

PRESS RELEASE

JUAN GIRALT



Juan Giralt. *Tercera versión (rosas)*, 1998-2001. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 165 x 130 cm

22nd September, 2023 – 25th February, 2024

1st floor exhibition rooms (front galleries and B3 gallery)

Curated by: Marcos Giralt Torrente and Miguel Fernández-Cid

Produced by: MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

INTRODUCTION

JUAN GIRALT at MARCO

The exhibition we're presenting is the most extensive to date dedicated to Juan Giralt (Madrid, 1940 – 2007), a unique and suggestive artist belonging to the generation of painters that came to the fore in the Spain of the late twentieth century. A virtuoso of colour, conscious of solemnity and fond of humour and meta-pictorial games, Juan Giralt soon showed a desire to explore, to escape from stereotypes and pigeonholing, that led him to experiment in a range of styles.

Trained in the art informel of the nineteen fifties, halfway through the following decade he was a part of his generation's break with the movement, advancing from post-CoBrA Expressionism to a Neo-Figuration charged with echoes of Pop Art that, by the seventies, had made him one of the most notable of Spanish artists.

Giralt is renowned for his command of colour, his plasticity and the force of his pictorial project. While not foreign to the trends of his time, he managed to achieve a recognisable style in which abstraction and figurative references, rationality and intuitiveness, meticulous draughtsmanship and the unctuous quality of painting, expressive gestures and formal geometric analysis coexist, not without friction, in a delicate balance that seems to inwardly multiply the surface of the works.

This integrating drive, already perceptible in his experimental work of the eighties, would crystallise impressively in the last twenty years of his career, which were splendid.

2

Our exhibition cursorily surveys the earlier stages of his work and then focuses on the artist's years of plenitude, between the late eighties and his death in 2007, when his style can be said to have matured into classicism. The evidence of his uninhibited eclecticism and peculiar treatment of pictorial space into which he introduced the technique of collage can be traced in the work of many later artists. Giralt's painting is a balancing act constructed in plain view that reconciles extremes, intellectual and cold yet at the same time highly emotional, interspersed with painted words, evocations of everyday objects, windows behind which we catch glimpses of hills, fragments of advertising posters, school plates, photos...

A painter of painters, respected and influential, Juan Giralt has not, however, been rewarded with the projection his brilliant career deserves. By means of this exhibition, that brings together small and large format works on both canvas and paper, MARCO, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vigo, joins the forces that defend his legacy.

Marcos Giralt Torrente and **Miguel Fernández-Cid**, curators of the exhibition

JUAN GIRALT at MARCO

“In order for a picture to be worth the trouble it needs to get out of your control”. Juan Giralt

Control and Escape are the two poles between which Juan Giralt's painting unfolded. On the one hand, order, a desire for harmony, a geometric impulse; on the other, emotions, the destabilising expressiveness of gesture and colour, the defacement of the painted word and collage. While in the first decades of his career his painting oscillated between the two poles as each new stage of work comprised previous experience, in his mature period he combined both extremes, demystifying and convulsing them, stripping them of their hierarchy in one and the same pictorial space.

“Painting must violate any theoretical approach. Permeable to every kind of contamination, it is enriched by contradiction and doubt”. Juan Giralt

Juan Giralt's painting has nothing to do with dogmas — we could say that its main pledge is to call them into question. Those of his pictures that seem to culminate in specific meanings are always beset by problems that create instability and multiply significations: a disconcerting brushstroke, a filigree, the sentimental distortion of a name, an auctioned portrait or any other exogenous element introduced by collage.



Juan Giralt. *Mayo*, 1990. Acrylic and collage on canvas, 195 x 260 (diptych). Banco de España Collection

JUAN GIRALT. Cuaderno de notas

“I leave my pictures in the studio for a long time, and subject them to occasional checks, changes and corrections. I like painting to be done thoroughly. Pictures painted on canvas in a direct process seem to retain the life and energy accumulated over the sessions of work on them: they have their own history, they lie and hide things, and on occasion they give you a glimpse of what they were, or show you something very obvious at first glance, yet their *raison d'être* lies in the elegance with which they conceal a mundane prior development.”



Juan Giralt. Madrid, 1998

“I dislike ‘tidied up’ pictures”.

“I often use small collages when painting. With them I seek to insert an element at odds with the picture’s formal structure. Sometimes I include old portraits from antiques fairs, drawn by the opportunity to give them a new life in another space, introducing, along the way, a sentimental contamination alien to myself.”

“To work, in front of the canvas I try to be in a receptive state, and so, staining and structuring it, I await the visitation of a ‘third arm’ liable to surprise me. It is desirable for these visitations to be often, as there is nothing worse than habits acquired from one’s work, techniques and processes.”

JUAN GIRALT. Cuaderno de notas

“Painters inhabit woods so tangled that we tend to shut ourselves into confined spaces, armed with our own rules. But we must ensure such codes do not turn into dogmas. No exclusive position is worth defending. Painting must violate any theoretical approach. Permeable to every kind of contamination, it is enriched by contradiction and doubt.”

“Paintings generally improve by elimination. But as ‘less is more’ often borders on ‘less is less risk’, I seek a balance between a very primary order and other murkier and more emotional aspects. The result is an order sustained by a deceptive geometry of crooked lines.”

“I am put off by the literary trimmings with which painting is saddled. My titles come to me after the event and correspond to associations of ideas or result from the use of some obvious or subconscious element.”

“Time dilutes, erases or subverts the intentions and limitations with which paintings were created. Wherever it is hung, stripped of all conditioning, painting suffices unto itself, complicit with eyes that know how to look at it.”

“I loathe the words abstract and figurative, especially as applied to my work, and I loathe the determination of those who wish to explain the history of painting as a sequence of conquests culminating in the dizzying isms of the 20th century.”

“In the treacly pelagic zone where my time stands still there floats a blend of Guston and Uccello, Mondrian and Velázquez, Utamaro prints and anonymous El Fayum portraits. We – painters – loiter in the environs.”

June, 2003

+ INFO and documentation:

Juan Giralt. *Control y fuga* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWptX9SiAPE>

#MostraEspahna2021, Lisbon. Video on the work and career of the artist Juan Rigalt, including statements by art historians and curators such as Juan Manuel Bonet, Enrique Andrés Ruiz, and Adolfo Cayón.

<https://www.juangiralt.com/>

ABOUT THE ARTIST

In recollection and praise of Juan Giralt, by **Carmen Giménez**

“I met Juan Giralt in the early seventies in Madrid. He was one of the foremost artists at the ultramodern Galería Vandrés, run by Fernando Vijande together with Marisa Torrente, and I was starting my career at Grupo Quince, a multiuse venue – engraving workshop, publishing house and gallery – near Galería Vandrés. Thanks to this proximity and to our shared interests and friendships, we in the Grupo Quince team often attended the opening nights and performances of the Vandrés artists and they would do likewise at ours. The dictator was soon to die; it was a time of elation, seething with hope, in which nearly all of us involved in that cultural effervescence shared one aim: the wish that the art scene of Madrid and by extension Spain, despite the restrictions imposed by the dictatorship, should not differ from that of other European capitals. Anyone who sees photos of that time and looks back at its exhibitions and the aesthetic debates we had will grant that this aim was achieved.

Despite his youth, by then Giralt already had quite a track record. He had set out in informalism, figured in post-CoBrA expressionism and since the mid-sixties practised a figurativism which in its early manifestations took Bacon as a model and was then radicalised under the influence of pop. His development in this first stage was recorded in his early exhibitions in Amsterdam, São Paulo or Madrid as well as at international biennales and fairs, so that by 1972, aged 32, when he unveiled the first of his three solo shows at Galería Vandrés, he was not just an experienced artist but also had what is hardest to achieve: a recognisable style and personality. A dazzling use of colour and a taste for meta-pictorial interplay were part of his make-up, but so too was an intimate dichotomy that would define his career. As José Antonio Moreno Galván, one of the chief critics of the time, said in his review of Giralt’s striking exhibition of 1974, there were two apparently contradictory sides to him: ‘on one hand, a certain formal geometricism in structures; on the other, an antiformal and expressive spontaneity, at times close to humour and caricature.’ Where Moreno Galván’s commentary erred was in viewing this show, entitled *Papeles, recortables y collages* (a resounding success with painters) as the definitive triumph of Giralt’s expressionist, gestural character, to the detriment of his cooler, more analytic side. Time would show that this dichotomy would never be left behind and that his apparent changeability had a covert purpose.

The eighties came over in Spain like a storm: new players entered the scene, others vanished and some, like Giralt, held their ground and turned the turmoil into an opportunity to experiment and to break with practices that could morph perilously into straitjackets. I had an intense experience in those years as head of the Culture Ministry’s Exhibitions Directorate, curating exhibitions of work never before seen in Spain or laying the ground for such necessary projects as the Reina Sofía Art Centre (1986), later to become a National Museum (1988). I saw Giralt only occasionally. A few times in New York with our mutual friend Daniela Tilkin, or with Juan Muñoz. Moreover, he did not exhibit much and I gradually lost sight of him. I occasionally saw some of his work at the Arco fair, but never enough to get a clear sense of how it was evolving.

I did not really get to see him again until the nineties, through his shows at the Bércena & Cía, Afinsa-Almirante and Metta galleries. His painting, which had kept the colourful eclecticism of the seventies and a liking for interplay with painted words and collage, had reached a peak of maturity. The old dichotomies had been resolved, as perhaps had been the plan from the start, and Giralt's various personas had converged in one dazzling oeuvre – emotional, ironical, uninhibited, cultured and with an unequivocal plasticity – unlike that of anyone else.

When Juan Giralt died in January 2007, after three marvellous exhibitions in a row at Galería Machón that consolidated him as one of the key figures in the generation of painters marking the Spanish turn of the century, I was left wondering sadly if his immense stature as an artist would outlive the injustice of fashions, the reviewers of the day and the inertial synergies that often govern the art market. A conversation about this with Manuel Borja-Villel gave rise to the Juan Giralt retrospective that we both curated at the Reina Sofía Museum in the 2015-2016 season. I am truly glad to have thereby helped the work of Juan Giralt to gain (as it seems) ever more admirers.”

Carmen Giménez [Text from *Juan Giralt: control y fuga*, the exhibition catalogue, Mostra Espanha 2021, Lisbon]

Juan Giralt, maestro, by **Darío Villalba**

“I think it is fair to note that, along with Luis Gordillo, he [Juan Giralt] was the first and undisputed master of the ‘Madrid Figuration’ with his peculiar dialectic way of apprehending painting: thesis, gesture, construction, synthesis, reflection, combining and reconciling of opposites, etc. The common denominator in the artists who emerged from that school was, simplifying greatly, colour. Colour, for those engaged in that dialogue, was precisely the decoding and distinguishing factor relative to the achromatic El Paso group.

Juan Giralt's unusual use of colour undoubtedly places him in the vanguard of the finest chromatic sensibility in all Spanish art of the latter 20th century. He could compare only with Tàpies in colourful vein, Mompó or perhaps Ràfols-Casamada. Juan Giralt's colour schemes, whose dense meticulousness make them quite impossible to imitate, call to my mind the best Bacon, with their moist lushness and thick strokes. When I think of Giralt I think in violet and green, orange and blue – I always have. To use colour is certainly not to accumulate quantities of diverse pigments. Living inside and outside colour, combining its inimitable innate spontaneity with the utmost self-censure and anarchic freedom is solely characteristic of Giralt. He really is a true painter, with all that that entails in rejecting the futile virtuosity, formulas or aestheticisms we know well.

Juan does not so much draw with colour as make colour spread out with a life of its own. Every gesture is informed by what went before, and we could say in his regard what Max Ernst once said: ‘the hand does not forget what the eye has contrived.’

Even this far on in my solitary progress, and with quiet obstinacy, I am still concerned and amazed at how current history (or the critical appraisal of each creator) involves odd inaccuracies. Historically this has always been so. Fortunately, more clear-sighted ‘revisionist’ schools have rectified many critical slips, though we know there are no absolute truths but rather just approximations. In the elucidation of art each period has its own way of reading it.

Regarding Juan Giralte, why is he not studied in the place that is his by rights, when his aesthetic statement is so close and alive? I think it is due to superficial, hasty readings with frivolous labels, and also to the painter's own character, not liable, given his acute and silent critical sense, to complacent self-references or practical strategies. Over and above bolder, overbearing voices, his complex discretion and shyness have fortunately left him fruitfully engrossed in his painting, which he now exhibits to us so categorically.

I venture not to question the range and calibre of his work, and to consider it masterful.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, not even freedom.”

Darío Villalba [Extract from 'Juan Giralte, maestro', exhibition catalogue, *Juan Giralte*, Palacio de Revillagigedo, Oviedo, 1997]

The inner landscapes and passages of Juan Giralte, by **Daniel Verbis**

“In the eighties, Giralte began to paint with the unrenounceable freedom of one who is fully aware that the origin of 'modern' painting lies in collage, that the unpredictable needs to find an anchor, that the reversibility of space is a condition of the modern, and that through montage, viewers discover other harmonies, other consonances that are less predictable precisely because they are not deliberate. Each fragment of Giralte's painting naturally qualifies in its relative independence, because the pictures aspire to be plurivocal. To an abstract landscape Giralte adds a realistic sign that counteracts the strangeness of the painting with scraps of what is most ordinary. The realistic postcard that acts as an attribute of everyday life shares the same space as the sumptuous line, that outlined path that avoids the geometric scheme, and the word, that typographic element that is timidly heard in the most barren corner, where we become acutely aware of the difficulty of experiencing silence (Cenital [Zenithal], 1998). Each of these elements is a centre of attention that has to be composed with the freedom of purely pictorial rules, unwritten rules that comply with a contingent order never given beforehand.”

8

Daniel Verbis [Extract from 'Los pa(i)sajes interiores de Juan Giralte', for the exhibition catalogue *Juan Giralte*, MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, 2023]

GENERAL INFORMATION / DOCUMENTATION / ACTIVITIES

Opening Hours

From Tuesdays to Saturdays (including bank holidays), from 11.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. and from 5.00 to 9.00 p.m. Sundays, from 11.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.

Documentation

The Library-Documentation Center at MARCO has prepared a **documentary dossier** which brings together links to articles and other information about the artist, which is available on the website www.marcovigo.com at [Library/News](#) and [Exhibitions/Present](#)

Catalogue

On the occasion of this show, the MARCO Museum of Contemporary Art of Vigo will publish an exhibition catalogue, including notes from Juan Giral't's notebook and texts by the curators, Marcos Giral't Torrente and Miguel Fernández-Cid, together with a selection of other texts written by different authors between 1992 and 2023.

School Programmes

In collaboration with: Fundación "la Caixa"

Starting on 10 October 2023

Times: Tuesdays to Fridays from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

Advance booking: tel. 986 113900 Ext. 100 / 986 113900 Ext. 308 / email: didactica@marcovigo.com

9

Children's Workshops

In collaboration with: Fundación "la Caixa"

Starting on 14 October 2023

Times: Saturdays from 11.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. (ages 3 to 6) and from 12.30 to 2.00 p.m. (ages 7 to 12)

Advance booking: tel. 986 113900 Ext. 100 / 986 113900 Ext. 308 / email: recepcion@marcovigo.com

Information and Guided Tours

Gallery staff are happy to answer questions and queries related to the exhibition. Additional guided tours are available: Daily at 6.00 p.m. 'À la carte' group tours, by appointment: Tel. 986 113900 / 986 113908

Interactive maps via the Vigo App

The interactive maps system accessible on the Vigo App allows visitors to consult exhibition-related content (videos, images, information about the works on display), either via beacons or Bluetooth devices located in the galleries, or elsewhere inside the museum, via the map on the screen of your mobile phone after downloading the app, or on the Concello de Vigo website.

Communication and Press Office

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