

# 1975.

## Galería Vivancos, Córdoba.

### CONTEXT

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Art galleries have a variety of functions, two of which are particularly pertinent to the subject at hand. Firstly, they act as social mediators, engaging with the citizens who approach them and introducing them to the work of artists. If art is a public asset—no matter how often it is bought and sold—then galleries ensure everyone has access to it. Secondly, and this is necessary for consolidating or professionalizing creative work, galleries give economic value to what artists do, which in fact is simply a different way of socializing their activity, making it one more element of a community's cultural output. These functions are even more significant in the case of contemporary art galleries, as they allow us to gauge the degree of acceptance their purpose has in a given context. The presence of a contemporary art gallery in a city is an objective fact that also enables art historians to analyse from different angles the evolution of a particular trend, the symbolic and financial value of what is exhibited there (corroborated by experts and collectors<sup>1</sup>), the evolution of a specific artist's language, the average profile of the city's inhabitants, whether they cling to tradition or are more open to experimentation and change, etc. Consequently, a survey of the galleries active in Andalusia in the mid-1970s can give us a general idea of the state of contemporary art and its social framework in the early years of Spain's transition to democracy.

If we threaded together the Andalusian galleries that existed around 1975, there would not be many beads on that string, especially if we limit our selection to venues that worked with artists whose production can be considered contemporary to some extent. Seville had the largest number of them. Perhaps the most relevant was La Pasarela (1965–1972), founded by Enrique Roldán and advised by artists like José Soto, Teresa Duclós and Carmen Laffón. Many of the local artists active in those years exhibited there—in addition to Soto, Duclós and Laffón, Paco Cuadrado, Gerardo Delgado, José Ramón Sierra, Juan Suárez and Luis Gordillo, among others—as well as Tàpies, Millares, Saura, Zóbel, Sempere, Lucio Muñoz, Gerardo Rueda and

Equipo Crónica through the agency of Galería Juana Mordó in Madrid, which immediately agreed to collaborate with the Seville showroom when Carmen Laffón suggested it. In the early 1970s, Galería Vida opened under the management of artist Roberto Reina and remained active for four years, primarily exhibiting local artists. Casa Damas also emerged in the early 1970s, with a programme centred on Andalusian talent. A singular case, given its impact on the Andalusian art world, is that of Galería Juana de Aizpuru, which took up the torch of La Pasarela and pursued a strategy that combined exhibitions of cutting-edge Spanish art with efforts to promote more avant-garde local artists and support young creators with grants through a series of complementary activities. Those who worked with Juana de Aizpuru form the core cast of Spain's leading contemporary artists in the final third of the 20th century, and though there are too many to name here, their existence proves that operating on the periphery—a Seville gallery which, 15 years after the first venue opened, decided to repeat the experience in Madrid—is no obstacle if the project is solid.<sup>2</sup>

We should not forget that the same year Juana de Aizpuru opened her gallery (1972), the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo was given a permanent home—thanks to the determination of its director, Víctor Pérez Escolano, who secured a building owned by the Cathedral Chapter—which went a long way towards bolstering Seville's timid acceptance of modernity. Encouragement was also provided by Juan Manuel Bonet and Quico Rivas in the arts section of *El Correo de Andalucía*, “though it was not odd to come across names like Víctor Pérez Escolano, José Ramón Sierra and Gerardo Delgado, who often signed his articles as Sebastián Olivares”.<sup>3</sup> Another essential factor in the invigoration of the Seville scene was Centro M11, created at the initiative of art critics Bonet and Rivas with funding supplied by José Guardiola and the collaboration of artists and designers like Manuel Salinas and Alberto Corazón. Though only active for a short time, from 1974 to 1976, this centre still managed to inject a healthy dose of creative currency

in the Andalusian capital, exhibiting the representatives of Madrid's New Figuration movement as well as Luis Gordillo (to whom it dedicated a retrospective), Millares, Saura, Alberto and Equipo Crónica. Salas del Ateneo and Club La Rábida already existed, but neither had given Seville the decisive push towards modernity that La Pasarela and Centro M11 did. This list does not include Galería Rafael Ortiz because at the time it was still Galería Melchor, and the conversion did not take place until the mid-1980s. It also excludes a number of galleries that continued to favour a more amenable, and therefore less interesting, brand of art: Juan de Mairena, Lambert, Imagen Múltiple, Moratín, Álvaro, Amplitud, Haurie, Murillo, Azcúe, Magdalena Mesa and Versalles<sup>4</sup>.

One of the first signs of artistic renewal in Málaga was the emergence of various artists' collectives that revitalized the local art scene. Founded in late 1978, the Palmo Collective<sup>5</sup> pooled the talents of various local artists and promoted collecting by offering print subscriptions; at the same time, it exhibited prominent names like Sempere, Tàpies and Elena Asins. The following year, another printmaking initiative appeared: Gravura, a workshop-cum-gallery in which José Faria and Paco Aguilar were involved. The same year witnessed the birth of another printmaking workshop, 7/10, also comprising local artists.<sup>6</sup> In Granada, important work was done by Fundación Rodríguez Acosta and Banco de Granada, with a strategy that combined an interest in the pivotal names of 20th-century art with a closer look at "the finest reality of contemporary art".<sup>7</sup> Special mention must be made of Galería Laguada, which opened in the late 1970s with a very heterogeneous programme that nevertheless gave Granada residents a chance to discover some of the top artists of the day. In 1982, Galería Palace offered proof of its predilection for home-grown talent (Manuel Ángeles Ortiz and José Guerrero), its engagement with Madrid's New Figuration movement (Chema Cobo, Pérez Villalta, Manolo Quejido) and abstraction (Zóbel, Hernández Mompó, Soledad Sevilla, Gerardo Delgado, Teixidor, Broto, Campano), and its promotion of fascinating and prolific local artists like Julio Juste, Pablo Sycet and Alfonso Sánchez Rubio.

## • Córdoba

A goodly number of private galleries also flourished in Córdoba. The first to appear was Galería Studio 52, founded in 1972 by the photographer José Jiménez Poyato, whose opening show featured his own work. This venue can be considered the doyenne of Córdoba galleries, not only because of its longevity but also because practically every local artist (and many from further afield) had a show there at some point.<sup>8</sup> One year later, Gerardo Holgado, owner of the eponymous designer furniture shop, opened Galería Atrium, with Julio Alcántara as manager and Antonio Povedano as artistic adviser. It exhibited works by Povedano as well

as José Vento, Venancio Blanco, Antonio Suárez and Miguel Pérez Aguilera, and when Julia Hidalgo came on as adviser in the 1975/76 season, the gallery welcomed Rita Rutkowski, Fausto Olivares, Ramón Lapayese, José María Córdoba, etc. Two more galleries sprouted at the end of 1977: Galería NUM, owned by José León, which exhibited the work of José María Báez and José María García Parody, among others; and Galería Art-Cuenca run by Antonio Cuenca. Galería Juan Mesa opened in early 1978, a venue co-owned by Rafael Orti, Fernando Gutierrez Alamillo and Antonio Espaliú. Thanks to its substantial infrastructure (a rarity in this city), the gallery was able to host solo exhibitions (for Manolo Hugué, Planes, Solana and Marcial Gómez, among others) and group shows, organize weekly "Encounters with Culture", publish a newsletter, and arrange concerts, lectures and symposia. Towards the end of the decade another new space emerged: Galería Pizmar, owned by the Valdelomar-Escribano husband-and-wife team.<sup>9</sup>

All the aforementioned galleries—with the exception of Studio 52, which has endured, with some bumps along the way, practically to the present day—were relatively short-lived, lasting five years at the most. But we cannot overlook the existence of more than a dozen other venues, mostly owned by public agencies or institutions, though some were established by associations, educational centres and even businesses interested in having their own exhibition halls. I am referring to the Provincial Council of Córdoba, which began organizing shows in 1974, and the Sala Municipal de Arte, a city council gallery that closed in 1976 after nearly three decades of activity; the showrooms owned by local savings banks, Caja de Ahorros de Córdoba and Monte de Piedad de Córdoba, which had already been operating for more than a decade, were joined by two new venues (Antonio del Castillo and Bartolomé Bermejo, respectively); the two galleries of the Círculo de la Amistad (Céspedes and Liceo, historic fixtures on the Córdoba art scene); and the exhibition spaces of the Federación de Peñas Cordobesas, Amigos de los Patios, the Mateo Inurria School, Universidad Laboral (C.E.I.), the Cultura Viva association, Círculo Cultural Juan XXIII and Librería Científica.<sup>10</sup> Their presence was symptomatic of an "exhibition boom" that came at an auspicious time—Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy—and was fuelled by the public's thirst for culture. Yet that boom did not signify an increase in the quality, modernity or contemporaneity of exhibited materials—quite the opposite, in fact.

Even so, there were signs of a growing social interest in contemporary artistic creation. In 1977, two attempts were made to create a contemporary art museum in the province of Córdoba. A platform consisting of David López, who taught drawing at a school in Baena, the artists José María Báez and José María García Parody, and others proposed Zuheros, a remarkable village in southeast Córdoba, as the site of the future museum.<sup>11</sup>

Through public talks, press releases and contacts with other artists, the platform managed to organize two exhibitions to support their cause: one at the Banco de Bilbao exhibition hall in Baena, and another in Zuheros. But the plan never made it past that stage. Another attempt was made by Pedro Bueno (who had already donated several works to the Provincial Council of Córdoba) and Manuel Santolalla and Miguel Manzanares (president and vice-president of the council), who wanted to repurpose some of the city's historic buildings and proposed the former Hospital de Crónicos in Plaza del Cardenal Salazar as a possible site for the new museum. Architects Rafael de La-Hoz and José Chastang drew up plans for remodelling the hospital, and a collection began to take shape, consisting of the council's own paintings and works voluntarily donated by artists who exhibited in its gallery. However, this initiative was also eventually abandoned. One final note: the Trade Union of Visual Artists (Asociación Sindical de Artistas Plásticos, ASAP) was created in 1978 as an association dedicated to obtaining professional recognition for artists and defending their rights. To this end, it organized artistic lectures and debates and even opened an exhibition hall.

### • Galería Vivancos

All of the foregoing is essentially a preamble that serves to explain the context in which Galería Vivancos emerged. And that emergence was as fortuitous as the life of its namesake, Miguel García Vivancos. García Vivancos (Mazarrón, Murcia, 1895–Córdoba, 1972) was a militant anarcho-syndicalist who spent his youth in Barcelona as a member of Los Solidarios, an armed resistance group that became quite strong in the 1920s and challenged Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. After travelling to South America to spread the workers' rights movement, he returned to Spain and signed up to defend the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, in which he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and commanded an entire military division. In early 1939 he crossed the border into France and was sent to the concentration camps for a time. There he was freed by the French Resistance, whom he fought with until their country was retaken by the Allies. The post-war years were harsh, and Vivancos worked all sorts of jobs to support his family. But soon, thanks to art, his life took a turn for the better. He met Picasso, and the master introduced him to collectors, art dealers and intellectuals (including André Breton) who took an interest in his naïve paintings. Little by little, he made a name for himself in the art world, participating in numerous group exhibitions across the globe. In 1970 he decided to return to Spain and had two solo shows at Galería Ramón Durán in Madrid and Galería Arteta in Bilbao. At the end of the following year, acting on the recommendation of friends, he moved to Córdoba, hoping that his ill health would improve in the drier climate.<sup>12</sup>

Vivancos brought his wife Pilar and their two daughters Elena and Sara to the Andalusian city and died there two years later. Two years after his demise, Elena opened a gallery bearing her father's surname, and although it closed long before it should have, that project illustrated, better than any other, the world of difference between reality and desire. The gallery opened with a group exhibition, *Realistas andaluces* [Andalusian Realists], featuring the work of Francisco Cortijo, José Duarte, Miguel del Moral, Richarte, Rolando and Rafael Serrano, among others. This was followed by several solo shows dedicated to Gustavo Carbó Berthold, Juan Molina (a Córdoba native whose Indian ink drawings had a strong Op art component) and Ginés Liébana, an artist connected to Córdoba since his childhood and member of the Cántico group who, after an extended absence, returned to the city to exhibit at Vivancos. Next came a motley group show<sup>13</sup> formulated as a response to *15 Pintores cordobeses* [15 Córdoba Painters], held months earlier at the El Castillo exhibition hall in Jaén. After that, it presented a one-man exhibition of Ignacio Mármol's paintings and the bold proposal of Gerardo Delgado and José Ramón Sierra in their joint show.<sup>14</sup> The season—and the gallery's brief life—ended with a retrospective of Miguel García Vivancos. But before it closed, Báez and García Parody extracted a promise from Elena Vivancos to organize a group show titled *Sobre arte joven en Córdoba* [On Young Art in Córdoba], which was presented in two instalments in November and December 1975. The participating artists were Báez, García Parody, José María Córdoba, Román Jurado, Miguel Ángel Angulo, Ángel Ojeda, Sara Vivancos, Manolo Cruz, Juan López, Rafael Ruiz, Esperanza Sánchez, and also Juan Molina and Rafael Cabrera, although the latter two did not appear in the exhibition catalogue. This was apparently the first attempt to assemble a cast of young Córdoba artists in the city, although it overlooked several others who would have fit the bill, such as Rafael Navarro, Jacinto Lara and Juan Vicente Zafra.<sup>15</sup>

Elena understood that, at the time, the Córdoba art scene and its balanced programme—the Delgado and Sierra show was the exception rather than the rule—meant one had to proceed cautiously so as not to offend any member of the artistic community. It was important not to overlook local artists, but she also knew that she had to do something different, look beyond that context and embrace the languages of creative renewal that had not yet made their way to the city. However, that dream proved elusive, and in the end the gallery closed.<sup>16</sup> In 1976, Manuela Vilchez opened a new gallery in the same premises once occupied by Vivancos, Galería Manuela, which primarily represented artists from Córdoba and Andalusia.<sup>17</sup> And in late 1979, the López-Obrero family took over the same space and launched a new project, Galería Meryan. In the early 1980s, the democratic transition begun years earlier took root in

Spanish society. The citizens of Córdoba were quick to embrace their newfound access to culture, as evidenced by the creation of the municipal and provincial arts departments, directed by José Luis Villegas (PCE, Spanish Communist Party) and Manuel Melero (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers Party) respectively, who delegated the technical responsibilities to Miguel Cossano and Diego Ruiz Alcubilla. The Provincial Council launched a very heterogeneous arts programme at the

Palace of La Merced, and Córdoba City Council did the same at the Posada del Potro. In autumn 1981, the Córdoba Association of Quantity Surveyors opened an exhibition hall, and a few months later, in partnership with Galería Yerba in Murcia, it showed a selection of prints by American Pop artists. Things clearly changed in the space of just a few years—or so it seems—but that, in any case, is another story.

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1 Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell (Berlin/New York: Sternberg Press, 2009).

2 Ángel Luis Pérez Villén, *Análisis de la recepción de la postmodernidad en la crítica de arte en Andalucía*, doctoral thesis, Universidad de Córdoba, 1999.

3 José A. Yñiguez, "Memoria de la vanguardia abstracta sevillana" in *La pintura abstracta sevillana 1966-1982* (Seville: Fundación El Monte, 1988), 31.

4 Ana Guasch, *40 años de pintura en Sevilla (1940-1980)* (Seville: Diputación de Sevilla, 1981).

5 The collective comprised Manuel Barbadillo, Enrique Brinkmann, José Faria, Jorge Lindell, Dámaso Ruano and Stefan von Reiswitz, among others. See Enrique Castaños Ales, *La pintura de vanguardia en Málaga durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX*. (Málaga: Fundación Pablo Ruiz Picasso, Ayuntamiento de Málaga, 1997), 24 ff.

6 Francisco Santana, Diego Santos and Alfonso Serrano, among others.

7 Bernardo Palomo, *La renovación plástica en Andalucía. Desde el Equipo 57 al CAC Málaga* (Málaga: CAC Málaga, 2004), 133.

8 José Duarte, Emilio Serrano, Rafael Botí, Francisco Aguilera Amate, Rita Rutkowski, Lola Valera, Francisco Zueras, Rafael Orti, Rufino Martos, Sara Vivancos, José Morales, Miguel del Moral, Ángel LópezObrero, Pedro Bueno, Antonio Povedano, Manuel Cabello, Alfonso Ariza, Antonio Bujalance, Hisae Yanase, José María Córdoba, Jacinto Lara, Juan Zafra, Desiderio Delgado, Miguel Gómez Losada, etc.

9 Ángel Luis Pérez Villén, "Un oasis en los setenta" in *Córdoba Arte Contemporáneo: 1957/1990* (Córdoba: Convenio de Colaboración Cultural. Consejería de Cultura y Medio Ambiente, Junta de Andalucía and Caja Provincial de Ahorros de Córdoba, 1991).

10 Elisa Povedano Marrugat (ed. Grupo TIEDPAAN), "Apéndices" in *Córdoba Arte Contemporáneo: 1957/1990* (Córdoba, 1991).

11 The idea was inspired by the contemporary art museum that art critic Vicente Aguilera Cerni had founded a few years previously in the village of Villafamés, Castellón.

12 José Álvarez, "Vivancos" in *Vivancos. Colección Cajasur* (Córdoba: Cajasur and F.P.A.P. Rafael Botí, 2016).

13 "Motley" in terms of the pieces exhibited as well the backgrounds of the participating artists: Alfonso Ariza, José María Báez, Rafael Cabrera, José María García Parody, Esperanza Sánchez and Sara Vivancos (all from Córdoba); Carlos BarreraWolff, Joaquín Ortega (Horgat) and Carmelo Palomino Kayser (from Jaén), plus Soto, Turégano and Mitsuo Miura, a Japanese citizen who settled in Spain in the mid-1970s. Juan Latino, "Colectiva en Galería Vivancos", in *Diario Córdoba* (6 April 1975).

14 "José Ramón Sierra, who had exhibited these pieces months earlier at Galería Vandrés in Madrid, presented his *Diez paisajes de tormentas* [Ten Stormy Landscapes], an impressive series of enamel paintings on two hinged panels with one of them resting on the floor, while Gerardo Delgado brought a sensual geometrizing installation of silk-lined fabrics hanging from the ceiling in a cascade of overlapping colours." José María Báez, *Arte contemporáneo en Córdoba. Diccionario personal* (Córdoba: Albenda Libros, 2016), 217.

15 Ángel Luis Pérez Villén (Córdoba, 1991).

16 José María Báez, *op. cit.*

17 This gallery organized solo shows for Dámaso Ruano, Juan Molina, Francisco Zueras, Ángel López-Obrero, Rowland Fade, Ginés Liébana, Salvador Montesa, José Duarte, Rufino Martos, Rafael Cabrera and José María Córdoba, among others, as well as several group exhibitions: *Grupo Tolmo* [Tolmo Group], *Homenaje a Vázquez Díaz* [Tribute to Vázquez Díaz], *Once artistas cordobeses* [Eleven Cordoban Artists] and *Ocho pintoras* [Eight Women Painters]. The latter was undoubtedly an important early instance of positive discrimination for art made by women. The featured artists were Julia Hidalgo, Eva de Hoces, Rita Rutkowski, Carmen Medina, Inmaculada Montero, Lola Valera, Julia Valverde and Hisae Yanase. Elisa Povedano Marrugat, *op. cit.*

