



Specials > FONS ÀUDIO

The *Specials* podcasts focus on projects by artists and curators who have some kind of connection to the Museum's programming and the MACBA Collection. Conceived as an audiovisual project, FONS ÀUDIO is a documentary series in which artists from the MACBA Collection talk about their work.

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Produced by Lucrecia Dalt. Interview and documentation: Dolores Acebal.

FONS ÀUDIO #31

Alfons Borrell

Alfons Borrell is one of the greatest exponents of Catalan abstract painting. He has gradually established a solid and highly expressive body of work of great intensity. His painting is a unique case in the artistic movements that shaped Catalan modernity in the second half of the twentieth century. In FONS AUDIO #31 Alfons Borrell takes us on a personal journey through his painting career, as he shares his ideas on art and life, memory and memories, nature and landscape.

01. Summary

In the context of the culture of the spectacle, a 'quiet' oeuvre like Alfons Borrell's (Barcelona, 1931) was in danger of being overlooked, as the poet and essayist Vicenç Altaió points out in the documentary *Reconèixer Borrell* (2012). But Borrell has managed to sustain a tenacious, consistent practice over more than six decades of creative research in which pigments, experiences with nature, personal memories, and a dialogue with the surface of the canvas merge, giving rise to an austere, vitalist abstraction that runs unerringly through Catalan painting from the seventies to the present. Borrell makes no distinction between painting and life. 'There are two types of painters, those who paint what they see, and those that are, themselves, painting. I identify with the latter,' he says.

Even though Borrell is basically self-taught, over the years he crossed paths with a series of art world figures who went on to play a key role in his life and career. Meeting Hermen Anglada Camarasa in Pollença, Mallorca, in 1950, and frequenting his studio introduced young Borrell to a new way of understanding painting, beyond the impositions of realism. On his return to Sabadell in 1952, Borrell broke away from his former figurative naturalism and threw himself into dramatic abstract expressionism, by means of which he tried to capture the throbbing pulse of the reality around him. These were the years when Antoni Tàpies' materic painting dominated the Catalan and Spanish art scenes, but Borrell never felt altogether comfortable within the parameters of Informalism.

In 1960 he became one of the members of Grup Gallot, along with Antoni Angle, Llorenç Balsach i Grau, Joan Josep Bermúdez, Manuel Duque, Josep Llorens, Joaquim Montserrat, Lluís Vila Plana and Gabriel Morvay. This Sabadell-based artists' collective worked with a series of actions – halfway between action painting and surrealist automatism – that challenged the limits of authorship and of the pictorial medium. Borrell's participation in the group was brief but crucial to his later development, because the communal and at the same time destructive action advocated by the 'Gallots' made him face the need to wipe the slate clean and reconsider his entire conception of painting.

At this point, Borrell embarked on a decade of research, introspection, and artistic reflection that, at the personal level, coincided with the birth of his three children and with the most intensive years of work in the family watchmaking shop. It was a period of apparent creative silence, but beneath the stillness an increasingly polished and personal style was brewing, which would lead to the precise, enveloping fields of colour that characterise his later output.

The seventies, on the other hand, was an expansive decade punctuated by various events and exhibitions: in 1973 Borrell held his first solo show in Room 2 of the Acadèmia de Belles Arts, after almost a decade of introspection; in 1976 he participated in the group exhibition *Pintura 1* at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona; two years later, he held a solo show at the Fundació Miró's Espai 10; and that same year (1978) he was selected to take part in the group exhibition *Seny i rauxa. 11 artistes catalans* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In 1977 he also met Lluís Maria Riera, artistic director of Galeria Joan Prats, and the poet and artist Joan Brossa, two men who would have a lasting impact on his personal and professional life. From that point on, Borrell began to exhibit regularly at



[Alfons Borrell during the recording of the interview]

Prats. And his close, enduring friendship with Brossa connected him to new universes of poetic freedom.

Borrell is part of a generation of Catalan painters whose work fell between the Informalism of the fifties and sixties and the neo-figurative trans-avant-garde of the eighties. A heterogeneous generation that was nonetheless, as Elvira Maluquer says, 'united by a style of "painting" – in the traditional sense of the term – that emphasised essentiality and colour as a vehicle of expression'¹. This group included artists such as Albert Ràfols Casamada, Joan Hernández-Pijoan, Pic Adrian, Joaquim Chancho and Borrell himself, to name a few. All of them were heirs to a tradition that could be said to start with Miró, and inevitably also passed through Tàpies.

In parallel to his paintings, Borrell produced an enormous amount of graphic works on paper, which exude a raw, incisive gestuality that place us directly before the void. This line of works includes the series that was acquired by the MACBA Collection in 2010: *Untitled* (1976-1979).

Alfons Borrell has participated in many solo and group exhibitions, including *Painting from the Seventies in Barcelona. Surface and Colour*, MACBA (1997); *Alfons Borrell o la celebració del color*, Centre d'Art Tecla Sala de Hospitalet de Llobregat (2006) and Museu d'Art de Sabadell (2007); *Alfons Borrell. Obra sobre paper 1956-2010*, Fundació Palau de Caldes d'Estrach (2011) and Museu d'Art de Sabadell (2013).

In 2014 he received an Honorary GAC Award from the three associations of Catalan Art Galleries. Borrell continues to paint and is currently working on the design of a public space intervention for the new Passeig de la Plaça Major in Sabadell. A retrospective of his work is also being held at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona in 2015.

¹ Elvira Maluquer: *Pintura de los setenta en Barcelona. Superficie y color*. Barcelona: MACBA, 1997 [exhibition catalogue].

02. Timeline

- 01:01** From the land to painting
- 02:15** An apprentice without a master
- 02:59** Anglada Camarasa and Port de Pollença. A new way of understanding painting
- 06:18** Return to Sabadell (1952): the path to abstraction
- 08:14** Grup Gallot (1960): collective gesture and total destruction
- 10:42** 1962-1969: years of silence
- 12:42** The first studio
- 13:41** The seventies: Fundació Miró, Galería Joan Prats, Joan Brossa
- 17:08** Cotton canvases and acrylic paint
- 18:53** *Seny i rauxa. 11 artistes catalans* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1978)
- 19:56** Painting is the painter's life
- 22:20** *Sense títol* (1976-1979) series of works
- 26:05** Nature, a source of emotional inspiration
- 29:14** Memories and memory
- 30:10** Finished work

03. Works by Alfons Borrell in the MACBA Collection

Sense títol, 1976
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-3646

Sense títol, 1976
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-3645



[Alfons Borrell, *Sense títol*, 1976] □

Sense títol, 1976
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-3647

Sense títol, 1977
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Gift of the artist
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-3969

20-1-1977, 1977
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Gift of the artist
www.macba.cat/en/20-1-1977-3968

(Oli), 1978
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Joan Brossa Fund. Long-term loan of Fundació Joan Brossa
www.macba.cat/en/oli-4838

[Sense títol], 1979
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Joan Brossa Fund. Long-term loan of Fundació Joan Brossa
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-4644

19-4-1979, 1979
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Gift of the artist
www.macba.cat/en/19-4-1979-3970

Litografia, 1979
MACBA Collection. Government of Catalonia Art Fund
www.macba.cat/en/litografia-181

14-XI-80, 1980
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Gift of the artist
www.macba.cat/en/14-xi-80-3971

[Sense títol], 1986
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium. Joan Brossa Fund. Long-term loan of Barcelona City Council
www.macba.cat/en/sense-titol-4667

4-9-89, 1989
MACBA Collection. Government of Catalonia Art Fund
www.macba.cat/en/4-9-89-0481

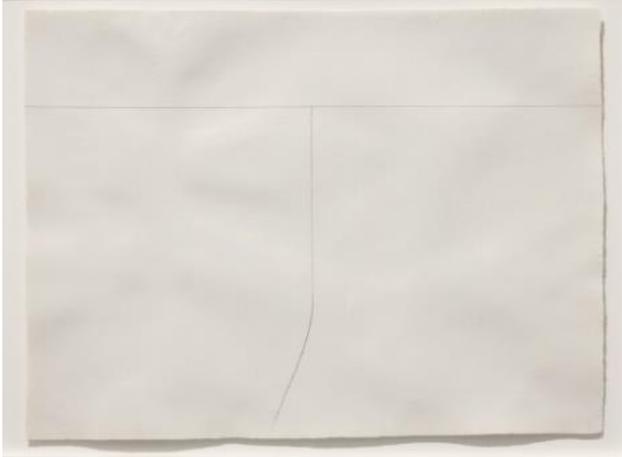
04. Related links

Alfons Borrell in Wikipedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfons_Borrell_i_Palaz%C3%B3n

Reconèixer Borrell, documentary directed by Aleix Gallardet. Produced by Pirinaigua Audiovisuals (2012), on TV3:
www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/programes/Reconeixer-Borrell/video/4567571/

Fent un trànsit boreal, a video about the production of the artists' dossier on Alfons Borrell and J. M. Mestres Quadreny, *Trànsit boreal*, on VilaWeb Televisió (2011)
www.vilaweb.tv/fent-un-transit-boreal

Alfons Borrell. Obra sobre paper 1956-2010, exhibition at Fundació Palau, Caldes d'Estrac (2011)
www.fundaciopalau.cat/fundacio-palau/ca/exposicions-temporals/exposicio.html?title=%20-%20alfons%20borrell.%20obra%20sobre%20paper,%201956%20-%202010&html=11957.html



[Alfons Borrell, *Sense títol*, 1976]

“Alfons Borrell-Enric Majoral. Intercanvi de records i emocions” in *Quadern de les idees, les arts i les lletres* (January 2014)

quadern.fundacioars.org/alfons-borrell-enric-majoral-intercanvi-de-records-i-emocions/

05. Credits

Produced by Lucrecia Dalt. Voice: Lucrecia Dalt and Roc Jiménez de Cisneros. Documentation and interview: Dolores Acebal. Recorded with Beyerdynamic MC 930, a Tascam DR-100 recorder and edited with Ableton Live.

06. License

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