was known as *Estampa Popular mexicana* and was championed by the artists associated with the Mexican revolution of the late 1930s, offered a concrete (and extremely picturesque) example to follow, to the extent that they even decided to adopt its name: *Estampa Popular*.

Beneath the surface we also encounter reasons relating to aesthetics and taste. Due to the inherent roughness of the techniques, woodcut and linocut produce images that are primitive, unpolished and easily associated with the Expressionist tradition of modern art. This character appealed to young artists looking to counteract the conservative stigma associated with figurative painting.



It was this last stylistic or aesthetic factor that the members of Estampa Popular de Valencia found the most problematic.

Estampa Popular first emerged in Madrid in 1959. A group of young Madrid artists led by Pepe Ortega (José García Ortega) came together and produced a manifesto in which they set out their ideas and announced their decision to found a group known as Estampa Popular. The group's first exhibition took place the following year, on 18 May 1960, in the Abril gallery in Madrid. Ortega was not, however, present. Following the issue of a search and arrest warrant due to his activities as a member of the clandestine Communist Party of Spain, he went into exile in France.

Although the movement lacked organisation, it rapidly spread to other Spanish cities. The first group to be set up after Madrid was in Seville, on the initiative of Francisco Cortijo, followed by one in Cordoba and another in the Basque Country headed by Agustín Ibarrola. These regional groups tended to be short-lived and were notably inconsistent with regard to their activities, but they achieved a significant presence within the Spanish art world.

The idea of creating an Estampa Popular group in Valencia arose in late 1963, initially on the initiative of Ortega, who made contact in Paris with Rafael Solbes, then with José María Gorris, as well as with the author of this text. Reference has also been made to a (clandestine?) trip made by Ortega to Spain, where he made contact with the art critic Vicente Aguilera Cerni and with some other Valencian artists such as Anzo (José Iranzo Almonacid) and Monjalés (José Soler Vidal). If this trip actually happened the present author was unaware of it at the time.

The specific event that launched the creation of the Valencian group was a group exhibition organised in Italy. In conjunction with the public celebration of the 20th anniversary of the end of the Resistance in that country, a group of Italian town councils governed by the Communist Party organised a travelling exhibition on Spanish, anti-Francoist art with the Spanish title of *España libre*. The project was devised by a sizeable committee of Italian critics led by Giulio Carlo Argan and was largely carried through by Mario de Micheli. The exhibition was structured into three sections to reflect three generations. The earliest featured works by Picasso, Julio González and Óscar Domínguez. The next comprised sixteen more or less established painters (or groups), ranging from Tàpies, Saura and Millares to Eduardo Arroyo, with each artist represented by two works. This group included Ortega, who was the subject of an introductory text by Jorge Samprún in the catalogue, as well as numerous members of Estampa Popular, some represented individually and others as a group. Finally, the third group was made up of six *novissimi*: two Catalans (Joaquim Lluçà and Carlos Mensa, both members of the Barcelona group Ciclo de Arte de Hoy), a Spaniard educated in Uruguay and resident in Italy (Antonio Ximenez), and three Valencians (José María Gorris, Rafael Solbes and Manolo Valdés). The relatively large presence of Valencian painters in the selection was due to Aguilera Cerni. While he does not appear among the organising committee (for fear of very likely reprisals by the regime), Aguilera played an important role in the exhibition's organisation, being responsible, for example, for the choice of the *novissimi*.

It was at the preparatory meetings for *España libre* that the projects for Estampa Popular de Valencia and the group that would later become known as Equipo Crónica took shape. Aguilera asked the author of the present text to write the introductory articles on Solbes and Valdés for the Italian catalogue, which led us to meet up and, during these meetings, to discuss Ortega's ideas for the creation of Estampa Popular de Valencia. We began a series of fortnightly meetings that were regularly attended by around a dozen young

painters from that city. We generally met in one of the artists' studios, particularly in that of Valdés on calle Dr Sumsi (soon to become Equipo Crónica's first studio). We functioned rather in the manner of a seminar; recommending books and texts to read and maintaining a degree of order in the discussions. The principal subjects of debate were Estampa Popular, realism and the role of the artist in society.

We soon reached the conclusion that the Estampa Popular movement as it functioned in the rest of Spain was condemned to irrelevance due to its lack of connection with Spanish society of the 1960s. Its iconography, which focused on images of rural poverty, had become a series of clichés that did not reflect the reality of contemporary Spain. In addition, its aesthetic, mid-way between Picasso and Expressionism, was far from what a militant and effective realism required for the Spain of its time. This was particularly the case at a moment when the crisis of Informalism seemed to have led all subjectivist aesthetics down a dead end. There was considerable debate about realism and we discussed Lukács and Brecht. Another topic was the post-Expressionist objectivity of 1920s German art and the political militancy of its avant-garde movements at that period. American Pop Art was a much discussed subject which, the previous year, had attracted the attention of some of the artists now attending the meetings (Artur Heras and Ana Peters). In the early summer of 1964, as our meetings were reaching a decisive point, the subject of Pop Art moved into the foreground when Rauschenberg was awarded the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennial. The talk was now of the new mass media, including television, and of their impact on modern man's visual experience. These phenomena were analysed at the time by various Italian writers, particularly Umberto Eco, whose book *Apocalittici e integrati*, published that year in Italy, came to our attention through Aguilera prior to its translation into Spanish.

The desire for an objective "distanced" realism in the Brechtian sense of the term and our interest in the symbolic function of the new visual languages of mass communication encouraged the idea of working as a group. However, it was soon evident that the Estampa Popular framework was inadequate for developing a project aspiring to produce work that was both rigorous and artistically important. What most interested Estampa Popular was street-level agitation, which was best achieved by a large-scale following. This implied a wide variety of individual styles and aesthetics. In addition, social agitation required changing criteria with regard to the circumstances of the exhibitions and the themes selected, which made it impossible to achieve the internal coherence necessary for the creation of a new artistic identity.

This, then, was how the idea of working together on two parallel projects arose during the course of our meetings. The first project was the creation of a Valencian branch of Estampa Popular, to be known as Estampa Popular de Valencia. The second project was the formation of a group of artists willing to working collectively. The first project saw itself as a broad, flexible association affiliated with Estampa Popular española [Spanish Estampa Popular] as a whole although functioning totally independently and from quite different theoretical bases. Moving away from any focus on poverty, misery, etc, the aim was on the one hand to revive the witty, satirical and at times anecdotal spirit of an old Valencian popular art tradition (the *aucas*, the 19th-century *fallas* etc), and on the other to appropriate resources from the new mass media. Estampa Popular's activity was thus understood as something occasional and specific; something that could develop independently and aside from each member's individual artistic activities.

The second project aimed to create a restricted and very cohesive group: a team (*equipo* in Spanish). It was inspired by the example of various precedents, including Equipo 57, but with the added complexity of working not to create a laboratory-type art but an artistic project in the widest sense of the term, which would furthermore adopt a realistic aesthetic that would consequently bring it into contact with the world and public life. Furthermore, the principal aim of the project was not that of inciting street-level agitation but

of profoundly changing the nature of artistic creation, which does not of course mean that it was any less “political”. Both Estampa Popular and the future Equipo were conceived as projects aimed at achieving a “political” effect. With the former, the desired effect was a wide-ranging but superficial and short-lasting one. With the latter, it was narrow (confined to the art world) but profound and long-lasting. The intention was thus to create a new, collective artistic identity that would in some way be the equivalent of the individual artistic identities habitual in the history of modern art. Exclusive dedication was thus required and the artists who would make up the team had to produce all their work within it, even ceasing to sign works individually.

The second, more ambitious objective was also seen as the more problematic of the two. Up to that point the history of modern art had developed as a continuation of the Romantic conception of the artist as individual who, in order to create, located himself to some extent on the margins of society. In order for this concept to function, the work of art—even the most “political”, even *Guernica*—emerged from the depths of the artist’s inner self, from a place located beyond the reach of social interaction. Working as a team implied a radical break with that concept, locating the genesis of the work within the field of social interaction, with the limitations and sacrifices but also the profound change that this implied. This was a difficult path and only a few of the artists who took part in the meetings held in the spring and summer of 1964 were prepared to pursue it to its final conclusions. In the end, there were only three: Rafael Solbes, Joan Antoni Toledo and Manuel Valdés, who joined forces to form Equipo Crónica. They began working together between November and December 1964 in the studio on calle Dr Sumsi. Shortly after this Toledo was called up for military service. After he had completed the initial period of military instruction and once again had some time to paint, he went back to working alone and did not reappear in Equipo Crónica’s studio. There was no formal act of separation but in late 1965 a solo exhibition on the work of Equipo Crónica was held in Reggio Emilia. Toledo’s name did not appear in the catalogue as a member of the group.



The works included in this first section of the exhibition exemplify both Estampa Popular’s output as well as Equipo Crónica’s first two or three years of work. The frontier between these two areas is not always clear. There are prints signed by Solbes and Valdés or even signed by Equipo Crónica that were made for Estampa Popular, and others printed by Equipo Crónica that have nothing to do with Estampa Popular. In theory, they should be clearly distinguishable given that they pertain to two different projects. In reality, however, they resemble each other, which is in fact quite understandable. The decision as to whether to include prints by Equipo Crónica in an exhibition of Estampa Popular or in one on Equipo itself depended on the practical circumstances of each occasion. What is certainly evident is a fairly pronounced continuity between these two fields of action. There was another reason for this continuity: the fact that combining the working methods of two different painters and creating a new shared language required a profound process of change on both their parts, involving an accumulation of new pictorial resources and working procedures. This process would necessarily take time. Thus, while Equipo Crónica was created in late 1964, it is only around the end of 1966 that it can be said that its work had become sufficiently integrated for it to constitute a true artistic identity.

All the works in this section belong to this initial period. It is divided into two subsections: the first, larger one is devoted to Estampa Popular and the second to Equipo Crónica.

Estampa Popular de Valencia (1964-1968)

The first public presentation of Estampa Popular de Valencia was an exhibition held at the Seminario Metropolitano in Moncada (Valencia), which opened in October 1964. This might seem a surprising venue. In fact, it was not the result of a premeditated decision but a chance opportunity that was unexpectedly offered by a group of students at the Seminario. It should be remembered that this was the period of the early years of Vatican II and that some sectors of the Spanish Catholic Church were profoundly questioning their alliance with the Francoist regime. Three more exhibitions were held in 1964: at the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, and the cultural centre in Cullera.

In early 1965 the impression started to prevail within the Estampa Popular de Valencia group that the results of the exhibitions held were not particularly encouraging. The matter was debated and the conclusion reached that the media initially chosen (prints, normally linocuts, made by hand in order to be exhibited in public and sold at low prices) should be replaced by industrial offset printing with larger edition sizes, lowering the prices and seeking out other forms of distribution. As a result, Estampa Popular de Valencia ceased to hold exhibitions as such (although members continued to take part in some general exhibitions organised by Estampa Popular española). The new type of production took shape as two projects: a calendar and a series of postcards. Their sale and distribution was agreed with the Concret Llibres bookshop and with its associated distributor Guardamar, two enterprises recently founded in Valencia and specialising in the distribution and sale of books in Catalan. These initiatives were not particularly encouraging either. The first collective endeavour, the 1966 calendar, sold slowly at the bookshop, which had a small but very loyal and committed client base, but it was impossible to sell it in other venues and a large number were remaindered. The experiment was repeated the following year with a calendar for 1967 and finally one for 1968. Rather than being printed, the latter was made using silkscreen and with a smaller print run. It was the last project undertaken by Estampa Popular de Valencia.



The present exhibition brings together a relatively large number of prints made in 1964 during the early weeks of the group's activities. The first four were made as posters for exhibitions. They were printed industrially in order to ensure a sufficiently large print run although all of them except one were based on a linocut made by one of the group's artists. The exception was the last poster, designed to announce an exhibition in Cullera in December 1964. It was designed directly at the printers by the artist, Ana Peters, using the printers' typefaces and an intaglio engraving that reproduced part of a comic book illustration.

The other works in this group are linocuts, made by hand with very limited resources and generally printed in small numbers (which no-one recorded, although the norm was not more than four or five impressions). As Estampa Popular de Valencia's exhibitions were not accompanied by catalogues, there is no way of knowing which ones were shown in them, although it is most likely that all or almost all of them were included in one or other exhibition. The present exhibition has assembled twenty-six prints by eight of the group's artists: Anzo, Calatayud, Gorris, Martí Quinto, Mensa, Solbes, Toledo and Valdés, of which the best represented are Solbes and Toledo with six and seven prints respectively.

Despite the fact that in its day the Valencia group saw itself and was perceived as being radically different from the pre-existing Estampa Popular española, when looking at its output today the difference does not seem so striking. It is true that the Valencian artists paid attention to images in the mass media and to devices used in advertising that are not to be found in the rest of Estampa Popular. It is also true that they much more frequently favoured the satirical and the grotesque. However, the technique of linocut imposed

a heavy stylistic straitjacket which diminishes the differences and brings the Valencia group's work close to that of the movement as a whole.

The works in the next group date from 1965. The largest group consists of ten engravings by Gorris, Peters, Solbes and Valdés. As noted above, Estampa Popular de Valencia decided that year to cease holding exhibitions, and as a result produced less prints. In addition, the prints of 1965 begin to reveal a stylistic evolution that can be seen, for example, in the one entitled *Levante* (private collection). It is signed by Solbes and Valdés who, we should remember, had already been working together for some months as Equipo Crónica. In addition to engravings, this section also includes six offset printed works: a calendar, a cover of art journal, three posters and a brochure. The most important one is the calendar for 1966. This was a collaborative creation involving Calatayud, Gorris, Martí Quinto, Peters, Solbes and Valdés, who each produced the designs for two months. The images were made as linocuts then reproduced in offset for industrial printing. The pages made individually by Solbes and Valdés clearly reveal a stylistic evolution that bears the mark of the work undertaken collectively as Equipo Crónica. For example, if we compare the pages for May and July [figs. 1 and 2], both engraved by Solbes, there is a pronounced contrast between the Expressionism of the first month and the much more objective language of the second. The juxtaposition, repetition and contrast of images in the month of July recalls the compositional systems of Equipo Crónica's earliest paintings. While it is most likely that these two prints were made at the same time, the differences between them are clear indications of an evolution that had reached a turning point. It is also worth noting that the print for July includes the first quotation from Picasso's *Guernica* to be found in Equipo Crónica's work. However, the image that is closest to Equipo's new style is the calendar's front cover [fig. 3]. Created by Valdés, it was the last to be produced. The vertical juxtaposition of two images based on photographs, optically distorted and coloured in flat tones, is notably similar to what we see, for example, in *Folklore* [fig. 4] and other similar paintings produced by Equipo Crónica in 1965.

The exhibition next presents works of 1966 and 1967, notably the series of postcards entitled *Mirant Valencia* (private collection) and the calendars for 1967 and 1968. The postcards are a relaxed, light-hearted group made without any pretensions to unity. They sold modestly to regular clients at the Concret bookshop. For the 1967 calendar (IVAM, Valencia) the same technique used for the previous year's edition was in part applied: the linocuts made by each of the artists were used as the basis for industrial printing but in this case they were vignettes inset into a typographically composed page. There was also a text that imposed a discursive unity on the entire calendar, recounting the life of a typical member of the Valencian bourgeoisie. It was written in verse in the manner of a traditional Valencian *auca*, with a quatrain for each month. The author was Josep Vicent Marqués, a writer and sociologist who occasionally collaborated with Estampa Popular. The vignettes reflected a notable effort to achieve stylistic unity throughout the entire calendar despite the involvement of different artists. The images had a grotesque tone and the influence of Equipo Crónica is less visible than in the previous year's calendar. The 1968 calendar (IVAM, Valencia) was Estampa Popular de Valencia's final undertaking. Given that the use of offset printing could not be justified by the number of copies sold over the two previous years, it was decided to use silkscreen. This allowed for flat, bright and saturated colours with a certain tendency towards acid tones. There is also an evident effort to achieve stylistic unity, with a style that comes close to that of comics.

The last block of works shown here is a group of comic pages drawn by Solbes and Valdés between 1966 and 1967 (IVAM, Valencia). They form part of an unrealised project. A Valencian comic publishers that was experiencing financial difficulties and in need of work offered to publish comics drawn by Estampa Popular artists. Jorge Ballester and Joan Cardells, who had just set up Equipo Realidad, were the ones to devote



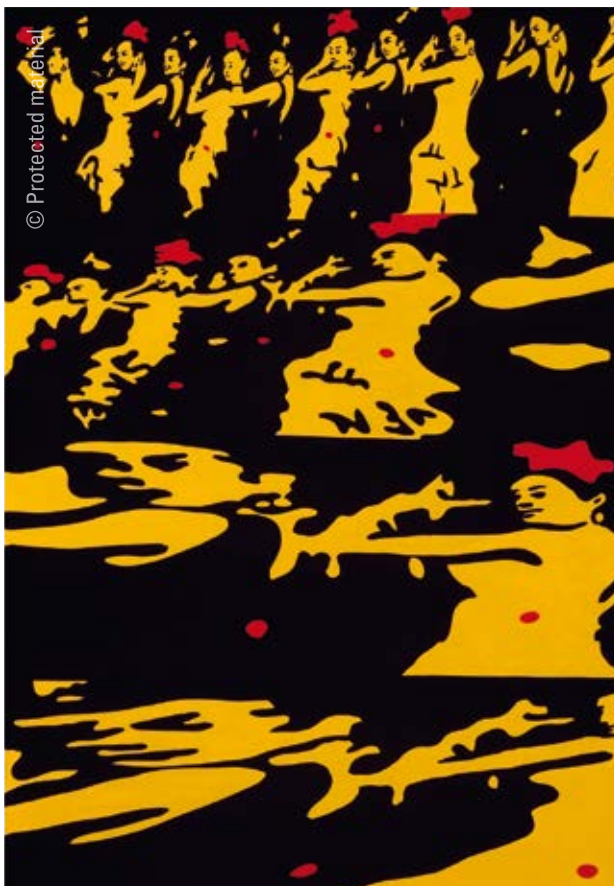
1. Estampa Popular de Valencia
Calendar for 1966 (May), 1965
 Offset on paper
 44 x 30.8 cm
 Private collection



2. Estampa Popular de Valencia
Calendar for 1966 (July), 1965
 Offset on paper
 44 x 30.8 cm
 Private collection



3. Estampa Popular de Valencia
Calendar for 1966 (front), 1965
Offset on paper
44 x 30.8 cm
Private collection



4. Equipo Crónica
Folklore, 1965
Acrylic on hardboard
100 x 70 cm
Guillermo Caballero de Luján Collection, Valencia

most time and effort to this project. They drew various issues with scripts and texts by Marqués. Solbes and Valdés completed the first issue of a comic on the life of Goya, which also had a script by Marqués. At the same time, however, the publishing house's financial difficulties increased and the comics were never actually printed.

Equipo Crónica (1965-1967)

The second part of this introductory section is devoted to Equipo Crónica's first two years. As noted above, this was a transitional period of experimentation for Solbes and Valdés, in search of a new collective artistic identity. In accordance with the realist project that constituted their starting point, they focused on themes taken from events and politics of the day. They did so in a reflexive manner, in search of a degree of lucidity or distancing, the most important precedents for which are to be found in the *sachlichkeit* tradition of German art and literature of the interwar period.

Nonetheless, modern society had evolved a great deal since then and the reality in which the Equipo artists found themselves was conditioned by the mass media and in particular by the proliferation of images, a phenomenon that profoundly affected the status of painting. The Informalist painters, particularly some groups associated with late Informalism, such as the Situationist International, Fluxus and Viennese Actionism, had attempted to skirt round this problem by basing themselves on painting's aniconic possibilities or by attempting to create works that went beyond painting. In contrast to this tendency, Equipo Crónica opted to focus on the internal mechanisms of this proliferation, making images of images and as such transforming images created and multiplied by the media into paintings. Significant precedents for this option were to be found in the interwar period and by the early 1960s were shared by various branches of Pop Art. Within this broad trend, what was specific about Equipo Crónica was firstly its realist aesthetic, clearly oriented towards society at large; secondly, the systematic nature of its linguistic or semiotic approach; and finally, its *sachlich* attitude, the latter taken to the extreme of working as a team.

The works on display here reveal Solbes and Valdés's efforts to implement that programme. When considering this period we should bear in mind the problems inherent to the start of all artistic ventures, some internal and others external. Many of the works that they sent to the group exhibitions in which they participated were destroyed or lost. However, those to be seen here illustrate the most habitual procedures of this phase. Marín Viadel identified those procedures in his meticulous analysis of Equipo's activities.¹ Essentially there were three: the reproduction, repetition and distortion of images.

Reproduction almost always took its starting point from photographic images taken from the mass media and preferably, during this initial period, from news media. When reproducing them, Solbes and Valdés simplified them and reduced them to flat tints, looking for an anonymity of pictorial handling that facilitated the cohesion of their collective endeavour, in addition to reflecting the *sachlich* element of their programme.

The total or partial repetition of the images, frequently combined with their optical distortion, soon became the basic mechanism of Equipo's initial language. In a way it sets itself up in opposition to traditional pictorial composition. Rather than uniting different images in a common and artificially homogeneous pictorial space - created in order to be grasped in a single gaze and thus giving the impression of time detained - repetition of the identical deletes the pictorial space per se and encourages sequential perception which extends in time, like reading. That sequential nature, which implies an approximation to the functioning of verbal language, allows the pictorial images to be given forms and resources characteristic of writing, such

¹ Ricardo Marín Viadel. *Equipo Crónica : pintura, cultura y sociedad*. Valencia : Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 2002 (col. Formes plàstiques; 14), pp. 32-37.



5. Equipo Crónica
The Industrialist, 1966
 Screenprint on paper
 Edition 6/50
 39.5 x 54.9 cm (paper); 23,7 x 32,9 cm (shaded area)
 Private collection

as metaphor, metonymy and narrative sense. Works such as *Folklore* (1965) [fig. 4], *K.O.* (1966) or *Vietnam* (1966) illustrate the effectiveness of certain metonymic procedures. Others, such as *America, America!* (1965) or *The Metamorphosis of the Pilot* (1966) deploy the illuminating power of metaphor. The narrative sense is clearly present, as we see in *Gathering* (1966).

It should be noted that in reality these are not authentic metaphors, metonyms or narratives given that, essentially, the iconic cannot be reduced to verbal language. However, the approximation of the iconic and the literary is extremely significant in terms of modern art history and of the situation prevailing in the early 1960s. While on the one hand it aspires to compete with certain approaches to the image invented in the ambit of the mass media, on the other it functions as an intentional inversion of the tendency (so deep-rooted within the modern movement) to deny painting's literary charge. Nor was Equipo alone in this. Faced with the aniconic and aphasic approach of Informalism and the trends deriving from it, in the early 1960s many painters strove to retrieve the literary, discursive and rhetorical qualities of the image. So visible was this tendency that the critic Gérald Gassiot-Talbot organised a large exhibition in Paris in 1965 entitled *Narrative Figuration*. This was too early for Equipo Crónica to take part. The team did, however, participate in other similar, slightly later ones also organised by Gassiot-Talbot. This Paris-based, well organised and active trend, in which the Spanish artist Eduardo Arroyo, the Italian Antonio Recalcati and the French Gilles Aillaud were involved along with other painters, was the only one in which Equipo acknowledged important affinities with their own programme.

The use of the procedures of repetition and optical distortion of the images did not, however, last for long in Equipo's work. There was something mechanical about them which restricted the painting's pictorial impact, and during the course of 1966 repetition and the juxtaposition of images were abandoned. The team, however, maintained optical distortion although moderating it, applying it to scenes of public life in Spain, for



6. Equipo Crónica
Latin lover, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 cm
Private collection

example *The Ribbon* (1966). A portfolio of four silkscreens also published in 1966 also reveals this evolution. While the first of them, *Medals*, still offers a characteristic example of the contrasting repetition of images, the other three each represent a single theme.

The portfolio includes a silkscreen entitled *The Industrialist* [fig. 5], which reveals a new focus within Equipo's work. The image in the foreground, which is horizontally distorted, seems to be taken from the identity document of an elderly man, formally dressed and wearing a bow tie and hat. In addition to being distorted it is simplified and limited to black, white and an intermediate grey. Behind the head, which occupies the entire width of the silkscreen, the photograph of the inside of an enormous industrial space, represented only in black and red, functions as the background. The clearly artificial combination of these two images obviously refers to a social type, suggesting a connection with the realism promoted by Lukács. Between 1966 and 1967 Equipo explored Lukács's concept of typification in a small but significant group of works. The most brilliant example is *Latin lover* of 1967 [fig. 6], a medium-size painting of extraordinary visual impact, included here as the culmination of Equipo Crónica's initial phase.

2

The early series (1967-1971)

The Recovery. Guernica 69. Autopsy on a Profession

The year 1967 was important for Equipo Crónica's professional development. In January the team was again invited to participate in the Salon de la Jeune Peinture in Paris, in an edition dominated by the presence of Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati which had a notable and controversial impact on the Paris art world. In April, Gerald Gassiot-Talabot included them in the exhibition *Bande dessinée et figuration narrative*, organised at the Musée National des Arts Decoratives, and in June in another entitled *Le monde en question* at the Musée National d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The latter was the first important exhibition devoted to the growing politicisation of art which became evident in Europe and (to a lesser extent) in the United States in the second half of the 1960s. Equipo was invited alongside twenty-four other artists of different nationalities. Meanwhile, in Spain it held three individual exhibitions, which is a striking number for this early phase of its career. The first took place in January in Valencia at the Val i 30 gallery; the second in February in San Sebastián at the Barandiarán gallery; and the third was held in October at the Sala Aixelà in Barcelona.

These exhibitions, in addition to others of lesser importance held that same year, including some of the last organised by Estampa Popular de Valencia, contributed to accelerating the creation of new working procedures and new stylistic resources which began to define Equipo Crónica's collective artistic personality. Solbes and Valdés carefully prepared each exhibition's content. The one held in Valencia had a special significance for them. Up to that point the city where they lived and worked had lacked any real modern art galleries. Founded by Vicente García Cervera with the aim of filling that gap, Val i 30 opened in 1967 with the exhibition on Equipo Crónica, which was also the first solo exhibition devoted to the team in Valencia. It had an important impact on the city's cultural world and a fairly large number of paintings were sold, which was in itself new and striking. The works exhibited, executed in 1966 or early 1967, were varied in type. They included paintings that reflected Lukács's above-mentioned typification, for example *Latin lover* [fig. 6], which was acquired by the sculptor Andreu Alfaro (again something exceptional in the Valencian art world). The exhibition also included various paintings based on the procedures of repetition and distortion discussed in the first section of this text. Notable among them was the group made up of what Equipo termed "professional deformations", for example *The Metamorphosis of the Pilot*. It was undoubtedly this group of works that inspired the exhibition's title, *Quantitative Analyses*. The decision to give the event a title was also an innovation and implied the intention to impose a certain thematic unity. When discussing the "professional deformations", the literature on Equipo has on occasions considered them a series. They were in fact no more than a precedent, given that serialisation was a new working method that only properly appeared in late 1967 with *The Recovery* series, the first works from which were exhibited at L'Agrifoglio gallery in Milan in February of the following year.

Equipo Crónica described this new phase in the following terms:²

With *The Recovery* series we began a new phase with characteristics that distinguish it from the previous one.

The narrative sense possessed by each of the paintings of 64-66 would be developed over the following years.

It was now the set that constructed a narrative. We started to produce "series" of paintings and gave these series titles. The Recovery is the name we gave to the group of works made during the years 67 to 69.

2 Equipo Crónica. "Datos sobre la formación del Equipo Crónica y Cronología por series" in *Equipo Crónica*. [Exhib. Cat., Madrid, Salas de la Biblioteca Nacional]. Madrid : Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes, Archivos y Bibliotecas, Subdirección General de Artes Plásticas, 1981, p. 106.

Characteristics of the series:

- Use of images from "High Culture", with a preference for 17th- and 18th-century Spanish painting (of the type vaguely termed "classical painting") and from the mass media.
- Use of mechanisms for confronting the images (de-contextualisation, anachronisms, illogical collages, etc).
- The formal structure of the paintings is logical, even traditional. These are "compositions" that follow academic norms.
- The subject matter loses frontality. The "subjects", while more specific and more "national", are treated in an oblique, metaphorical manner.
- Works by Velázquez, El Greco, Goya, etc, are "used" (not criticised) for the specific cultural, social and political charge that they possess.
- The procedure of parables aims to satirise and de-mystify aspects of our contemporary history.
- The images continue to be painted with the technique of flat planes, although now with more detail. The chromatic range is more varied and the support is now canvas.
- In 1968 we produced the first polychrome papier-mâché multiples. This was an attempt to connect with the Valencian folk art tradition of the *ninot* and its critical connotations.

With *The Recovery* series Equipo Crónica embarked on a new phase. From this point onwards, serial output became an essential characteristic of its work. In a way, this was a logical consequence of the reflexive, *sachlich* attitude that had led them to de-personalise artistic creation in order to work as a team. Series offered a structure that allowed them to undertake collective work in a systematic and logical manner. First, a subject was selected which was significant within the context of contemporary politics and culture. This was followed by a period of reflection, study and internal debate, iconographical references were assembled and preliminary studies or "ideas" for paintings (following the academic method) were produced. The most promising of these were selected and the two artists began to work, dividing up the labour on a daily basis depending on the abilities and mood of the two. They continued to paint until the subject was exhausted or until a new subject arose for a new, more appealing series or until a specific occasion such as an exhibition project that would lead on to change presented itself. This was because, as we should bear in mind, it was often specific occasions arising from the political, cultural and professional context that encouraged or stimulated the rhythm of the succeeding series. This dependence on the exterior context may seem surprising given that it contradicts one of the implicit beliefs most influential in criticism and art historical writing in the 20th century, but it was the result of Equipo's programme. Solbes and Valdés always understood their work not as a "creation" (a term they studiously avoided in their writings and statements) but as a "profession", an activity that had a specific end and purpose within the exterior world. From this starting point it was relatively logical that the sequential structure of their work should respond to occasions in the outside world or appeals from that world.

There were inevitably moments of doubt and uncertainty. Not all the series were the same. Some were short and others long. Some had well defined limits and others not. There were related series and others that implied a break or contrast with the previous one. Nor were they all equally successful. There were weak projects and moments of doubt and indecision when Equipo nonetheless continued painting. We will single these out and analyse them in the course of the exhibition.

This section brings together the first three series, entitled *The Recovery*, *Guernica 69* and *Autopsy on a Profession*. Although fairly closely related to each other, they differ in length and degree of definition.

The Recovery is a long series. It is the first and was probably not initially intended as a series. The coherence and identity that we now perceive in it gradually arose as it was created during the course of 1968. The



8. Equipo Crónica
The Structures Change, the Essence Remains, 1968
The Recovery series
 Acrylic on canvas
 130 x 160 cm
 Guillermo Caballero de Luján Collection, Valencia

process was interesting precisely because it was the first and because it was by painting the works in it that Equipo had the idea of structuring its output as series.

As noted above, the first paintings in *The Recovery* were exhibited at L'Agrifoglio gallery in Milan in February 1968. It is unlikely that at that date Equipo considered them as a series. Whatever the case, they were exhibited alongside earlier paintings. The exhibition was the subject of a positive review in the Milan press by Mario de Micheli, a Marxist critic who was known and respected in both Italy and Spain, where his book *The 20th-century Avant-gardes*, translated and published that year, was widely disseminated. The same exhibition with some changes travelled to Il Girasole gallery in Rome in May. In September, Equipo was the only foreign participant in a group exhibition entitled *Pluralità viva*, organised in Martinengo (near Bergamo). This was an interesting exhibition which included one of the first public presentations of the *Arte povera* movement. It is not known exactly which paintings Equipo Crónica showed there. The one reproduced in the catalogue, *Spanish Gentleman* of 1967 (private collection) is one of the most characteristic of the new *Recovery* series. Standing out against the background of a Castilian landscape taken from Ortega Muñoz, simplified and flattened like the backcloth of a fairground tent, is the figure of Don Fernando de Austria in hunting dress taken from Velázquez's painting in the Museo del Prado. The original figure has been inverted (right-left), simplified and flattened out as if it were painted on a cut-out wooden board and set up in front

of the backcloth in the manner of silhouettes used for shooting practice. Rather than holding a 17th-century gun, Don Fernando has a mid-20th-century assault rifle of the type used at this time in the Vietnam war.

The public presentation of *The Recovery* as a series in the full sense of the term took place in Valencia in 1968 at the second exhibition devoted to Equipo at the Val i 30 gallery. It was extremely well received in Spain. The weekly magazine *Triunfo*, which had a large print run and considerable cultural influence, dedicated the front page and a six-page article to the exhibition.

While the references and connotations in the series could probably only be fully grasped in Spain, the European context of its first presentations helps to understand the reasons that led Equipo to paint it. As noted in Equipo's text reproduced above, the subject matter was inspired by the current political situation in Spain but was treated in an "oblique, metaphorical" manner through images derived from 17th- and 18th-century Spanish paintings. In other words, these were images that contained a new "specific social, political and cultural charge". This charge had been added by the Francoist dictatorship in the new phase of that regime that had begun in the 1960s and which is primarily associated with the campaigns launched by the Ministry of Information and Tourism headed by Fraga Iribarne as minister (between 1962 and 1969). These campaigns, aimed at Europe but widely disseminated inside Spain, set out to project a peaceful, luminous image of Spain with a dual intent: firstly, to earn political recognition for a dictatorship that continued to be questioned abroad and secondly, to attract foreign tourists with the aim of boosting Spanish revenue (in which it was to some extent successful). After "25 years of peace" (a campaign launched in 1964 to which some of Estampa Popular de Valencia's works had referred), we had "Spain is different".

Although based on clichéd folkloric tradition, this second slogan of Fraga's also aspired to achieve specific resonance in relation to the history of painting, where it echoed the presumed and so frequently repeated idea of the uniqueness (and genius) of the "Spanish School" from El Greco to Goya. The "Recovery" referred to in the title of Equipo's series alludes to that particular historical-artistic resonance. In two of the series' most important works, *The Still* (Valencia Fine Arts Museum) and *The Structures Change, the Essence Remains* [fig. 7], characters taken from Spanish painting are placed in the service of the political interests of the regime and its new economic allies, the "technocrats" who dominated the second phase of the dictatorship, which began in the 1960s. In *Antechamber* (Juan March Foundation), one of the most notable paintings in the series, El Greco's legendary *Gentleman with his Hand on his Breast*, seated at a formica table in front of an overpowering background of two-coloured marble, exemplifies through the sole object on the table—an American iron knuckleduster—the alliance between the new Spanish capitalism and the repressive mechanism of the dictatorship.

The last historical link that confirmed the uniqueness of the Spanish School was Picasso, and the regime also tried to incorporate him into their artistic pantheon. This intention inspired *Guernica 69*, a relatively short series that was presented for the first time in 1969 in an exhibition of Equipo Crónica at the Grises gallery in Bilbao. Picasso's painting had become a topic of current interest around late 1968. The Spanish government was building a new headquarters for the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo, an old institution that had had a precarious existence since its foundation in 1894. The Spanish art world anticipated that the inauguration of the new building would be used by the regime as a suitable occasion to promote the museum's somewhat mediocre collection. There was talk of obtaining an adequate representation of Picasso and someone had the idea of "recovering" (this time physically) *Guernica*, the painting which Picasso had deposited with the MoMA in New York on a temporary basis until a Republican regime was installed



8. Equipo Crónica
Packaging, 1969
Guernica 69 series
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm
 Colección de arte contemporáneo
 Fundación "la Caixa"
 Inv. no. ACF0147

in Spain. For this idea to become reality it was naturally essential to obtain Franco's personal consent. Unexpectedly, he gave it, with the result that in late 1968 the General Director of Fine Arts, Florentino Pérez Embid, received the order to embark on the necessary procedures to secure the recovery of Picasso's masterpiece. While the issue was initially dealt with discretely, it inevitably came out and during the course of 1969 became one of the principal topics of discussion in the Spanish art world.³

In their commentary on this series, Equipo Crónica describe it as short. Michèle Dalmace's catalogue raisonné details eighteen paintings in comparison to the thirty-one of the previous series. Nine were exhibited in Bilbao, including *The Intruder* (Provincial Council of Valencia), *The Visit* (private collection) and *Packaging* [fig. 8].

Guernica 69 is undoubtedly one of Equipo's most fully realised series, with a clear sense of continuity from the previous one. The artists themselves noted that: "there are no significant variations [in it] with respect to *The Recovery*."⁴ As Marín Viadel observed, its success is due to the fact that "in the series as a whole Equipo Crónica focused on a marvellous story",⁵ that of the supposed return of *Guernica*, its installation in the museum's new building (which was under construction when Equipo produced these paintings and would take a further six years before opening to the public), the inauguration, broadcast live by Spanish Television, etc. Each painting in the series can be seen as an episode set within the narrative thread of the overall story, although as in medieval romances, each episode has a high degree of autonomy. Scene by scene, the story's narrative vigour is emphasised by the illuminating or surprising visual quotations, de-contextualisations and re-contextualisations of the pictorial forms extracted from Picasso's work but located in archetypal spaces charged with cultural references: the museum, the Zurbarán-like monastery, the landscape of the Castilian upland, the shooting gallery, etc. One of the most memorable episodes, *Packaging*, is devoted to the physical transportation of the painting. The paper wrapping has torn and visible through the hole is the head of

3 The story of this attempt to recover *Guernica* has been recounted on various occasions. One of the most detailed and reliable accounts is in Gijs van Hensbergen. *Guernica : the Biography of a twentieth-century Icon*. London : Bloomsbury, 2004. See, in particular, pp. 258-262, where the author also discusses Equipo Crónica's exhibition at the Grises gallery in Bilbao.

4 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 106.

5 Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., p. 53.

Picasso's crazed horse, although whether it is crazed from witnessing the bombings of 1936 or from finding itself in Madrid under Franco in 1969 we cannot know.

At the heart of Equipo Crónica's programme lies a reflection on painting as an institutionalised social practice, its various cultural significances and its divergent and sometimes contradictory political uses. It is in fact implicit in the original decision to work as a team. Now, in 1970 and after the creation of *The Recovery* series, which had made use of figures taken from "classic" Spanish paintings, and after *Guernica 69*, a series devoted to creating a fantasy on a single painting (possibly the most famous of the entire 20th century), there seemed to be a need to offer an explicit reflection on the subject of painting. This, then, would be the theme of Equipo's next series, *Autopsy on a Profession*. Once again the iconography would concentrate on a single painting, this time *Las Meninas*. The fact that this was the most paradigmatic example of Spanish "classical" painting again connects the series to *The Recovery*, while the fact that it was devoted to a single painting and that in *Autopsy on a Profession* Velázquez's painting is on some occasions cited through Picasso's versions of it (which had gone on display just a few years before at the Museo Picasso in Barcelona) creates a connection with *Guernica 69*.

This is how Equipo explained the series:⁶

As the title of this series indicates, this time we took the very act of painting as the central theme. This was an attempt to self-analyse the creative process itself and to include it within a broader discourse.

From here on this aspect (the profession as subject) underlay our subsequent works. On some occasions overtly and on others in a more veiled manner.

Characteristics:

1. This time the backdrop is once again "classical" painting, particularly *Las Meninas* by Velázquez.
2. In almost the entire series we have included our own image as if part of the action that each painting depicts.
3. We deliberately employ associations of images that in some way refer to Surrealism.
4. Technically we continue to use the procedure of flat planes. On occasions we incorporate fluorescent colours and Walt Disney images, given that we want to achieve a certain kitsch atmosphere in the treatment of Velázquez. The formats are large and medium (200 x 200 and 120 x 90).
5. In our installation of this series at the Val i 30 gallery in Valencia in 1970 we filled the exhibition with figures (of cut-out painted plywood) which represented the public looking at the painting. We wanted to achieve a certain effect of role inversion. What is on display observes the viewer, erupting into its space by means of the image.

The exhibition at the Val i 30 gallery referred to in the above text marked the first presentation of the series. As with Equipo's previous exhibitions held in Valencia it was well received by the public and from a professional viewpoint marked a high point both in Equipo's career and that of the gallery, with which it had a long-term contract. One of the most memorable paintings displayed on that occasion was *The Dog* [fig. 9], acquired at the exhibition by the painter Eusebio Sempere, who later donated it to the Museo de la Asegurada (now the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Alicante). Also exhibited was *The Lesson*, an ambitious, large-format painting which was not based on the iconography of Velázquez and which Equipo did not consider particularly successful, substantially altering it and repainting it after the exhibition. That second version was exhibited in 1971 at the Poll gallery in Berlin, from where it was acquired by the Kiel Kunsthalle. The large-format *The Surrender of Torrejón* (Fundació Suñol, Barcelona), which was not included in the Valencia exhibition, is a version of Velázquez's *Surrender of Breda*. In his catalogue raisonné of Equipo Crónica, Michèle Dalmace groups thirty-three works under this series, which makes it one of the largest. However, when looked at one after the other it is evident that from late 1970 it started to become less homogeneous and to lose its initial identity.

6 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 107.



9. Equipo Crónica
Self-Portrait at Palace or The Dog, 1970
Autopsy on a Profession series
Acrylic on canvas
122 x 100 cm
Colección Arte Siglo XX. MACA, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Alicante
Inv. no. XX.044

3

Police and Culture (1971)

The *Police and Culture* series marked a break with the three previous ones. Like *Guernica 69*, or even more so, this is a short series (fourteen paintings) executed in a relatively short space of time (barely six months) and endowed with a marked identity and internal coherence. It was inspired by external factors of a varying nature. These factors are worth discussing here.

Following the events of May 1968 and the political agitation that followed, the subject of this series was in the air. Exhibitions took place across Europe on the relationship between art and politics, and Equipo was invited to take part in a number of them including one of the most important, *Kunst und Politik*, organised at the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe. Images of clashes between the police and demonstrators became standard and the participants in these demonstrations were frequently connected with the art world. One of the most active centres of the events of May 1968 in Paris was the École de Beaux-Arts and over the next few years its example was followed by art schools across the rest of Europe. One of the issues raised in these clashes was the role of art and artists in modern mass society, a theme that lay at the very heart of Equipo Crónica's concerns, as we have seen. Rather than approaching this in an abstract, metaphysical manner as they had in the *Autopsy on a Profession* series, in *Police and Culture* Solbes and Valdés decided to adopt a more direct approach and one related to present-day reality.

In Spain, that reality was possessed of a particular intensity and a different meaning due to the unique nature of its political regime. The country's economic growth of the 1960s had by now stagnated and the regime's internal problems were more pronounced. In late 1969 the so-called "Matesa Case", a corruption scandal of gigantic proportions, provoked a crisis and a consequent radical government re-shuffle; the Falangist sector (including Solís and Fraga), which had attempted to use the case for their own political ends, was practically expelled from the government. The idea thus started to take root that the dictatorship was coming to an end. Growing sectors of the Catholic Church were moving away from the regime and supported the opposition to differing degrees. Street protests, backed by two different sectors, the trade unions and the universities, profoundly worried public opinion. Concerned about Franco's health and about the prospect of a turbulent end to the regime, the new government believed that it must harden its position. Firstly it proclaimed a State of Emergency, authorising increased powers to the police. Secondly, and with the aim of offering a resounding lesson, it grouped together various terrorist cases awaiting trial into a single case, which it handed over to the military courts. The case was tried in Burgos by a military tribunal which imposed nine death sentences. Fortunately, these were never carried out as the reaction both within Spain and abroad was so intense that the government was obliged to commute them. The State of Emergency did not prevent the fact that from 1970 to 1971 more strikes and clashes with the police took place (including in Valencia) than ever before. With regard to Solbes and Valdés, the Political-Social Brigade made use of the State of Emergency to pay them a few warning visits. This, then, was the atmosphere in which the series took shape.

The third factor which influenced *Police and Culture* was of a professional and artistic nature. In 1970, at the time when Equipo received an invitation to exhibit at the Colegio de Arquitectos de Cataluña y Baleares that institution enjoyed considerable prestige, not just culturally but also politically due to its anti-Franco stance. In 1962 the Colegio had inaugurated a new building opposite Barcelona cathedral, a project on which Picasso agreed to collaborate. The artist, who remembered Barcelona with nostalgia and who was currently in negotiations with its Town Council regarding his donation that would provide the basis for the new Museo Picasso which would open the following year, had agreed to create a large decorative frieze for the College of Architects' new building. That building also had an exhibition space. It was originally intended for exhibi-



10. Equipo Crónica
Closed Structure, 1971
Police and Culture series
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm
 Guillermo Caballero de Luján Collection, Valencia

tions on architecture but in 1968 the College's new governing board invited Miró to produce his own exhibition. He accepted and the date was set for May 1969. Miró intended to use the occasion to counteract the aura of officialdom that was—much to his displeasure—being created around him through the numerous public events and exhibitions in which he found himself involved, particularly the large retrospective on his work held at the Hospital de la Santa Creu in Barcelona in 1968. Thus, rather than an exhibition, what Miró did at the College of Architects was a happening: one night and with the help of four assistants, he painted an enormous multi-coloured frieze on the large window that surrounded the exhibition space and connected it to the street. This was an ephemeral work which Miró himself destroyed two months later at the end of the exhibition.

This set a precedent for the venue and one Equipo Crónica could not ignore. Moving away from the distance, intellectuality and irony of its previous series, *Police and Culture* was conceived as an enormous Baroque polyptych that responded to the spectacular, provocative nature of Miró's work, albeit with two important differences: it remained strictly within the terrain of painting and it clearly referred to the political reality of the time.

This is how Equipo described the series:

The language becomes more radical. We aim to sum up the experiences of the previous work.

What is the relationship between art and society?

For us, at the present time, the answer is a radical one. The interrelationship of the two phenomena is radical, although complex. We do not consider artistic activity as an autonomous activity, but this does not mean that we think that knowledge of that phenomenon can be exclusively explained in terms of the context in which it is produced. These parallels are as mechanical as they are frequent.

Artistic activity possesses its own laws and, for us, it is only from knowledge of these mechanisms of language specific to each case and from the analysis of the again specific medium, place and time in which they come about that productive answers can be obtained.

Characteristics of the series:

1. An iconography that basically derives from contemporary visual culture, associated here with images of the forces of public order.
2. Large canvases (200 x 200cm) conceived as separate compositions that can be mounted to form large display boards (installation in the Colegio de Arquitectos, Barcelona).⁷
3. The scenes narrated are reiterative. In all the paintings a group of policemen assault, watch or threaten people, with symbols of modern art located between them. On occasions it is the very guardians of order who have these symbols. There is no possible neutrality in artistic activity, that is the idea.
4. Some of the formal solutions are new to our work. The images are large in relation to real life. In some cases the forms of the image are straight. The baroque nature of the compositions serves to express the subject's formal and ideological tension.

There was a precedent for the presentation of the series at the Colegio de Arquitectos. In May 1971 the Town Council of Granollers organised two artistic events: an international exhibition in homage to Miró, which included a small but important group of recent works by the artist and the involvement of qualified international experts; and an artistic event entitled *1st Mostra d'Art Jove* in which various artists such as Ferrán García Sevilla, Carlos Pazos, Jordi Benito and Josep Ponsati carried out a series of actions in public spaces around the city. Within the history of Catalan conceptual art, this event has come to be seen as one of the movement's founding manifestations. Equipo, which had been invited to take part in the exhibition in homage to Miró, sent one of its paintings from the *Police and Culture* series on which they were currently working, namely *Pim-Pam-Pop* (Rafael Tous collection, Barcelona). Another Valencian artist, Jordi Teixidor, who produced a type of abstract painting totally remote from that of Equipo but who was very friendly with Solbes and Valdés, was also invited to take part in the *Mostra d'Art Jove*. These coincidences are relevant to an understanding of the reception of the exhibition held at the Colegio de Arquitectos in Barcelona a few months later.

The general's public reaction to the event was outstanding, as was that of the press. The Madrid-based magazine *Triunfo* once again devoted the front page to Equipo, as well as a lengthy article by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. However, young artists in Barcelona, particularly those affiliated with the *povera* (or *feble*) and conceptual neo-avant-gardes (understood in a broad sense) were hostile. Maria Lluïsa Borràs reflected the attitude of this sector in her article entitled "El panfleto plástico" [The visual tract] published in the magazine *Destino*.⁸

7 The text refers to the large boards that were used to advertise films outside cinemas. In the exhibition space of the Colegio de Arquitectos, the fourteen canvases were installed as a continuous frieze with almost no space between them.

8 Maria Lluïsa Borràs. "El panfleto plástico" in *Destino*, 13 November 1971, pp. 54-55.

Precedents for these positions were related to the above-mentioned exhibition *Miró otro* [The other Miró] held at the Colegio two years earlier. While some critics such as Rafael Santos Torroella and José María Moreno Galván from Madrid had expressed reservations regarding the element of happening and of programmed destruction within Miró's exhibition, these were precisely the aspects that the young neo-avant-garde Catalan artists found most praiseworthy. Ignoring the vast historical distance that separated their generation from that of Miró, they considered that the great Catalan artist supported them in their convictions. Cirici Pellicer, champion of *arte feble*, which he considered the equivalent to Italian *Arte povera*, and the young Maria Lluïsa Borràs, a supporter of the young conceptual artists, took their side. Equipo Crónica's exhibition at the Colegio de Arquitectos led Borràs (who had meanwhile established a good personal relationship with Miró and had played a leading role in the organisation of the two exhibitions in Granollers) to once again controversially support the young artists' neo-avant-garde stance.

In her article in *Destino*, Borràs argued that given the fact that in bourgeois society works of art and in particular paintings had become merchandise, in order to be authentic any political criticism of that society had to speak out, breaking away from painting and even from art as the production of objects. Any attempt to express political positions through producing paintings thus necessarily led to opportunism and the creation of political tracts. In Valencia, Equipo (and the author of this text, who replied to Borràs in a letter also published in *Destino*) were profoundly taken aback by this argument, particularly due to the incomprehension that it revealed regarding the complexity of Equipo's position in relation to the history of 20th-century painting. While this controversy had little public repercussion, its arguments, which would be repeated by other critics over the years, were important for confirming Equipo in its particular course, giving it more polemical arguments.

4

The Black Series (1972)

After the exhibition at the Colegio de Arquitectos in Barcelona, the *Police and Culture* series was shown in Madrid in early 1972 at the Juana Mordó gallery. This Spanish gallery represented the leading artists of the previous generation—Tàpies, Chillida, Saura and Millares—and the fact that it offered Equipo not just an exhibition but also a long-term contract was a telling sign of the team's growing degree of professional success. After Madrid there were two solo exhibitions on Equipo in Segovia and Oviedo, both featuring paintings from *Police and Culture*. It also took part in two important group exhibitions. The first, held in Seville in April at the recently opened Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, was devoted to contemporary Valencian art. It was devised by the university professor Antonio Bonet Correa with the involvement of his son Juan Manuel and of the group of artists and critics associated with him (who would align themselves with Equipo Crónica just a few years later, as we will see). The second exhibition, held in June, was *Encuentros de Pamplona* [Pamplona Encounters]. I will discuss it later in this text. In the meantime, Equipo had been working since the previous autumn on a new series, the *Black Series*.

Police and Culture represented a break with the continuity evident in Equipo's three earlier series. As noted above, this break had come about due to the pressure of exterior circumstances. However, it came to be a method. The start of the *Black Series* arose from the routine of the studio and the reflection which that routine implied. Nonetheless, it was also a break.

The new series was relatively large (twenty-nine works in Dalmace's catalogue raisonné). The first paintings from it were exhibited in a small solo exhibition held in Banyoles in October 1972, but the full presentation of the series was the one that took place in December at the Val i 30 gallery in Valencia. Shortly afterwards,

in early 1973, some paintings from the series that had been shown in Valencia were presented at the René Metras gallery in Barcelona alongside other paintings from *Police and Culture*. In April the *Black Series* was shown at the Arte/Contacto gallery in Caracas, to which Perán Erminy, a Catalan critic living in Venezuela, acted as advisor. In professional terms this was an important occasion, marking Equipo's first presentation in South America and at a time when Venezuela was enjoying a period of notable economic and cultural vitality. Solbes and Valdés carefully prepared the exhibition and included in it a considerable number of previously unexhibited works. Four of the ten selected for the present exhibition were first exhibited to the public in Caracas, in comparison to five first shown in Valencia and the one in Banyoles.

While it lacks the compactness of the *Police and Culture* series, which was conceived almost as a polyptych, the *Black Series* is very homogeneous and possesses a clear identity. The paintings that belong to this series are easily recognisable as such. It is also one of the best painted.

Equipo made the following observations on the series:⁹

With the Black Series we embarked on a new experience which although at first sight might seem to be alien to our previous direction, on the contrary has enabled us to generate subsequent explorations and further develop our language.

In these paintings we aim to articulate various thematic levels that are already to be found in other series.

Firstly, there is the violence and action characteristic of American film noir and crime novels, which have had so much influence on our generation.

Another aspect involved in the series is the reference to the issue of our creative activity, the very process of that convention known as "painting".

Thirdly, the subject refers to the post-war years, vaguely recalled through images typical of that period.

These three aspects are articulated in each painting and also preserve their autonomy. The tone employed is autobiographical, hence its subjective and intimate character, as if remembered.

Characteristics:

1. Iconographic elements deriving from the three above-mentioned thematic areas.
2. Minimal colour ranges, basically blacks and greys.
3. The limits between the flat planes are broken down through *sfumato* executed with pen and carbon pencil.
4. Frequent use of trompe l'oeil to locate different planes of the image, within the conventional structure of the painting.

Three ideas in this text represent important innovations with regard to Equipo's procedure to date.

The first is the abandonment of the factual level in favour of a fictional level. The previous series, from *The Recovery* to *Police and Culture*, referred to Spanish social and political reality of the time and did so by alluding to certain events (the attempt to recover *Guernica*, for example, or the clashes between students and police arising from May 68). These could (and often did) give rise to different metaphors but behind these metaphors were always certain facts or factual conditions. With the *Black Series*, however, the violence that saturates the paintings belongs to an imaginary world: it is that of film and literature. It is true that this fiction functions metaphorically, but the metaphor does not point to any specific fact or event but to an overall atmosphere. If we recall the early years of Equipo and Estampa Popular in Valencia we will appreciate the profundity of the change. It is precisely this change which led Equipo in the above commentary to observe that the new series might seem "alien to our previous direction".

Secondly, it is easy to appreciate that the metaphorical functioning of the series is ambiguous. On the one hand, it refers to a certain generic climate of violence, but on the other to the very process of artistic crea-

9 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 107.



11. Equipo Crónica
Painting is Like Hitting, 1972
Black Series
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 200 cm
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
 Inv. no. AD00376

tion, and “Painting is like hitting” is in fact the title of one of the most memorable paintings [fig. 11]. In this sense, the *Black Series* recalls *Autopsy on a Profession*, but there are also significant differences. Firstly, because as an object referred to metaphorically, painting has to co-exist with that other object, which is the previously mentioned generic atmosphere of violence. Secondly, and this is important, because the tone of the series is no longer critique or “de-mystification”. What emerges from a contemplation of the paintings in the *Black Series* is rather a certain reaffirmation of painting. This affirmation is better understood if we remember that in the early 1960s, the genre of “noir” was becoming something of a cult. Space does not permit for an explanation of this phenomenon, which was evident throughout Europe, but particularly so in Spain. I will thus limit myself to mentioning two key indicators, both relating to Catalan culture. The first is the success of the book *La cùa de palla*, from a series published by Edicions62 of classics of American crime literature of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Hammett and Chandler, alongside more recent authors such as Ross McDonald and Patricia Highsmith. I well remember the enthusiasm with which we waited in Valencia for the appearance of a new title in that series. The second indicator is the publication in 1972 of *Yo maté a Kennedy* [I killed Kennedy], the first novel in the “Carvalho” series by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, a writer who had written very positively about Equipo a few months earlier and for whom Solbes and Valdés felt a

particular affinity. Comparing painting with film noir or its literary equivalent may seem rather trivial, but in the cultural context of the time it was a positive comparison.

There is another aspect that makes this still more interesting. Defending particular genres, both in literature and film, implied defying certain beliefs that were firmly established within the modern tradition. Firstly, because modernity required a submission to history, understood as permanent change, while genres tended to be a-historical (within certain limits). A good crime novel is a good crime novel, whether from the 1930s or the 1950s. This a-historical nature (although understood as relative) leads whoever uses the genre to move away from the avant-garde. The genre's margin of validity derives from certain rules, the validity of which persist over time, or at least for some period of time. Thus accepting these rules flatly contradicts the basic supposition of avant-garde innovation, which can only be innovative to the degree that it subverts the prevailing rules.

The convictions underlying the *Black Series* are of this type. Time in the history of culture is not linear or compulsive, as the notion of avant-garde required. It has currents, strata that circulate at different historical speeds. Some remarkably slowly: for example, film noir or the crime novel, or—even more slowly—painting. That slowness is due to the fact that the rules which define the frontiers of these strata keep them closed and protected from the constant flow around them. Something similar happens to what we find with gangs, which are small, closed worlds defined by their own rules and oblivious to those that govern the outside world. It is here that the most fascinating aspect of the metaphor reveals itself. This is because a certain degree of violence seems to be involved in all this. There is no rule without coercion and no coercion without violence: "Painting is like hitting." The extent and relevance of this affirmation are clearly evident in the light of the controversy which had brought Solbes and Valdés into conflict with the Catalan neo-avant-gardists just at the time they were starting to devise the *Black Series*.

The third idea that appears in the artists' text reproduced above is the most surprising: "The tone employed is autobiographical, hence its subjective and intimate character [...]." How can a group of artists working as a team (even if only a team of two) talk about subjectivity? This is undoubtedly one of the most profound changes evident in the course of Equipo Crónica's career, and the work that they made from the *Black Series* onwards would gradually reveal the consequences, as we will see later.

5 Portraits, Still Lifes and Landscapes (1972-1973)

Equipo Crónica had held solo exhibitions in the principal cities of Spain and in some Italian ones, but not in Paris. This was despite the fact that due to their participation in various important group exhibitions, their work was by no means unknown in that city's art world. It was the Stadler gallery that offered them their first solo show in France in April 1973. The gallery, which had an excellent reputation, represented important artists of the previous generation such as Appel, Mathieu, Fontana and Saura. In the 1950s Stadler had been Tàpies' first gallerist before he moved on to Maeght. The exhibition on Equipo Crónica arose from the suggestion of Saura, who convinced Rodolphe Stadler and then contacted Solbes and Valdés, who took little persuading.

Equipo decided to paint a new series for the exhibition. Once again representing a clear break with the *Black Series*, this one took two different directions: returning to the "classics" of the Spanish school and exploring the field of genre painting. This is how Equipo explained it:¹⁰

¹⁰ Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 108.

A series in which we return to a theme that is dear to us: so-called “classic” Spanish painting.

The premises of these paintings are deliberately academic. In principal it is a thematic approach through genres, which are represented with a total lack of formalist display.

We want the appearance of these works to be as close as possible to the models selected. Only [differing] in the colour, in the minimal introduction of discordant elements and in a meaningful choice of models. This must be enough to reveal some of Spain’s most sinister and black historical traits.

To return to the iconography of the “classic” Spanish school meant returning to the continuum of the three previous series, interrupted by the break represented by *Police and Culture*. However, Equipo returned to this familiar territory with a clearly different intention. They refer to most the significant difference in their text: “We want the appearance of these works to be as close as possible to the models selected”, and in effect, the figures from Velázquez or Goya which appear in *The Recovery* series are simplified images that basically function in an iconic manner, serving to produce contrasts or associations with images deriving from other sources, for example the press, and which also appear in the paintings with a purely iconic value. Now, however, Equipo was not satisfied with merely depicting the iconic elements of the paintings cited, but also wished to depict, translate and reinterpret their pictorial values. As Marín Viadel noted: “Up to now, they had used images from classic Spanish painting. Now it was about submerging themselves in its particular qualities.”¹¹ In other words, Equipo was now thinking that the old woman eating as we see her in Goya’s *Two old People eating* (1820-1822) (Museo del Prado) is inseparable from the way Goya painted it. In order for the contrast proposed by Equipo in *The Meal* to work [fig. 12], juxtaposing Goya’s figure with the motif of the fish and the plate taken from *The Table (Still Life with a Rabbit)* by Miró (1920, Zumsteg Collection), the notably different pictorial qualities of the two originals had to be translated and introduced into the new painting in an effective way. It should be emphasised that this was a translation or interpretation that involved the use of different media (for example, Goya and Miró’s paintings are executed in oil while Equipo’s is in acrylic).

This emphasis on the pictorial—in which the pictorial, iconic and ideological values of a painting form a continuum in which there is no interest in introducing breaks—is a result of the direction that Equipo Crónica’s programme had taken since the *Police and Culture* series, and in particular since the polemic with Maria Lluïsa Borràs. While in the *Black Series* Equipo had visibly expanded its repertoire, its effort to discover new techniques and to achieve new pictorial effects seems to have become one of the principal aims of *Portraits, Still Lives and Landscapes*. The systematic use of conventional frames (which in these paintings form part of the original picture) is a way of underlining (with some irony) that pictorial drive, which is so strong that it overflows the physical limits of the canvas and invades the frame.

The emphasis on pictorial qualities is also consistent with the subject matter of this series. In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of the defence of the different genres within the context of European art and literature in the early 1970s. However, while the *Black Series* championed a painted version of a literary and film genre, what Equipo proposed in this new series was practising various genres of painting. These were the most conventional or “academic” ones, in Equipo’s words, recalling the period of their own training at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts, where the portrait, still life and landscape were all taught as separate subjects.

The idea was one that entailed problems, however. While the great modern painters of the generation of Picasso and Matisse were capable of working directly within the traditional genres, producing authentic portraits, still lifes and landscapes, Equipo no longer seemed to be able to do so. Its still lifes were not directly located on the table in the studio prior to painting, nor did its landscapes require going outdoors, nor did its portraits depict any live sitter. Like all its previous painting, they are images of images, paintings of paintings.

11 Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., p. 89.



12. Equipo Crónica
The Meal, 1972
Portraits, Still Life and Landscapes series
Acrylic on canvas and frame
140 x 140 x 6,5 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AD03787

6

More on painting (1973-1975)

Craft and Craftsmen. Subverting the Signs. The Executions. Seeing and Making Painting

The exhibition at the Stadler gallery opened in May 1973. After this, Equipo immediately started work on preparing its next project, namely its participation in the Paris Biennial, which opened in September. Solbes and Valdés decided to embark on a new series, *The Poster*, which directly tackled the problem of the relationship between painting and politics. I will discuss it in the next section.

After *The Poster*, Equipo started work on another series entitled *Craft and Craftsmen* with the aim of including it in an exhibition scheduled for Rotterdam in March 1974. This was to be a retrospective, the first exhibition of this type on Equipo, presenting a survey of their first ten years of work. It was organised by the Lijnbaancentrum, a Dutch foundation established to document contemporary art. The foundation's main focus of activity was making video recordings of happenings and actions by Fluxus artists such as Beuys and Filio and other artists within this trend. The exhibition on Equipo *Crónica* thus did not fit particularly well within its strategy and I am not aware of how it came about. Whatever the case, the organisers insisted on placing the emphasis on Equipo's working process, as reflected in the exhibition's title, *Equipo Crónica. Werkproces (1964-1974)*. For Solbes and Valdés, who were largely uninterested in videos, "working process" implied their studio and group of friends and collaborators who frequented it, and this was the direction in which they oriented the iconography of the new series. They described it as follows:

A series that connects up with the work of 69-70 in the sense of it being a reflection on artistic activity.¹²

The word "craftsmen" [*oficiantes* in the original Spanish] has a certain ambiguity which quite closely reflected the meaning that the series had for us. On the one hand, a "craftsman" is someone who practises a trade, but on the other it possesses a certain ritual and magical character which is precisely the one we wanted to recount through the 16 or 17 paintings in the series.¹³

The artist magus, the artist demiurge, the "outsider", the bohemian, disturbing but bearable, etc. This figure, the context in which it operates, its relationships with its working tools, its fetishes and its rituals, are the aspects we have critically presented in "Craft and Craftsmen".

Characteristics:

1. The use of an image repeated using silkscreen in all the paintings on a different scale, depending on the composition (group of painters), plus images of different areas (painting, photographs, trompe-l'oeil).
2. Compositions with a "non realist" appearance.
3. Standard format for all the paintings (110 x 80cm).
4. Inclusion of texts in some paintings.¹⁴

The sentence on the "artist magus, artist demiurge [...]" surprisingly evokes the figure of Beuys, who was, as noted above, one of the artists regularly exhibited at the Lijnbaancentrum. Equipo had been familiar with Beuys's work since 1970, when they all participated in the exhibition *Kunst und Politik*. Beuys would subsequently be one of the stars of *Dokumenta V* in Kassel in 1972 and it was precisely that event which had motivated the change of direction of the 8th Paris Biennial, in which Equipo had decided to take part with polemical intent, as we will discuss in the next chapter. In contrast to the myth of the "artist shaman", so insistently constructed by Beuys but also underlying other neo-avant-garde art projects of the 1970s, in *Craft and Craftsmen* Equipo constructed an everyday image of total normality: the portrait of a group of painter friends who have got together for a coffee and a chat.

¹² Here Equipo is undoubtedly referring to the *Autopsy on a Profession* series.

¹³ Michèle Dalmace's catalogue states this series to include 18 works.

¹⁴ *Equipo Crónica*, op. cit., p. 108.



13. Equipo Crónica
The Painter, 1973
Craft and Craftsmen series
 Paint on papier mâché
 165 x 95 x 54 cm
 Private collection

The catalogue of the Rotterdam retrospective included fifteen paintings from this series alongside another thirty-nine from previous series. It also included a multiple, *The Painter* [fig. 13], of which the entire edition of twenty was included in the exhibition, all painted differently and lined up, rather in the manner of the Xian terracotta warriors. A single one of these has been chosen to represent the series *Craft and Craftsmen* in the present exhibition. Equipo described this multiple as follows:

Within the series "Craft and Craftsmen" we have made some multiples with the title "the painter painting", which represent an artist holding a palette and brush. Life-size and made of papier-mâché, it is painted with motifs from art. Each figure contains a style ("neo-plasticist", "cubist", "expressionist", "dada", "naïf", etc). / There are twenty of them and they are intended to be grouped together. They are baroque with regard to colour and form and have a humorous character.

• • •

The formulaic concept of the ten-year survey worked and the Rotterdam retrospective was followed in 1974 by two considerably more important ones. The first opened in Paris in June at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in its Animation, Recherche, Confrontation space directed by Suzanne Pagé, who also curated the exhibition. Like the Rotterdam event, it was also structured through Equipo's series. Critical response was positive and the exhibition subsequently travelled, with some variants, to Saint-Etienne, Rennes and Pau. The third and final ten-year retrospective opened in May 1975, after some delays, at the Centro M-11 in Seville. Once again it was structured in terms of the series. The accompanying catalogue, designed by Alberto Corazón, included a large selection of texts and images.

In Equipo's account of its activities published in the Seville catalogue, the series *Subverting the Signs* (which is not, however, referred to as a series) is followed by a section entitled "1974-1975". The text in that section refers to a further five "series", which according to Equipo "have not been fully carried out yet". The titles of these series are: A. *The "historical" genre of Painting (The execution as subject)*, B. *Intellectuals*, C. *Images of victory*, D. *On language*, E. *Informalism: initial response*.¹⁵ In their account of their activities dating from 1981, Equipo literally reproduce the Seville text but the series referred to under the heading of "1974-1975" are reduced to four in number as the one called *On language* has disappeared.

Behind these rather unclear listings a crisis is evident, at least with regard to the serial working method. Up to that point Equipo's series had followed each other in an ordered fashion. The overlapping of series that we now observe must have generated doubts and confusion in the studio. It was also a symptom of doubts and confusion in itself. Furthermore, and this would come to be confirmed, some of the titles mentioned in the Seville catalogue (*Intellectuals* or *On language*) are so generic that they do not seem to reflect any conceptually precise project.

When we look at the works produced by Equipo at this period it is evident that the crisis not only affected the thematic groups listed under the heading "1974-1975", but also the next series, *Seeing and Making Painting*, produced between 1975 and 1976. Curiously, that title does not appear as a heading in the catalogue. What we find in the 1981 autobiographical account after the heading "1974 to 1975" is another section headed "1975-1976". It is in the text for that section that Equipo refer to "a period of trial and search" regarding the "pictorial language" which manifested itself in a group of paintings that "exclusively deal with language (processes of realisation, the issue of style, suggestions for reading specific paintings, etc), and we have entitled this series *Seeing and Making Painting*."¹⁶

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that from 1973 onwards, having completed *The Poster* series, which had a "strong" argument, Equipo entered into a period of doubts that would not be resolved until late 1975 or early 1976 when it began to work on *The Execution Wall*, another series characterised by a "strong" argument.

It appears that Solbes and Valdés even considered breaking up Equipo. This has been stated by Marín Viadel, who discussed the crisis with them in a series of interviews dating between 1980 and 1981.¹⁷ This may explain the undefined nature of projects for series that never actually came into being. It might also explain the stylistic variety of Equipo's work at this period.

In biographical terms the crisis could perhaps be understood in terms of the process of maturing. The retrospectives of 1974 to 1975 had allowed Solbes and Valdés to see the consequences of ten years of joint

15 *Equipo Crónica*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Sevilla : Centro de Arte M-11, 1975, no page numbers.

16 *Equipo Crónica*, op. cit., p. 109.

17 Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., pp. 197-208.

collaboration, leading them to ask themselves whether the results justified the sacrifice of renouncing their individual artistic identities.

In historical terms it may also be relevant that, following the rising path represented by their first ten years of activity, Equipo now faced some problematic expectations. Its reflection on the condition of modern art, its defence of painting and its rejection of the neo-avant-gardes were marginalising it in relation to the new trends that were emerging with force in contemporary art. This gave rise to a suspicion of resounding failure. Equipo's initial intention to change the world, either that of Spanish politics or the international art world, had proved to be naïve. With regard to both these fields the battles Equipo had waged seemed to have been lost.

Whatever the case, what seems clear is that the overall mood of Equipo's work between 1974 and 1975 is reflexive; its primary interest has to do with the social, political and cultural condition of painting. It is this interest that connects the work of these years with the thematic line initiated in 1970 with *Autopsy on a Profession*.



Five paintings have been chosen to represent that period. The first two, *Heartfield-El Lissitzky* (IVAM, Valencia) and *Schad-Solana* (Fundación Obra Social y Monte de Piedad de Madrid), date from 1974 and were first exhibited at Art Basel on Val i 30 gallery's stand. They were then included in the travelling version of the French retrospective. While these are two very different paintings in terms of appearance, they belong to the same series, *Subverting the Signs*. According to Equipo, that series "aimed to describe a possible line in the context of critical realism [...] starting with the interrelating of certain images by painters who have nothing to do with each other in principle and who are chosen because each of them approaches the issue of realism in his own way."¹⁸ In contrast to those wishing to marginalise realism, Equipo's proposal is to reveal its richness and importance for 20th-century painting.

The examples selected with this aim in mind are interesting. Schad and Solana had very different careers and personalities but they shared a clear commitment to traditional realism, which isolated them from the principal trends in modern art. The case of Heartfield and Lissitzky is quite different: these two artists were leading members of the avant-gardes. By including them in their revision of realism, Equipo must have thought that their involvement in the revolutionary movements of the 1920s and 1930s made them representatives of "critical realism". Aside from its historical plausibility, this opinion reflects the concept of "realism without frontiers" upheld by Roger Garaudy in the previous decade and adopted by many artists interested in the question of realism (Saura and Millares in Spain, for example). Whatever the case, Solbes and Valdés did not operate as art historians but as painters. What mattered to them was that the juxtaposition of quotations was plausible, painting by painting. That plausibility had to be not just iconographic but also pictorial, as they had achieved with their *Portraits, Still lifes and Landscapes* series of 1973. For the present author, the two examples included in this exhibition fully achieve that aim.

Guernica Cut Up or Rupture number 2 (Scissors) (MNCARS, Madrid) was first exhibited in public in April 1975 in the retrospective in Seville. In that catalogue the painting was grouped under the series *On language*. However, that series, presented in Seville as comprising four paintings, disappeared from Equipo's autobiographical texts, as noted above. Michèle Dalmace, who left it out of his catalogue raisonné, assigns *Guernica Cut Up* to the section "1974-1975", where he lists it with the paintings from *Subverting the Signs*

¹⁸ Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 109.



14. Equipo Crónica
Eye Witness, 1974
The Executions series
Acrylic on canvas
181 x 221 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf. Acquisition, 1977
Inv. no. 0.1977.3

despite the fact that it obviously has nothing to do with them. Marín Viadel does, however, include it in the *On language* series, to which he devotes a section in his book.¹⁹ In his opinion, *On language* is a precedent for the series *Seeing and Making Painting*.

Eye Witness [fig. 14] is probably the most important painting of this entire period. It was first exhibited in public in the Seville retrospective, in the catalogue of which it is grouped with the series *The "historical" genre of Painting (The execution as subject)*. The title is interesting because it implies the belief that history painting was simply one more pictorial genre, an opinion that clearly goes against the 19th-century attitude.

¹⁹ Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., pp. 121-122. Nonetheless, the author states the series to consist of only three paintings. He omits from his list the last work that was shown in Seville with the title *El Arte* [Art] (Helga de Alvear Collection). This omission may be due to the difficulty of identifying that painting given that in Michèle Dalmace's catalogue it is included with the slightly different title of *Arte* and with different dimensions. In my opinion, *Art* clearly belongs to the *On Language* series.

However, Solbes and Valdés, saw the genres from an autobiographical viewpoint associated with their time at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts where there was a separate history painting class, as there was for still life and portraiture. Whatever the case, this way of approaching history painting allowed them to establish a direct connection between this new series and *Portraits, Still Lifes and Landscapes*, presented in Paris in 1973.

Eye Witness seems to have been the first work in the series devoted to history painting. In fact, it may have initially been conceived as a further painting in the previous series, *Subverting the Signs*. Once again, Equipo compares images and styles by two painters, Manet and Ernst, who were extremely different but are also linked by a distinctive and personal aesthetic that tended to coolness and distancing, a type of scopophilia that is so fascinated by reality that it takes it to the point of the unreal. The painting's title refers both to the enigmatic figure of Ernst to be seen in the foreground and to the witnesses to the execution, who are absent in Manet's painting but implicit in that scene, as is the painter himself. Through this association of the painter and the eyewitnesses to historical events (even the most atrocious), the reflexion on realism that inspires *Subverting the Signs* and which also appears in *Eye Witness* links up with Equipo's reflection on the condition of painting that characterises this entire period of their work.

Reading Daumier (Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz) is also an important work that falls within this reflection on realism, although it belongs to the last series of this period, *Seeing and Making Painting*. It was first exhibited in public at the solo exhibition on Equipo organised by the Juana Mordó gallery in 1976 and was selected as the catalogue's front cover image. This is a work of complex realisation. It began as an ambitious diptych measuring 200 x 300cm in total, which Equipo worked on in its studio for a long time. Finally, the reduction in size by half and the clarification of the motifs allowed Solbes and Valdés to complete it.

7

A political art? (1972-1977)

Pamplona Encounters. The Poster. Execution Wall. The Plot

Can art talk about politics? An article by the present author entitled "The distancing of distancing" was published in the catalogue of the retrospective of Equipo Crónica held at the Musée d'Arte Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1974.²⁰ As I said in that text, this was precisely the question that had inspired *The Poster*, the series which Equipo had presented at the Paris Biennial in 1973. I will now turn to look at that series, as well as three other Equipo projects dating between 1972 and 1977.

The first took shape in 1972 and was directly related to the Pamplona Encounters cultural festival. At the beginning of the year Equipo received an invitation to take part in that event. Solbes and Valdés, who were extremely busy with the *Black Series*, had their doubts. The controversy with the Catalan neo-avant-gardists was a recent one and the Pamplona programme promised to be more of the same although on a larger scale. The Equipo artists consulted Tàpies and Saura who said they were not thinking of participating. Arroyo, it would seem, had not even been invited. Finally, it was a musician, Xavier Montsalvatge, who convinced Equipo that they should not turn the invitation down. Given the small number of cultural events in existence in Franco's Spain, they should be taken advantage of, although the nature of Pamplona Encounters provoked

²⁰ Tomàs Llorens. "Equipo Crónica : la distantiation de la distantiation : une demarche sémiotique" in *Opus International*, no. 50, May 1974, pp. 78-89 (reproduced in *Equipo Crónica*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Suzanne Pagé (ed.). Paris : Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1975; reproduced in "Equipo Crónica : la distanciació de la distanciació: una trayectoria semiótica" in *Equipo Crónica*. [Exhib. cat.]. Sevilla : Centro de Arte M-11, 1975).



15. Equipo Crónica
Spectator of Spectators, 1972
Multiple made for *The Pamplona Encounters*, 1972
Paint on papier mâché
127 x 49 x 82.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 90/47

doubts. Finally, Equipo decided to take part but with a work that expressed the political problems involved in the organisation of the event.

Devised and run by the Alea group, particularly by Luis de Pablo, Pamplona Encounters benefited from the support and sponsorship of the powerful Huarte family, which had always enjoyed good relations with the regime. In addition to the core disciplines of music and the visual arts, the festival's programme also included dance, film, theatre and architecture. The organisers succeeded in attracting participants of a high

international level, particularly in the field of music. In order to promote the festival, the events mainly took place in public venues in the city in the days leading up to the San Fermín holiday.

Bearing in mind the problems of public order that were affecting the regime during these years (five States of Emergency were declared between 1970 and 1975), it seems evident that the authorisations issued by town councils and provincial authorities that were required for holding an event of this type would have been impossible to obtain in cities such as Madrid, Barcelona or Valencia. This was a period of hardening of the regime and any street gathering of university students or any concert of protest songs that brought together a few dozen people (not to mention more overtly political or union-led demonstrations) was systematically broken up by the police. In Pamplona, however, authorisations had been issued and the first question to be asked by anyone with even minimal political experience was why?

This was certainly the first question asked by Equipo Crónica when it received its invitation. The most likely answer was that the organisers, counting on the political connections of the Huarte family, had previously explained the project to the relevant authorities in the regime and had convinced them that the activities planned had no political relevance. The apparent freedom that the Encounters programme seemed to concede to artists was, in reality, a controlled one, and this is precisely what Equipo set out to reveal. Solbes and Valdés produced a papier-mâché multiple of the type that they had made for some of their exhibitions at the Val i 30 gallery, but represented this one as a police agent from the Political-Social Brigade. They sent it with the intention that these figures should be sited sitting among the audience at the festival's concerts and activities. To make its purpose entirely clear, they entitled it *Spectator of Spectators* [fig. 15]. An edition of 100 was produced that was distributed as intended, although perhaps not with the efficacy that might have been hoped for had the organisers been more enthusiastic.

From a certain perspective, *Spectator of Spectators* was in fact successful. Participants in Encounters and the attending public (at least the Spanish part of it) fully grasped the allusion to the Political-Social Brigade. The reaction was light-hearted. Some of the dolls were thrown around and others destroyed. The rest rapidly disappeared as members of the public took them home as souvenirs. Overall, it seemed like one more happening among the many taking place in Pamplona during the festival. The authorities had the sense not to interfere; after all it was better not to let on that they got the reference. This, in fact, was where Equipo's failure lay: not in the reaction of the authorities, which was to be predicted, but in the fact that a work they had sent with a critical, political intent ended up fitting easily within the festival's programme.



This would not happen again. When in the summer of 1973 Equipo was invited to take part in the Paris Biennial, the team was clear that it was going to send painting and nothing else. The invitation was extended on the initiative of Saura, who was on the Biennial's selection committee. The 1973 edition aimed to take a radical new approach to this Parisian institution. The previous year, *Dokumenta V* had taken place in Basel. Its new director, Harald Szeeman, ex-curator of the Berne Kunsthalle, had transformed it into a festival of neo-avant-gardists from both sides of the Atlantic with resounding success. Numerous Paris-based critics and artists now believed that the French capital needed to offer a response to the Biennial. Saura thought that it should be different, emphasising painting and its critical potential. Equipo Crónica took up this idea and focused on the question that had concerned them since the controversy with Maria Lluïsa Borràs: why does a painting about politics automatically cease to be seen as art and become a "tract"?



16. Equipo Crónica
The Street, 1973
The Poster series
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm
 Guillermo Caballero de Luján Collection,
 Valencia

The Poster was Equipo's reply. This is how the team described it in 1981:²¹

This is a series of five large canvases (200 x 200 and 200 x 400cm) that were exhibited at the 8th Paris Biennial. Radical differences are frequently established between "poster" and "painting", "tract" and "art", etc., and these differences are also frequently analysed using criteria that are not objective and we might even say simplistically tendentious (we are not of course referring to technical differences).

It can be adduced that the immediate functional purpose of a poster both explains and conditions its nature. This conditioning, we can also adduce, should not exist in art, which needs total freedom for its development as such. Given that we consider that all visual activity is, consciously or unconsciously, subject to prior conditioning factors of all types, which prefigure, reinforce and explain it [...] we believe that the boundaries that separate these two phenomena are extremely complex [...].

Numerous intellectuals have consciously worked on this problem (Brecht, Heartfield, Dziga Vertov, Renau, Piscator, Tatlin...), while there are also many works that are now assessed for their artistic merit (and there is no doubt that they are art) but which were in their time determined by the need to disseminate facts or ideas [...]. Thus, the guiding idea behind *The Poster* series is that of raising a controversial question on the widespread situation in which the painting-poster or tract-act are opposing poles.

While it is generally seen as one series (Equipo referred to it as such in the above text), *The Poster* is different to the others.

It is not an open sequence of paintings but a closed group in which each of the five units that comprise it has a specific place. In Paris it was exhibited as a polyptych. Seen in this way, the work has a powerful visual effect.²² If only for its size and pictorial complexity, there is no doubt that it is Equipo's most ambitious work,

²¹ Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 108.

²² During the 1980s the five works that comprised *The Poster* were split up. After its showing in Paris *The Poster* has only been shown in its entirety in the retrospective exhibition on Equipo organised by the IVAM and the MNCARS in 1989 and in the present exhibition.



17. Equipo Crónica
Execution Wall III, 1975
Execution Wall series
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 150 cm
Private collection

although perhaps not the most successful. The effort made in its execution is too apparent, giving it a certain rigidity that limits the results to which Equipo aspired.

Whatever the case, with regard to the Biennial it was a losing bet, although for reasons that had little to do with its pictorial quality. The work did not arouse the interest of the critics nor, in general, the French art world of the time. The rising tide of the neo-avant-garde was unstoppable, even in Paris, and these artists enjoyed the support of all the academic institutions, museums, critics and above all (and this was crucial) the leading operators in the international art market.



Execution Wall was a less ambitious but pictorially more brilliant series than *The Poster*. It was painted in late 1975 and early 1976 for *Spagna, avanguardia artistica e realtà sociale, 1936-1976*, an exhibition organised by the Venice Biennial in the central pavilion of the Giardini. The Spanish pavilion was closed as the Spanish government had been expelled from the Biennial in 1975, and its Executive Committee invited Alberto Corazón, Equipo and the author of this text to present an alternative project. Presented in July, the proposal was accepted in September and the Biennial formally commissioned the exhibition from a committee consisting (in addition to the four authors of the proposal) of Oriol Bohigas, Valeriano Bozal, Agustín Ibarrola, Antonio Saura and Antoni Tàpies. This committee met in Barcelona in September 1975 in Bohigas's

studio, accepted the commission and appointed Bozal and the present author as the exhibition's curators and the architectural firm Martorell, Bohigas and Mackay as its designers.

The Franco regime (and the life of Franco) were coming to an end although this was obviously not known at the time. That same month of September 1975 a military tribunal condemned five anti-Francoist militants to death. The sentence provoked a wave of protests and international pressure on the regime increased. Despite this, however, Franco ratified the sentences, which were carried out on 27 September. As Equipo noted, *Execution Wall* refers to that event:²³

We did this series as the result of the events of 27 September 1975 (the execution by firing squad of five young men, which Franco ordered shortly before his death).

It consists of ten canvases measuring 140 x 140cm in which we repeat a single iconographic system: a wall, a figure with its eyes blindfolded by a black rectangle, a page from a calendar with a date, a broken palette in the centre and a black band at the upper left corner.

All these elements are repeated using a cool, synthetic treatment. The pictorial references and symbolic ordering of the space aim to describe the above-mentioned events from a viewpoint that rejects both aseptic "neutrality" and sentimental rhetoric. The approach chosen could be described as a symbolic documentalism.

The recurring elements in the series (the mourning band in the corner and the rectangle over the figure's face, the calendar and the broken palette) were the objective and immediately recognisable elements which we used as symbols. The walls and figures, which are variable factors, were chosen from the iconography of avant-garde art—Chirico, Klee, Delvaux, Tàpies, Picasso... etc—and fulfilled the function of representing the specific event. They constitute the documentary part of the work.

As a final note, the imposing frame emphasises its nature as "painting", an object from the realm of high culture.

The series was exhibited in Madrid and at the Venice Biennial.

As I noted in the previous section of this text, *Execution Wall* marked the end of the crisis which Equipo had suffered since the end of 1973, a crisis that, as we have seen, involved among other factors the issue of whether political painting was possible, and under what conditions. The way out in this case involved a type of return to the team's initial presumptions. In contrast to the previous series, this one involves a specific, factual reference to political events. Its "documentary" nature and its "objective", "cool" focus (all terms used by Equipo itself) bring it close to their critical realism of the early years.

This explanation is, however, not entirely convincing. The "documentary" spirit of the series is notably toned down. To use Equipo's surprising expression, it is a "symbolic documentalism". The fact is, while it refers to a specific political act, none of the painted images present that act and the references are always indirect ones of a generally metonymic kind, based on very abstract and complex substitution mechanisms. Overall, if the series works this is not due to its "documentary" character but to its formal qualities. The first of these is the precise, rigorous interplay of the network of "symbolic" relations that each painting reveals. The second, crucial one is the pictorial quality. Here I refer to decisions as fundamental as the size of the figures in relation to that of the canvases, the square format, which is extremely severe and difficult but nonetheless very well deployed in each painting, the geometrical splendour of each composition, the choice of pictorial quotations and the way they are treated, the series' brilliant colours, etc. All these elements reveal that Equipo had recovered its confidence in the validity of painting.

• • •

23 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 109.

Equipo Crónica began working on *The Plot* immediately after the Venice Biennial. It was intended for the team's second solo exhibition in Paris, this time in a different gallery. Although the previous exhibition with Stadler had gone well, Eduardo Arroyo had suggested they exhibit with his gallerist, Karl Flinker. Arroyo acted as intermediary. The Karl Flinker gallery was a prestigious one although somewhat isolated within the French art world. Arroyo, who had recently joined it with a long-term contract, was fascinated by the personality of its owner, an exquisitely cultured Viennese Jew. The series that Equipo produced for the exhibition would be one of its most complex projects.

[...] For us, different elements play a part in the paintings, each of which has a specific role. Among them we believe that the spectator, the artist, the specific work and the context in which it is created are fundamental. This is the structure that we wanted to transgress through the above-mentioned subversion of roles, emphasising the complex, interconnected nature of every work of art.

[...] These were twelve triptychs, each one of which referred to an event in Franco's public life. Each triptych repeats the same mechanism, as in *Execution Wall*: a biographical document (painted), a recreation of the codified languages of the classic avant-garde, and a fragment in which a spectator is seen from behind looking at the previous fragment. There were also other graphic elements such as small silkscreen photographs.

A final element superimposed on the triptych in the manner of Surrealist automatism appeared in each triptych, comprising objects with no narrative connection, the function of which was to emphasise that breaking of the spectator's visual habit.

Our reflection arose from this complicated structure. We wanted the spectator to find himself engaged in the act of reformulating various questions on the nature of works of art, on the gaze itself, on painting's requirements as a specific discipline and on its relationship with reality.²⁴

8 The Game of Billiards (1977)

For artists who had been as closely involved in the anti-Francoist struggle as Equipo Crónica and Eduardo Arroyo, the dictator's death must have implied a profound change, not only with regard to the contents of their work but also in their professional situation. Arroyo, who had lived in exile in Paris since the start of the previous decade, wanted to be able to exhibit again in Spain. He did so in January 1977 at the Maeght gallery in Barcelona, showing a large selection of works from recent years. Through the mediation of Equipo Crónica, this exhibition then travelled to the Juana Mordó gallery in Madrid. However, the return was not a happy one. The early years of the so-called Transition in Spain proved conflictive and unstable. In the art world, everyone fought to obtain an advantageous position with regard to the future currently opening up. Nobody wanted to know anything about the past, and even less about Arroyo and Equipo, who were now the target of widespread hostility for their roles in the organisation of the Venice exhibition.²⁵ Arroyo's exhibitions were boycotted, particularly the one at Juan Mordó's gallery. Not even the gallery's own artists attended the exhibition. The ensuing trauma damaged relations between Arroyo and Solbes and Valdés, with the former unjustly blaming the latter for not having defended him with sufficient vigour.

It should be observed that both Arroyo and Equipo Crónica were experiencing a critical phase. The era of the big Paris exhibition of the 1960s was long gone and would not return. Gassiot-Talabot's "narrative figuration" had also faded away. The final battle that they fought together, the Venice Biennial, had ended in defeat. Not just in Spain, as Arroyo had just learned, but also, and above all, outside it. The exhibition

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

²⁵ Arroyo was not part of the exhibition's organising committee but he played a key role in it as a member of the Biennial's Visual Arts Committee.

Spagna, avanguardia artistica e realtà sociale, 1936-1976 received a record number of visitors and extensive coverage in the Italian and Spanish press, but the active forces in international art subjected it to a sort of *damnatio memoriae*. They had declared war on the “Red [i.e. Communist] Biennial”,²⁶ and the Spanish exhibition was the paradigm of everything they wished to expel from the art world. The only thing remembered today about the 1976 Biennial is the exhibition on Beuys in the German pavilion and the group show *Ambiente/Arte* curated by Germano Celant.

The fascination Equipo felt for Karl Flinker was a telling symptom of the new situation in which Equipo now found itself. Voluntarily disconnected from the leading international networks and their venues (Kassel, Venice and Basel), Flinker’s Paris gallery offered an attractive refuge. Existing on the margins of the neo-avant-gardists and their market was no tragedy and some of the leading artists of the day, such as Bacon or Kitaj, had deliberately adopted a comparable position. A near at hand example was Saura, who continued to maintain friendly relations with Solbes and Valdés. However, the falling out with Arroyo made it impossible for Equipo to show with Flinker.²⁷

In the meantime, Equipo’s relationship with Juana Mordó had also deteriorated, again largely due to the Venice Biennial. It was at this problematic moment that the team received an extremely timely proposal: to present a large solo exhibition with the Maeght gallery in Barcelona, which could represent the start of a long-term relationship.

The exhibition opened on 14 February 1978 and the new series that Solbes and Valdés had painted for it was entitled *The Game of Billiards. Autonomy and responsibility of a practice*. In the artists’ own words:

In this series, which is considerably longer than the previous ones, we revived some characteristics from *Autopsy on a Profession* and from the *Black Series*. Aspects such as the narrative character or the symbolism of *Autopsy* [...] and even the urban context of the two closed, tough worlds of billiards and the criminal underworld had clear parallels.

[...] We started from a visual metaphor that allowed for a comprehension of the series’ true argument, which was obviously not the game of billiards, but artistic practice. We chose this metaphor because that game has certain aspects which in some way coincide with the act of painting [...] Both are practiced as specific disciplines based on a complex set of rules (even if they exist to be flouted). In both of them, chance and pleasure occupy an important role. The geometry, ambient light and colours, even certain rituals of billiards might suggest on a metaphorical level aspects characteristic of the act of painting.²⁸

Marín Viadel perspicaciously drew attention to another parallel that I would like to emphasise: “Both billiards and painting are minority activities, sports or hobbies. Their technology is archaic and rudimentary and seems to have survived more from the inertia of tradition or from a curious fondness for pastimes than for their appropriateness to the modern world.”²⁹ It is important to appreciate the difference that this aspect implied with regard to the *Black Series*, which is also structured around a central metaphor. In both series the art world and its practices were paralleled with other closed worlds. In the case of the criminal underworld, the prevailing vehicle of the metaphor was violence; an ambivalent violence that was on the one hand attributed to painting but on the other and above all, to capitalist society and its collective iconography.

26 The period immediately after the statutory reform of the Biennial in 1973, which was notably influenced by the role of Carlo Ripa di Meana (1974-1978) as its president.

27 The present author can offer direct evidence of this. One afternoon in the spring of 1978 while I was in Portsmouth I received a call from Karl Flinker, who was preparing his second exhibition on Equipo Crónica for the following season. Arroyo had vetoed it, threatening to leave the gallery, and Flinker, who was very upset about this, asked me to mediate. I had a lengthy telephone conversation with Arroyo but was not able to convince him to change his mind. Flinker cancelled the exhibition on Equipo.

28 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 110.

29 Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., pp. 159-160.



18. Equipo Crónica
The Marvellous Forest, 1977
The Game of Billiards series
 Acrylic on canvas
 175 x 275 cm
 Arango Collection

In the case of billiards, the vehicle of the metaphor was the historic disjuncture, the lack of adaptation to the modern world, a characteristic that billiards shared only shared with painting and not with society in general.

The autobiographical elements and the aura of nostalgia that tints the *Black Series* are emphasised in *The Game of Billiards*. As in earlier series, the iconographic sources for this one are in part photographic and in part pictorial, taken from 20th-century art. However, there are two differentiating traits: the first is the limited use of quotations from other painters, and the second is the fact that for the first time, the photographic sources are not taken from the mass media. Rather, they are photographs taken by Solbes and Valdés in a specific place and with the help of Francisco Alberola.³⁰

Billares Colón was the most important billiards hall in Valencia. It was located on the ground floor of a Neo-Mudéjar building on calle Russafa a short distance from the Plaza del Ayuntamiento and the North Station. It had an old fashioned cement tiled floor, tiled walls and numerous billiard tables that were well lit individually by neon strip lighting. In addition to a large clientele of numerous local amateurs and country people from the nearby villages, this was the meeting place for professionals who played for money. The place had a slightly seedy, low life air to it dating back to the post-war period. As teenagers, Solbes and Valdés, both of whom were born in Valencia, must have experienced the attractive seediness of *Billares*

³⁰ Francisco Alberola was a professional photographer and a close friend of Solbes and Valdés who documented Equipo's work and activities over many years.

Colón and its professional players. Now, in the 1970s, the place was in general decline and it was easy to guess that property speculation would close it down before too long.

There are two visual elements that determine the overall character of the series: the composition and light. Both derive from the photographs used as the iconographic base. However, these photographs had been taken by Equipo with a painter's eye. Thinking about the large, smooth surfaces of the billiard tables, the compact geometry of the room, the shadowy corners, the harshness of the neon lighting... pictorial qualities, all of them imaginary, but ones that would soon materialise through their work on the paintings.

Many critics, including the present author, consider that *The Game of Billiards* includes some of the high points of Equipo's pictorial output (along with some paintings in the *Black Series*). It reveals that not only had the team emerged from the crisis that had begun in 1973 but had emerged strengthened. Personally, I am convinced that the splendour of this series was decisively influenced by Equipo's awareness of the marginalisation it was suffering with respect to the principal events and venues in the contemporary art world. Defeat had proved to be liberating.

9

Final series (1977-1981)

A Sort of Parable. Travels. Urban Landscapes.

Chronicle of the Transition. The Public and Private series

In the late 1970s a renewed confidence in painting and a defence of its specific nature started to become widespread. In 1981 the Royal Academy in London organised an exhibition that revealed the breadth of this tendency, which was beginning to defy the pre-eminence of the neo-avant-gardes of the previous decade. The exhibition was called *A new Spirit in Painting* and was commissioned by Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides. An exhibition that had adopted a similar attitude had already been seen in Spain: entitled *1980*, it was a group show organised in October 1979 by the Juan Mordó gallery in Madrid and curated by Juan Manuel Bonet, Quico Rivas and Ángel González.

1980 brought together a group of young painters of different backgrounds, with a core group from Seville that had sprung up around its three curators in the second half of the 1970s. The exhibition's thesis was the defence of painting. The catalogue, written in a relaxed, polemical tone, advocated a complete break with "the art of the 1960s", including Equipo *Crónica* under this label in a fairly explicit way. The exhibition provoked a highly critical review by the present author,³¹ to which Juan Manuel Bonet responded. "In the darkest corners of my filing system", he wrote, "there are four thick files grouped under the same heading, the *Sixties*. Each of them has a sub-title: 'angst-ridden artists', 'political artists', 'erotic artists' and 'technological artists'. In my opinion, and I think in that of most critics of my generation, the 1960s will remain in the history of Spanish art as just that: pure angst, pure politics in images, pure sex-shop Eros, pure technological bore. Everything except painting."³²

"Everything except painting". The final two years of Equipo *Crónica*'s work took place under the shadow of this new controversy. The previous one, which had led them to clash with the neo-avant-gardes, had faded out during the early years of the Transition for two reasons. Firstly, due to a change in taste, encouraged by

31 Tomàs Llorens. "El espejo de Petronio" in *Batik*, no. 51, November 1979.

32 Juan Manuel Bonet. "Después de la batalla" in *Pueblo*, Madrid, 17 November 1979.

the European art market, which returned to promoting painting as a novelty. The above-mentioned exhibition in London was the clearest manifestation of that change. The second reason was specifically Spanish and was based on the desire to break from the immediate past in all areas of national life. That rupture involved forgetting the anti-Francoist attitudes which had dominated cultural life in the 1960s, both with regard to the neo-avant-gardists and those whose work was labelled “social realism”. Suddenly, all of this was “political art.”³³ Thus, while the old controversy that had affected Equipo Crónica opposed two different ways of understanding anti-Francoism—with painting or against it—the new one opposed two ways of understanding painting—with politics or without it.

The concept of painting defended by what we might call the *1980* group could be described as absolute and self-sufficient. Painting ceased to be painting from the moment it became the painting of something or accepted the slightest degree of contamination from the social, political or historical context in which it was created. While the origins of this attitude lay in the Aesthetic tradition of the late 19th century, the *1980* painters and critics made use (generally rather imprecisely) of conceptual references that were nearer at hand. On the one hand, they looked to the French neo-formalist movement championed by Marcelin Pleynet and the magazine *Cahiers de la peinture*. This was the position of the Trama group in Barcelona, at that date supported by Federico Jiménez Losantos and soon after by Juan Manuel Bonet himself. On the other hand, these references looked to the American critical tradition derived from Clement Greenberg. Its ideas had reached Spanish art circles via painters such as Fernando Zóbel who had studied in the United States, and José Guerrero who had lived there for almost two decades. Its artistic references began with Monet and Matisse and concluded with Motherwell and Rothko. Supported by cultural institutions that enjoyed a high profile in Spain at that period, such as the Museo de Arte Abstracto de Cuenca or the Fundación March, this tendency had a decisive influence on the Spanish art world of the Transition, starting with the institutional market.

As we have seen, in the 1970s Equipo Crónica had also championed painting in opposition to the neo-avant-garde movements. However, their conception of painting was radically different. For Solbes and Valdés it only made sense if it was painting of something and if it maintained a transitive relationship with the surrounding world. Given that the painter lived and worked in a context defined by a specific social structure and relations, painting had to reflect them in some way. The conceptual references that inspired Equipo and the individuals close to them, such as Bozal and the present author, were located within the theoretical tradition of modern realism, particularly within Italian Marxism, from Antonio Gramsci to Galvano della Volpe. Equipo’s artistic references (many of them ignored by the American critical tradition) were wide-ranging, from Spanish Baroque painting to the Russian avant-gardes and Pop Art and encompassing German Expressionism, Picasso and Miró.

Immediately after *The Game of Billiards*, Equipo Crónica embarked on another series entitled *A Sort of Parable*, which involved a notable stylistic change. Instead of the flat planes and intense colours of the billiards series, this new one focused on greys, grey-browns and dark greens and was based on complex pictorial procedures such as glazes, shadows, *sfumato* and textural contrasts. As with *Guernica 69*, the series referred to a single work, *The Parable of the Blind* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (Museo di Capodimonte, Naples). Its most innovative aspect with regard to Equipo’s output was the way in which it aims to evoke the naturalist landscape of classic Dutch and Flemish painting. Frequent use is made of oil in combination with acrylic. Overall, the series implied a forward leap in the pictorializing direction that Equipo had pursued practically since their outset. At the same time, it illustrated their broad and shifting conception of realism.

33 A similar change of direction was evident in literature, particularly the novel. The collective identity of the new generation of writers that emerged was defined by their willingness to forget both the “social realism” and “experimental literature” of the second phase of the Francoist regime.

As Equipo wrote in 1981:

What we wanted was that an argument suitable for being treated in a realist way—the repression and fear produced by post-war Francoism (the theme of the series)—should become a timeless fable which would both include and emphasise the dramatic nature of real events in Spain at that period. The appeal to the viewer basically worked in two directions: one, in an emotional way, arousing the vague but real sensations that memory generates when we remember events experienced in the past. The second, more reflexive and critical, would function as a link between the spectator’s gaze and the real story. Hence the edgy treatment, like a nightmare, that we gave the paintings.³⁴

“The repression and fear produced by post-war Francoism” was in fact the typical theme of the Spanish realist novel of the second half of the 20th century (and continues to be so). Equipo did not, however, approach it directly by referring to specific events or facts, either real or fictional. *The Colossus of Fear* [fig. 19], which is undoubtedly the principal painting in the series, offers a good example of both how the team approached the subject and its conception of realism.

Basically, it is a painting of paintings: a painting composed from images of images, like all the painting that Solbes and Valdés had produced since their outset. These references are easy to recognise. The six blind men from Brueghel’s paintings are located in the foreground. They are small, as if seen from afar. As in Brueghel’s painting, they proceed in an oblique line towards the abyss, which in this case is the space located outside the painting beyond the lower edge of the frame. They walk across a flat, greyish-brownish-green plane, dark and arid, in which nothing else is to be seen other than two small clusters of remote houses, lost in the distance (two landscapes of Horta d’Ebre painted by Picasso in 1910). The blind men cannot see and in Brueghel’s painting they will simply fall down because neither they nor their guide have spotted the ditch opening up at their feet. In Equipo Crónica’s version there is an additional reason. They will also fall because they are running away in terror. It is night or nearly so, and on the horizon a huge giant looms up, a colossus that terrifies them (even though they cannot see it because it is dark and they are blind). Here again we have the image of an image: the image created in 1948 by the Catalan graphic artist Josep Artigas as an advertisement for the Polil brand, comprising a hollow, puppet-like figure, harmless and rather comic. This figure could only become frightening if it appeared in a nightmare and rose up from behind the horizon like a huge giant, higher than the mountains. If seen that way it would evoke, as it does here, one of the most tremendous symbols of terror ever painted, Goya’s *The Colossus*. This is because Goya’s figure is an image also present in Equipo’s painting: the principal one, although it might seem to be absent. All that is required to evoke it is the composition and the darkening evening sky with the sharp crescent of the waning moon fixed in the upper right corner of the painting.

Both Brueghel and Goya were part of the European tradition of pictorial realism. Both *The Parable of the Blind Men* and *The Colossus* refer to the world, to society and to history, and they do so allegorically. Equipo’s painting does the same. The colossus is an image of war and its disasters. In this case the war is the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939. The night is the night of time, the total night of the blind and of the state of uncertainty and ignorance in which they live (much worse when it is a painter imagining it). It is also, however, the night of the post-war period, a historic era in which nocturnal nightmares continued to be filled with images of terror. The war had finished but the Falangists could come, or the Guardia Civil, or who knows, always at night, and take us away, who knows where. To the abyss. It could also, however, be the night of ignorance, of blindness and of fear carved out of the early post-Francoist phase. If this is not the case why, in these nocturnal nightmares of 1977 to 1978, do we encounter the forceful presence of famous Spanish trademarks (Polil, Sandeman, the Osborne bull, etc) created thirty or forty years earlier to fill the desolate Spanish post-war landscape?

34 Equipo Crónica, op. cit., p. 110.

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19. Equipo Crónica
The Colossus of Fear, 1977
A *Sort of Parable* series
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 150 cm
Senate Art & Historical Collection
Inv. no. 164

If *A Sort of Parable* refers to history the following series, *Urban Landscapes*, returns to the subject of painting. However, the contrast between the two series is not particularly striking and viewed stylistically, they form a continuum. This is also true iconographically. In some cases it is hard to know which series a particular painting belongs to. The series also includes works on paper, such as *The Staircase* (private collection), in which the caricatural figure from the Polil advert reverts to his normal human dimension in order to descend a metro station staircase (what element in the landscape could possibly be more urban than the entrance to a metro station?). It may be that the allegorical resonances of the parable of the blind men have not yet been exhausted. Might the series also refer to painting as such? Could it not be said that artists who, having started out as painters, end up rejecting it as the neo-avant-gardists had done in the 1970s, are in fact blind? Or those who paint for its own sake without wanting to know what they are painting, like the 1980 group painters? Or Solbes and Valdés themselves, who are not sure how their painting will end up or even how they will end up as artists in the new historical era that has begun with the death of Franco (did it make sense to continue working as a team?).

During the last two or three years of its existence Equipo's series overlapped and blurred, as they had done in the period from 1973 to 1976. The reasons for this were, however, different. The team's work during the mid-1970s conveyed an atmosphere of internal tension, reflecting the pressure imposed by various troubling questions: can one paint to change the world; is painting an appropriate instrument to do so? However, the confusion that characterised the period starting at the end of the decade was different. It was not due to a tense atmosphere, but in fact to a relaxed one. After the sequence comprising *Execution Wall*, *The Plot* and *The Game of Billiards*, three perfectly conceived and executed series, the pressure imposed by the above questions notably diminished. Confidence in painting and its possibilities (limited, of course, but real), had returned.

In contrast to the previous one, the *Urban Landscapes* series, produced between 1978 and 1979, was extremely long (according to Michèle Dalmace's catalogue raisonné it consists of seventy-two works) and represents a sort of licence or experimental immersion in the studio and in the interplay of the possibilities of painting. It is not by chance that it was exhibited in parts, as the paintings were completed. The first were shown in Cadaqués, followed by Madrid, Zurich (the branch of Maeght in that city, where the innovative group of oils on cardboard were shown), and finally Barcelona, along with paintings from other series.

After the *Game of Billiards* series and the short series on Brueghel, Equipo embarked on a group of drawings, pastels, gouaches, collages and oils on canvas and cardboard on the subject of the city. This would come to constitute a series with the title of *Urban Landscapes*. In the team's own words:

Here we take a more radical approach to the differentiating aspects tentatively initiated in the Brueghel series. This difference manifests itself not only in the technique (favouring oil over acrylic, gradations, gestural brushstrokes and the importance of textures) but also in variations of a thematic nature (a more generalised argument, a preference for indirect means of communication rather than directly explanatory ones, new positions with regard to iconographic references from other painters, etc).³⁵

The last statement in Equipo's commentary refers to the most important stylistic change. The way of quoting images by other painters has now broadened and become more flexible. This change had begun in *A Sort of Parable* and we also observed it when pointing out the importance of the quotation (albeit almost invisible) from Goya *The Colossus of Fear*. This is related to the desire to abandon one of Equipo's most longstanding traits, which is the effect of collage inherent in the juxtaposition of different pictorial quotations. The two

³⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

fundamental images in *Chimneys* (IVAM, Valencia), the flat, black industrial shape in the foreground and the grey background landscape (borrowed, with some licence, from Juan Gris's painting *La fenêtre ouverte*, 1921: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid), easily create a single landscape image. They do so largely due to the sizeable black and white brushstrokes that suggest smoke from the chimneys, creating a sort of three-dimensional vault which visually connects up the two planes that construct the landscape. The mechanism is particularly interesting because the exaggerated gestualism of these brushstrokes in oil constitutes a highly meditated and explicit break with regard to Equipo's stylistic development. The attention paid to Brueghel's landscape in *A Sort of Parable* looks forward to the systematic exploration of urban landscapes in this new series. Landscape painting necessarily implies the unity of the pictorial space and what better demonstration of Equipo's new confidence in painting than the recovery of that pictorial space, a key component in pictorial tradition but one so notably called into question by the modern movement.

Urban Landscapes also links up without significant breaks with the next series, *Travels*, painted between 1979 and 1981 at the height of the controversy with the *1980* group. Conceptually, it can be associated with the *Seeing and Making Painting* series of 1974 to 1975. Once again, this is a lengthy series (fifty-one paintings in Michèle Dalmace's catalogue) and an open one, with paintings that could be assigned to other series and vice versa. Its subject is simple: Solbes and Valdés travelled around Europe as painters, in order to see and make paintings.

Near Narni Bridge of 1980 (IVAM, Valencia) evokes one of Corot's celebrated Italian landscapes, *Le pont de Narni* (1826; Musée du Louvre, Paris). This is the Italy of Romanticism. An unspoiled valley with a classical ruin in the background. A landscape bathed in sunlight and saturated in colour and tactile values. Equipo radically changed the scale of the original and introduced a huge black locomotive that rushes head-on down one of the valley's slopes. This motif refers to Monet's engine in *Arrivée d'un train à la Gare de Saint-Lazare* (1877; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.), which in turn refers to Turner's celebrated *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1833; National Gallery, London). Equipo, however, modified the modernising motif of the locomotive and it is now one from the 1950s. Thus we have a sunlit, tranquil Italian valley, a Romantic ruin and a train engine about to run us over. A nostalgic image of a time in which painting seemed simpler. The *déchirure de l'Histoire* [the rift of History].³⁶

In the Uffizi Gallery of 1980 (private collection) is also an image bathed in Italian sunlight and nostalgia. On this occasion there are no pictorial quotations. The painting, which is monumental in scale and painted in a simple, traditional style (of a type that Equipo rarely allowed itself), is based on a holiday photograph. An uncrowded gallery with fragments of classical sculpture. In the right foreground we see Solbes, half-length and from behind, wearing a blue jacket. The intensity of the memory is surprising. As the reader of this text will recall, autobiographical elements had first started to appear in the *Black Series*. After fifteen years of joint activity, Solbes and Valdés had constructed a new collective identity. A new entity?³⁷ In a way, perhaps, but how could one mark out a clear line between the objective and the subjective in painting? A significant part of the controversy with the *1980* group lay in the simplistic way in which the latter had approached that question.

36 This expression was coined by Jean-Louis Ferrier in relation to other considerably earlier paintings by Equipo: "C'est peut-être ce que Manuel Valdés et Raphael Solbes ont tenté jusqu'ici de plus ambitieux: montrer, dans la différence qui sépare deux oeuvres, la déchirure de l'Histoire" in *Equipo Crónica, ocho retratos, dos bodegones y un paisaje*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Paris : Galerie Stadler, 1973.

37 I analysed this issue in detail in my essay "Equipo Crónica : la amistad y la palabra" in *Equipo Crónica 1965-1981*. [Exhib. Cat., Valencia, IVAM Centre Julio González; Barcelona, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de la Casa de la Caritat; Madrid, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1989]. Tomàs Llorens (ed.). Madrid : Centro Nacional de Exposiciones, 1989. I had already analysed it on several earlier occasions, as had Valeriano Bozal. See, for example, "La mirada de un sujeto asumido es el fundamento de las imágenes que constituyen la serie llamada *Los viajes*", Valeriano Bozal. "Mirar y pensar" in *Equipo Crónica*. [Exhib. Cat., Madrid, Salas de la Biblioteca Nacional]. Madrid : Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes, Archivos y Bibliotecas, Subdirección General de Artes Plásticas, 1981.

More than in other series, this one undoubtedly reflects a process of relaxing, a spontaneous letting oneself go through recollections, nostalgia, joie de vivre. Indissolubly connected with this subjective impulse, however, is an objective reference to the moment in time when it was painted. A precise moment in the history of the Transition that was given the similarly precise name of "Disenchantment". This was because for the Left wing, which just a few years earlier had been engaged in a constant anti-Francoist struggle, the political balance achieved in 1979 to 1980 involved the renouncement of a significant part of its long-held aspirations. "In addition to the general sense of disenchantment, Solbes and Valdés had to add their own disappointment. The new direction that they had decided to follow in their last series [*Urban Landscapes*] had not been met with the anticipated enthusiasm. They seriously considered moving to live in another European city or an American one so long as it was an important cultural centre, as Manolo Valdés would ultimately do some years later."³⁸ Travelling, then: particularly if it meant leaving Spain.

This disappointment with politics is the theme that prevails in the final series completed by Equipo Crónica. This is their commentary:

The chosen title, *Chronicle of the Transition*, has a deliberately ambiguous nature. With it we refer to two basic directions pursued by this series. One of them focuses on specific aspects and events of the Spanish political "Transition", while the other centres on the process of transformation of our own visual language.

A characteristic feature of the series, almost its "leitmotif", is the abundance of iconographic quotations from Picasso. It is within this by no mean chance situation that the arguments referred to above are played out.

Firstly, we would like to point out that its intention is not, or at least not primarily, that of constituting a further homage to the figure or work of Picasso. In any case, we have already done that, implicitly or explicitly, on other occasions that we consider less slippery and ecumenical than the current Spanish *grande rentrée*.³⁹

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to consider that there is no relation between this remarkable pseudo-official centenary and our series.

The enthusiastic, widely promoted and considerably manipulated official recognition of the great painter from Malaga, undoubtedly well-deserved if somewhat late, implies such a wealth of complexities and compromises that it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess it free from the uncertain history of the political, social and cultural phenomena of Spanish national life.

At every level, institutional and private entities have thrown themselves into the centenary and the imminent arrival of *Guernica* and obviously not just out of purely cultural concerns. Attempts to appropriate it for purposes of self-legitimation, heightened prestige, etc., are the order of the day and will be so even more in the near future. All this complicates rather than clarifies the calm atmosphere needed for dealing with a work as vast and complex as Picasso's, and all this despite the contributions and serious analyses that could in fact be offered, along with the opportunity implied by seeing a more extensive selection of the artist's work.

Whatever the case, this precautionary recommendation has not motivated our argument. For Equipo, this "Picasso 81" basically works as a symbolic paradigm of the mechanisms of the long drawn out and increasingly frustrating political transition present at all levels of our daily life.⁴⁰

This is a revealing text which, it should be noted, was not published during Equipo's lifetime. While I am not aware of the exact moment it was written (probably the summer of 1981) I do know, or can conjecture, some

38 Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., p. 187. His account is totally reliable. It was precisely during the period when Equipo was painting *Travels* that Marín visited them and frequently interviewed them for the purposes of his doctoral thesis, which was published in 1981 by the Universidad de Valencia with the title *El realismo social en la plástica valenciana (1964-1975)*. It includes many of his interviews with Solbes and Valdés of these months.

39 Here Equipo refer to *Guernica's* arrival in Spain, a story of which the numerous ins and outs were recounted in detail in the Spanish press throughout 1980 and most of 1981. The episode coincides in time with the production of *Chronicle of the Transition*. While the Spanish government was engaged in the relevant international negotiations for *Guernica's* return, its Ministry of Culture organised numerous cultural events that were more or less related to the centenary of Picasso's birth.

40 Reproduced in Ricardo Marín Viadel, op. cit., p. 199.



20. Equipo Crónica
The Photograph or The Character, 1980
Chronicle of the Transition series
 Oil, collage and acrylic on canvas, 160 x 130 cm
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
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of the circumstances in which it was produced. *Chronicle of the Transition* was exhibited at the Maeght gallery in Barcelona in May 1981 in a large exhibition that also included works from the two previous series. The catalogue included texts by Valeriano Bozal, José Francisco Yvars and the author of this text, but none by Equipo itself. This absence would interrupt the sequence of explanatory texts on their series which Equipo had written almost since the start of their activities. The last had been the one on the exhibition at the Maeght gallery in Zurich in October 1979. As a result, in the summer of 1981, the last two series lacked explanatory texts. Nonetheless, at the time when the exhibition opened in Barcelona or shortly afterwards, Javier Tussell, the Director General of Fine Arts, informed Equipo of the Ministry of Culture's desire to organise a major retrospective on its work. When it was decided to hold it in the October of that same year (coinciding with the 100th anniversary of Picasso's birth and the anticipated arrival of *Guernica* in Spain), it became clear that the project was not possible and it was thus postponed. Instead, the Ministry organised an exhibition in Madrid in November 1981 which included the same works shown at the Maeght exhibition in May that year and repeated the catalogue. The text quoted above was thus written as an update to the



21. Equipo Crónica
The Iberian Arena, 1981
Chronicle of the Transition series
 Oil and collage on canvas
 170 x 240 cm
 Private collection

sequence of explanatory commentaries for publication in the catalogue of the retrospective that finally did not take place. I do not know why it was not published in the catalogue of the exhibition organised by the Ministry for November.

While the Ministry of Culture's interest in the work of Equipo Crónica might lead one to assume the opposite, the reality is that the exhibition of the last series was poorly received in the Spanish art world. Despite this, soon after the Barcelona inauguration Solbes and Valdés began to work on their next series. The growing climate of hostility or at least chilliness that had surrounded them since 1979 led them to further emphasise and reaffirm their artistic concepts. The new series thus arose with the aim of recovering the theoretical and polemical tension that had gradually relaxed in their painting since the start of the Transition.

The central theme of this new series, which was ultimately given the title of *The Public and the Private*, connected up with the theme of subjectivity, of which there are numerous examples in the work of the three previous series. The pictorial references were defined over the course of the summer. Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* would be the reference for the public realm and Rembrandt's self-portraits for the private. Work primarily progressed in relation to Géricault's canvas. This was an atypical history painting which, rather than representing an officially important event such as a battle, a coronation or something of this type, depicted a *fait divers*. The incident lacked general significance per se but had acquired it through its

dissemination in the press at the time. That transformation, however, was based on the media's ability to arouse the public's emotions. What interested Equipo were the internal processes of that transformation: the interplay between the world of facts and the world of emotions, between the objective and subjective and the public and private.

The series, however, remained unfinished. Solbes, who had felt unwell during the summer, worsened and hardly went to the studio in September. He died on 10 November 1981.