

## About Catalan Surrealism

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### ABSTRACT

Catalan Surrealism has local roots, although it also has an international dimension. Even though doubts have been cast as to whether some Surrealistic artists fully fit within the theoretical definition of Surrealism, the history of this artistic trend could not be written without Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró, who extend beyond its boundaries. However, it is not fitting to limit ourselves to these two artists, the most famous ones; rather we must also consider other artists like Leandre Cristòfol, Esteban Francés and others discussed in this article.

**KEY WORDS:** Surrealism, artistic avant-gardes, contemporary painting, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró

A great deal has been written about Surrealism: about the personalities in the famous group that founded the movement, about its creators, theoreticians and prominent members, and about some of the newer members who played a decisive role in consolidating the movement. A great deal has been written about Surrealistic poetry, about the revolution that the poets pushed for and about the social policy they professed and promoted. A great deal has been written about Surrealistic film, about the places where the Surrealists met and frequented in their Parisian gatherings... There is no doubt that Surrealism is the cultural movement of the 20th century that has been written about the most. Yet despite this plethora of literature, which even raises the anecdotal features of the personalities to the status of doctrinaire examples, and their proclamations of messianic doctrine, despite all of this, Surrealism is a movement that is difficult to define, and little is known about it beyond the French group and a handful of prominent names. Thus, when the large-scale exhibitions started to be held at Barcelona's Palau de la Virreina in 1981, I suggested a show on Catalan Surrealism. One of the heads of the Culture Council at the Barcelona Town Hall answered by asking me if I was thinking about painting the works myself. Until then, there was no overall image-concept that a Catalan version of Surrealism or enough Surrealist Catalan artists might exist. In this country, only Dalí was ever mentioned in association with that trend.

Not much had been written about Catalan Surrealism

until the early 1980s. However, I think that three different artefacts related to this movement are worth spotlighting: a magazine, a book and an exhibition with its corresponding catalogue.

The magazine was a special issue of the first *Cobalto*,<sup>1</sup> which assembled a very diverse set of articles, including comparisons between modern Surrealism and the Surrealism that was seen in images from the ancient world; mediaeval Surrealism; the Surrealism in Moore and Àngel Ferrant; other general and theoretical considerations; an analysis about Chagall; and logically, studies of Miró and Dalí. But no other Catalans were analysed.

The book *Surrealismo*<sup>2</sup> was published the following year, 1949. It was written by A. Cirici Pellicer as part of the Poliedro collection, which became a crucial collection for shedding light on contemporary artistic currents immediately after the Spanish Civil War. Cirici – with sound documentation and with the characteristic errors in that documentation – analysed Surrealism decade by decade after surveying its antecedents. What we are interested in now is whether he mentioned the Catalan Surrealists and if so how. Obviously, he opens the section on this country with Joan Miró: he stresses Miró's anti-optical stance as well as his automatism free from expressive subjection. He also exalts the collages that create a poetic myth and states that Miró travelled much further along the pathways of Surrealism than where Max Ernst had arrived, and that for this reason André Breton had stated that he might be the most Surrealistic of all.<sup>3</sup>

The book continues by examining Salvador Dalí, and it does so on three occasions. In the 1920s, he mentions Dalí when talking about Surrealistic film by stating that when

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Dalí arrived in Paris in 1928 he astonished the world by premiering *Un Chien Andalou* with Luis Buñuel. This film contained three historic scenes: the ants that emerge from a cut in the palm of a woman's hand, the eye slit by the razor and the pianos heaped with rotting donkeys. He once again mentioned this influential film in the 1930s when discussing Dalí's monumental paintings – like *The Great Masturbator*. He claims that Dalí ended up improvising the Surrealistic object in conjunction with Gala, and that he created an entirely new doctrine with *The Visible Woman*. Cirici also states that randomness and ambiguity in his images led him to the highest heights. In the 1940s, he points to Dalí as a conquerer of America, eclipsing Breton, Éluard and Peret. He stresses that there Dalí worked as a fashion illustrator, the creator of the Venus Pavilion at the New York Universal Exposition and the brilliant stage designer for numerous ballets.

However, before that he devotes an entire paragraph to the Barcelona-based group Adlan, spotlighting Jaume Sans, Ramon Marinello and Eudald Serra, and he hints at some of their passions, such as the circus, fair objects and traditional Mallorcan whistles. It is important that even though he only briefly mentions this group, Cirici does so to prove the existence of other local Catalan surrealists who created art in the shadows of the two international Paris-based artists, Miró and Dalí.

It is de rigueur to analyse the show and exhibition catalogue for “Surrealismo en España” (Surrealism in Spain)

put on by the Galeria Multitud in Madrid in 1875 as part of that brief yet comforting series that revived movements that had almost been forgotten. These shows served to consolidate Francisco Calvo Serraller and Ángel González García.

This show on Surrealism was extremely interesting for two reasons. First, in the introduction to the catalogue it stated that the importance of the movement was the creation of a Surrealist consciousness, which led the group's tenets to survive after the disappearance of the historic core of founders, and secondly because despite everything, there was still a deep obscurity surrounding the importance and development of the movement in Spain. This introduction provides new elements of analysis, such as the fact that contrary to traditional claims, Surrealism extends beyond the personages who created, formed and dissolved the historic group, opening up the possibility that artists from one or two generations later could also be regarded as Surrealists. Furthermore, another new analytical concept was also introduced: geography. The goal was to establish general coordinates over the entire area, beyond the names of the most prominent artists from the historical movement. This approach led the authors to draw up a list of ten Catalan artists who could be chronologically divided into two groups: those who worked before 1939 and those who worked after that date. The former included not only the ubiquitous Miró and Dalí but also Leandre Cristòfol, Joan Massanet, Àngel Planells and Àngels Santos, while the latter included Modest Cuixart, Joan Ponç, August Puig and Antoni Tàpies.

This introductory text posits certain claims that will be eternally debated when speaking about Surrealism, such as its start or roots in the literary, poetic realm. Thus, in the Catalan approach, “[...] poets like J. V. Foix, Sebastià Gasch, Salvat Papasseit and others initially prevailed.” And the most fascinating question of all is whether or not we can truly speak about Spanish Surrealism, about Catalan Surrealism.

On the one hand, Spanish poetry was far removed from French poetry, and even further away from the poetry and literature of the Surrealist writers. On the other hand, starting in 1929, official Surrealism became deeply popular because of the celebrated clashes and dissensions. All of this posed a major obstacle to forging connections and influences between the French and Spanish personages and groups.

Lucía García de Carpi, one of the persistent researchers into the subject of Spanish Surrealism – especially its poetic facet – offers this lucid analysis: “After the studies conducted in recent years, we can no longer question Spain's existence in the Surrealistic literary and artistic output. However, we should note how, having barely overcome this unconscious controversy, the way is now being paved in Spanish historiography for the fallacy of an autochthonous Spanish Surrealism that was totally detached from the French movement. Thus, with no coher-

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Figure 1. *Desnudo (Nude, 1926)*. Oil on canvas by Joan Miró (1893-1983). 92 × 73.6 cm. Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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Figure 2. *Un món* (*One World*, 1929). Oil on canvas by Àngels Santos (Portbou, 1911). 290 × 310 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

ence whatsoever, we have gone from denying any expression of Surrealism in Spain to justifying its existence based on a telluric determinism or an unproven predisposition in the collective psyche.”<sup>5</sup> And the researcher ends by stating that, just as in all the avant-garde trends that were cultivated in Spain before the Civil War, Surrealism drew from European tenets and impulses.

Therefore, we must posit the existence of a Spanish Surrealism, as well as a Catalan Surrealism, even though the events in Catalonia took place slightly differently, as two of the most important artists in worldwide Surrealism – perhaps the two most important – are Catalan. It is obvious that I am referring once again to Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí.

In his essay *Surrealism and Painting* – which is ultimately more essay than history because of his partisan, biased analysis – André Breton actually claims that Joan Miró might be the most Surrealistic of all.<sup>6</sup> Despite this claim, Breton himself questioned whether the Catalan

artist was a good example of a Surrealistic painter, and even the theoreticians and historians who study his oeuvre are not quite sure how to classify it and into what category to pigeonhole it. In order to claim Miró as one of his own, Breton wanted to bring him into the fold of automatism: “With a thousand problems that did not concern him on any level, despite the fact that the human spirit is full of them, Joan Miró only has one wish, that of completely abandoning himself to the act of painting, and just painting (which for him means limiting himself to a single discipline, painting, in which we are confident he has all the means at his disposal), to the pure automatism which I have always highlighted, but whose values and deep-seated reasons, I am afraid, he has very succinctly verified.”<sup>7</sup>

This sentence is very enlightening as to how Joan Miró acted and how Breton perceived that Miró acted. First, Breton states that the problems of Surrealism do not concern Miró, even though he further states that they are

problems of the human spirit. Later, he stresses that Miró has all the resources at his disposal to paint, but that it is the only discipline in which he has these resources. In a very subtle, French way, Breton makes it crystal clear that Joan Miró is not concerned with theory, with Surrealistic ideology, a feature that he portrays as a personal limitation. Breton feels that Miró is, that is, he wants to feel that Miró is, a Surrealist given the pictorial strength of his work.

For these reasons, Joan Miró's categorisation within Surrealism has always run into more misgivings than reluctance. I think that Rosa Maria Malet has conducted the most accurate, objective analysis of Miró's position with regard to the Surrealistic group and movement in her brief essay, "Joan Miró: el Surrealisme entre l'afinitat i la divergència" (Joan Miro: Surrealism between Affinity and Divergence).<sup>8</sup> Malet makes a comprehensive survey of Joan Miró's evolution: of his discomfort and disagreement with what he experienced in the Barcelona art scene in his youth, given that in addition to the enormous weight of academic painting as the future, there were designs to instigate a return to Mediterranean essences in Catalonia, with Noucentisme; and of how after he moved to Paris in early 1921 into a studio on Rue Blomet, next to a studio that André Masson had nearby, he became immersed in another world. This chance encounter conditioned him absolutely and forever, as Masson introduced him into his circle of poet friends, who represented the avant-garde of the time, including Tristan Tzara, Michael Leiris, Pierre Reverdy and Georges Limbour. These are the avant-gardes who would join Breton when he assembled the Surrealist group. Joan Miró was connected to the new group, the most decisive group in 20th century art, and unquestionably the most revolutionary, by sheer happenstance.

Having reached this point, Malet confesses that numerous questions arise about Miró's ties to Surrealism: is his work the outcome of automatism or is it conditioned by the artist's dreams? What exactly about Surrealism interested Miró?

Miró's profound ties to the land meant that even when he is not realistic his work emerges from or is rooted in nature. "Joan Miró never stops taking reality as the point of departure in his works, but instead of reproducing it in the spirit of detail, he lets it invade his spirit, take ground in his feelings, and these feelings and the impact of his personal experiences are what dictate the form to him. The results are more unprecedented works where freedom gives free rein to the imagination and to suggestion."<sup>9</sup> Personal experiences, imagination and suggestions... but Malet never mentions automatism or dreams. How can we speak about automatism if there are several preparatory drawings that the artist patiently drafted for every painting? How can we posit a connection to the world of dreams if his structure is always grounded on the natural, external world? And Rosa Maria Malet answers these questions by saying: "There is no doubt, the facts

prove it, that indeed there was a Surrealistic period within Miró's career; what is no less certain is that this stage was totally unconventional compared to orthodox Surrealism."<sup>10</sup> It is also true that Miró used collage and placed a premium on the object, but the way he treated and presented them was always a far cry from the Surrealistic canons. However, Joan Miró would not have developed his oeuvre as he did without the existence of Surrealism and without his friendship with the members of the original group.

Anywhere in the world, when we say "Surrealism" Salvador Dalí comes to mind first. We should recall that Dalí himself proclaimed on numerous occasions: "I am Surrealism."<sup>11</sup> However, this recognition and popular presence were in no way linked to the interpretations and analyses of historians and analysts. I summarised this bibliographic complexity as follows: "[...] defining a personality for ourselves, focusing on the neat, unquestionably malevolent image that he brings back from the shadows, which his own Surrealistic colleagues, the intellectual left, the repetitive criticism and rancid Catalanism had created around him. Both, for very different reasons and interests, have wanted to create an image of Salvador Dalí that is totally distorted: the former, an image that is relativist, by limiting the importance of his work – that is, of the creative output itself – and the latter, by discrediting the artist himself. Both had a strong ally: his eccentric behaviour, the artist's unusual reactions, which could be painted as those of a true madman. In the opinion of the former camp, Dalí did not follow the dictates of the left, while the latter viewed his ideas as fascist; almost all of them claimed that his creativity was exhausted long ago, while to others he was not 'one of us'. And for those who accepted many of these interpretations, his life was 'excessive'. In his exhaustive study, Llongueras states: "A life can never be 'excessive' – as Gibson or his editors put it; perhaps it might be richer or more intense – such as in the case of Salvador Dalí – than that of other people not touched by the stroke of genius."<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt that Salvador Dalí was one of the greatest Surrealist artists, even though many years are still needed, perhaps two or three decades, for the Dalian world to be measured without so many prejudices. We need enough distance in order to examine his person and his oeuvre without such overbearing factors conditioning our analysis.

I would now like to analyse the article "Esquema de Salvador Dalí" (Schema of Salvador Dalí) written by J. A. Gaya Nuño, which was published in the aforementioned issue of *Cobalto* devoted to Surrealism. His analysis comes before the ideological and partisan burden that would come later. Gaya Nuño, an exiled republican in Barcelona in the 1940s, always thoroughly documented his claims and revealed utter freedom of criteria, complete independence from fashions and analytical trends. In his brief essay, he mentions three points regarding Dalí: the persona, the technique and the subject matter of his works.

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Figure 3. *El crim Perfecte* (*The Perfect Murder*, 1931). Oil on by Àngel Planells (1901-1989). 41 × 41 cm. Salvador Molins Collection, Barcelona.

It is clear that he holds no affection for the persona. Over the course of the article, we can read numerous declarations like these: “Very rarely would such an abnormal kind of creator have arisen in the world of the fine arts”; “Dalí is flagrantly abnormal; he is an insane adorer of the foul and rotten as determinants of beauty, with which he does nothing other than bravely proclaim a facet, aesthetic or paraesthetic, common to many but inconfessable for all”; “In the Catalan artist, the exhibitionistic fury, the preoccupation with sex, the attraction towards obscene and scatological phenomena will amply replace the moralistic preoccupation of Hieronymus Bosch as a source of monstrosity. Once, Dalí’s friends and wife actually came to wonder whether he might be a coprophage.”<sup>13</sup> I could fill four or five full pages with the always malevolent and twisted statements by the historian known for his incisively disparaging language. This was Gaya Nuño’s opinion of Dalí’s persona.

The analyst takes pains to demonstrate that with regard to technique, Dalí was a step backward compared to Pi-

casso or Braque: compared to the collage and heteroclitic techniques of the Cubists, Dalí used the time-worn techniques of minute brushstrokes which “can only be seen in half a dozen of the best museums in the world”. However, this statement, which might seem like praise at first, was actually a veiled disparagement: in the article, we can find sentences like these: “[...] a boy with a revolutionary bent under which unspeakably conservative moulds are concealed”. And at another point he reproaches his academicism; he levels the accusation that Raphael and Vermeer of Delft were his gods, and he states that Dalí was stuck in pre-Raphaelism – “the most glibly cunning of the painting schools that existed in a wonderfully advanced country”. He claims that he looked backward instead of forward like Picasso. And he reproaches the fact that Dalí set his sights on modest, local artists like Modest Urgell and Marià Fortuny, who “had seduced him through some technical ingeniousness”. He accuses Dalí of celebrating Gaudí excessively – Modernism (Art Nouveau) had not yet been reassessed, nor had its leader: “[...] the Catalan

who leaves the strongest imprint on our artist is Gaudí, the ancient architect of the Sagrada Família. Gaudí, not bereft of genius yet overly endowed with shocking amounts of a roiling bad taste with his pseudo-Gothic arborescences, with his camouflages and thingamajigs, Gaudí must have impressed the avid, poorly educated Dalí, one of whose aesthetic tenets consists of 'hating simplicity in all its forms.' Even more sincerely, he proclaims the fecundity of bad taste, symbolising it, and quite rightly so, with the names of Gaudí, Boecklin and Wagner. Hence, the extraordinary consequences of the fact that as a child Dalí was taken to Parque Güell one afternoon."<sup>14</sup>

I have given plenty of space to these comments because they are quite indicative of what was to come: Dalí would basically be analysed for his behaviour more than for his oeuvre. Even when talking about his triumph in America, Gaya Nuño compares him to Xavier Cugat, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. It is true that the critic actually says that *El momento sublime* (The Sublime Moment) – that telephone earpiece hanging over a pair of fried eggs – is the best still life in the 20th century; it is true that he places Dalí in the so very Spanish line of demons, the demonic world, ensconcing him alongside Goya and Solana; it is true that shortly before this essay he had included Dalí as the latest link in Spanish painting along with El Greco, Velázquez, Goya and Picasso.<sup>15</sup> However it is also true that this art historian opened the doors to the analysis of Dalí's collateral deeds as part of his true contribution – regardless of whether Dalí's work is liked or not. It is curious that a historian like Gaya Nuño, who was always so thoroughly documented, did not analyse the theories that Dalí brought to Surrealism, which were perhaps more profound and radical from the artistic standpoint than the ones that emerged from inside the movement. He forgets Dalí the theoretician of Surrealism, which justifies most of his creative output. He talks about *Vida secreta* (Secret Life),<sup>16</sup> but he fails to mention the theory of the "paranoid-critical" which Dalí set forth in his book *La femme visible* (1930) and was enthusiastically welcomed by Breton, while it also signalled a landmark in the Surrealist movement. Gaya Nuño glorifies the depiction of dreamlike scenes that Dalí renders with precise, meticulous technique, stressing the presence of the landscape in Portlligat.

Nor does Gaya Nuño talk about the importance of Surrealist objects, whose creation led to the practice of the happening, an artistic action which Dalí helped to found. He does not even highlight, as José Pierre does, the erotic facet that infuses the movement. The French historian states: "[...]Salvador Dalí's greatest contribution to Surrealism lay in his systematic exaltation of eroticism, that is, of his own wholly erotic personality. This inspired him in numerous paintings of vast importance, like *El gran masturbador* (The Great Masturbator) from 1929 – which is obviously a symbolic portrait – and the 1931 *Persistencia de la memoria* (Persistence of Memory), whose famous 'melting clocks', in my opinion, actually say that mastur-

bation is an effective magical means to counter death."<sup>17</sup> In other words, as soon as Dalí and his work begin to be analysed from the historiographic perspective, we can find that a vein arises that is unlike the way the oeuvre of other artists has been studied.

If I stress the fact that Gaya Nuño did not speak about Dalí's theoretical writings, it is because of the importance attached to them at the time, and also to highlight the prominent role that theory played in Surrealism, as we have seen. We could almost claim that Surrealism is a theory or position spearheaded by the literati which branched out and entered many other disciplines and conducts. For this reason, the three basic catalogues of the three most important exhibitions on the movement held in Spain take pains to stress that there was a body of literature here, too.

The exhibition catalogue of the Galeria Multitud in Madrid (1975) – the most coherent show and catalogue on Surrealism in Spain to date – mentions that literature is one of the backbones of the movement: from automatic writing to the manifestos, along with their creators and promoters, who were poets and writers. As a result, an effort is made to fuse Spanish Surrealism with the young future Generation of '27 and Catalan Surrealism with J. V. Foix and Salvat-Papasseit. It underscores the fact that the only Spanish magazine that could be called Surrealistic was the *Gazeta del Arte*, founded in 1932 when Breton spent a few months in Tenerife. That is, even though the Madrid-based *Revista de Occidente* almost immediately translated Breton's manifesto, there was no real Surrealist literature in Spain; there were no theoreticians of the new movement.<sup>18</sup>

The exhibition catalogue for "Surrealisme a Catalunya 1924-1936", held in Barcelona at the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica (1988), includes an article that focuses on the role of magazines in the Surrealist movement in Catalonia. Isabel Coll performs a meticulous survey of the magazines *Terramar*, *Monitor* and *L'Amic de les Arts* and spotlights everything that might have a connection with Surrealism. From *Terramar* she mentions an article by Pérez Jorba in which the word "Surrealism" appears, perhaps for the first time or one of the first times here in Catalonia. From *Monitor*, she highlights the articles by M. A. Cassanyes, which encouraged a rupture with the traditional trends that dominated everything: "I prefer not to speak about our avant-garde art, which we could say is non-existent." Says Isabel Coll: "From the magazine *Monitor*, Cassanyes' personality led to a revival of admiration for the symbolic world, which stands out for its perseverance in the quest for a liberating trend that impelled the spirit to find a formula that followed the dictates of thought, rejecting the tenets set by the old schools in the past." Even though there were subsequent efforts to establish that Symbolism was its underpinning, the most immediate forerunner of Surrealism, the truth is that none these articles was either ideological or analytical regarding the new French trends; rather they celebrated the rupture with the past, they en-

couraged a shift toward the avant-garde without clearly specifying what the new pathways and new movements should be.

In Catalonia, *L'Amic de les Arts* is a mythical magazine regarded as a bastion of the avant-garde during the years it was published – 31 issues between 1926 and 1929. It was a stronghold of the avant-garde because it was where Salvador Dalí began to write, venturing into certain themes that hinted at his theories; it is where Sebastià Gasch wrote what, at that time, was a benchmark of modernity; it is where J. V. Foix published his poems and texts with a Surrealistic bent; it is where Lluís Montanyà and M. A. Cassanyes expounded on Surrealism, even though they did not touch on either its conceptual considerations or behavioural processes.

In fact, Isabel Coll closes her article with this statement: “All of these magazines [*Terramar*, *Mirador*, *L'Amic de les Arts*] appear as faithful mirrors of the ideal shared by their publishers, who indefatigably boosted the most cutting-edge currents. With this spirit, they were not complacent just to examine the problem from a distance, rather they fully entered the fray and, by taking an active role in it the magazines turned into peerless testimony of a prodigious effort of will, intelligence and integrity that enabled them to forge new pathways in our avant-garde art. Their endeavour can be regarded as exceptionally val-

uable, and it can be counted among the most renowned literary efforts of our century.”<sup>19</sup> If this opinion has a downside, it is its excessive optimism. The reality is that one cannot talk about authentically Surrealist magazines in either Catalonia or Spain. I think that this is an important, or even more accurately a decisive, consideration for truly grasping both Catalan and Spanish Surrealism.

Let us examine, for example, the Catalan Anti-Art Manifesto of 1928, better known as the *Manifest Groc* (Yellow Manifesto), which was signed by Salvador Dalí, Lluís Montanyà and Sebastià Gasch. It was drawn up with great pains, as Montanyà and Gasch – as the latter recounted later – were too fearful to dare to rectify many of the statements written by Dalí, who was just donning his provocative posture at that time. In fact, the “manifesto” was neither programmatic nor did it have anything to do with Surrealism. In reality, it was an attack on the Catalan culture of the day, which was mired in tradition: the culture of the Orfeó Català, of Noucentisme, of the fame of Bernat Metge.<sup>20</sup> It was an exaltation of the modern spirit, of modern life – of the cinema, jazz, beauty pageants and huge transatlantic ocean liners. It is true that this so-called “manifesto” aroused a great deal of ruckus in Catalonia, logically, and in Spain, but in essence it was actually a major tantrum of youth. Deep down, it had nothing to do with ideology.

Therefore, despite numerous efforts to prove the contrary, in Catalonia there were neither Surrealistic magazines nor even theoreticians of Surrealism. This is a fact of prime importance which leads us to deny the existence of a true Catalan Surrealism and only leaves us with the possibility of a certain kind of Surrealism in Catalonia. So it should come as no surprise that in none of the scant shows held in our country to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of the first Surrealistic manifesto was a Catalan version of Surrealism presented; instead, the geographic scope of the show was always stated: “El Surrealisme a Catalunya 1925-1975” (Surrealism in Catalonia, 1925-1975) at the Galeria Dau al Set in Barcelona; “1924-36. Surrealisme històric a Catalunya” (1924-36: Historic Surrealism in Catalonia) at the Galeria Bonanova, also in Barcelona; and “Pintors surrealistes de l'Empordà” (Surrealistic Painters of the Ampurdan) at the Museu de l'Empordà in Figueres. However, although the titles of the shows were somewhat restrained, the texts included in the catalogues or that the authors themselves wrote about the shows were bolder.

Rafael Santos Torroella claimed: “[...] counter to what has been written at times, Surrealism in Catalonia has been – and somehow still is – quite valid, surely much more so than any other avant-garde trend”. He questioned people who believed that “[...] speaking about a Catalan Surrealism, then, is perhaps inaccurate, incorrect and abusive.” He also opposed the claims that Spanish Surrealism was basically poetic.<sup>21</sup> However, apart from this he does little to examine its generic and defining features. He said that Surrealism in Catalonia included Miró

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Figure 4. *De l'aire a l'aire* (*From Air to Air*, 1933). Sculpture in metal by Leandre Cristòfol (1908-1998). 48 cm high. Lleida Town Hall.

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Figure 5. *Premonició de la guerra civil* (*Premonition of Civil War*, 1936). Oil on canvas by Salvador Dalí (1904-1989). 100 × 99 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

and Dalí, two of the most important Surrealist artists, and he provided information on some of the other lesser-known artists who might fall within the scope of Surrealism.

In the catalogue for the exhibition held at Barcelona's Galeria Bonanova, Alexandre Cirici also stressed the importance of these two artists: "If we think about the artistic vein of Surrealism, which is associated with automatic creation unfettered by reason, we shall see that the figure of Joan Miró occupies an undeniably prominent role. If we think about the other vein, which conveyed dreamlike or subconscious contents through conventional visual renderings, then we must acknowledge the prominent

role played by Dalí." Cirici found the roots of the Catalan Surrealists in Modernisme (Art Nouveau), as he believed that the most prominent movement in the late 19th century was actually a rebellion against academicism, a prologue to Surrealism – a Surrealism *avant la lettre* – and that Gaudí was a forerunner of the Surrealist movement. With this interpretation, he reinforced Catalonia's importance in international Surrealism.<sup>22</sup>

The exhibition of Surrealists from the Ampurdan brought two new considerations to the subject: Santos Torroella claimed that there was no doubt that the Tramuntana<sup>23</sup> wind was tantamount to Surrealism, and that in consequence Catalan Surrealism was from the Am-

purdan or had its Surrealistic artistic roots there; and Jordi Gimferrer claimed that the cradle of Iberian Surrealism was the Ampurdan.<sup>24</sup>

In *Història de l'art català*, I recapitulated the three exhibitions commemorating the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Surrealist manifesto and the publication of several articles about it: "If nothing else, the 50th anniversary of Surrealism served to reveal our lack of knowledge about one of the cultural movements in which we Catalans have imposed our values internationally".<sup>25</sup>

As future art historians write their doctoral theses and a new generation of young exhibition curators have sought unusual subjects or unearthed ones that have been scarcely studied, the literature, that is, our knowledge of the artists who were somehow associated with Surrealism, has filled out. By 2010, at least one book or catalogue from an extensive exhibition has been written about almost all the Catalan artists who spent some stage in their careers either closely or loosely tied to Surrealism. Still, an overall assessment of what these contributions meant has not been conducted.

Stock was taken to some extent in 1988 when Josep Miquel Garcia, Fina Duran and Conxita Oliver presented the show "Surrealisme a Catalunya, 1924-1936", mentioned above. It was a unique exhibition: I think that its prime value lay in drawing attention to the subject it spotlighted, acknowledging that indeed we can talk about Surrealism here in Catalonia. However, in more than one respect the show was disconcerting, chiefly in the catalogue, that is, more in the theoretical aspects than in the works exhibited. The catalogue contains an excellent article on Miró, but none on Dalí. It is true that in addition to the images of the works displayed in the exhibition, the first two pictures in the catalogue are devoted to Dalí: the former reproduces the image from the cover of issue eight of the magazine *Minotaure*, and the second solemnly features the utterance "Le surréalisme c'est moi", which, like a legal affidavit, confirms that Dalí made this statement on the 22nd of March 1988 at Torre Galatea before Antoni Pitxot and Josep Miquel Garcia. This was a unique take on the matter, since after Dalí made this provocative – and quite probably truthful – statement in the early 1930s, he repeated it dozens, even hundreds of times.<sup>26</sup> I think that this singular way of introducing the catalogue – singular yet ambiguous – does not explain the fact that Dalí is one of the most prominent – I believe *the* most prominent – member of the international Surrealist group. To me, there is no justification for failing to include an article on Dalí in the catalogue as the author of theories and doctrines that deeply expanded the earliest automatic bent of the movement. On the other hand, an entire article is devoted to the – almost non-existent – oeuvre of Àngel Ferrant in his Catalan stage, and Leandre Cristòfol is placed on par with Viola and Lamolla. There is no mention of post-war Surrealism, which over time consolidated a notable current of its own here by connecting principally with Miró – the intellectual left of the day was manifestly anti-Dalí.

It does highlight the efforts of Adlan. Adlan (*Amics de l'Art Nou*, or Friends of the New Art) was a group established in Barcelona in late 1932. The first article of its by-laws states its intentions clearly: "The purpose of Adlan is to protect and develop art in any of its manifestations". Neither its bylaws nor its subsequent manifesto contain any programmatic instructions. I summarised the group's intentions and actions by saying that Adlan "[...] signalled early awareness of avant-garde art and was the first time that a group was set up here in Catalonia with coherent goals aimed at defending new art: in its dissemination".<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it may seem strange that Adlan is mentioned whenever we speak about Surrealism in Catalonia. This is due to the fact that among its many notable activities – from the Picasso exhibition, the first held in Barcelona since 1912, to the outstanding Winter 1934 issue of the magazine *D'ací i d'allà*, devoted to 20th century art – Adlan promoted the exhibition "Logicofobista" which opened in early May 1936 at Barcelona's Llibreria Catalonia bookshop. Corredor-Matheos claimed that all the members of Adlan were tinged by Surrealism, but he also added that the degree of influence from the new movement was diverse and that this interest was also manifested in many different ways.<sup>28</sup>

They were all influenced by Surrealism, that is, by the footprint of Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí. But of the two artists, Dalí prevailed, perhaps because his approaches were known to be closer to official Surrealism, that is, to André Breton.

The exhibition "Logicofobista" opened on the 5th of May 1936 at the Llibreria Catalònia, which back in the 1930s sponsored major art shows. It was organised by M. A. Cassanyes, an art theoretician, about whose thinking Arnau Puig performs a subtle analysis. Cassanyes chose to promote Surrealism: "Surrealism seemed to him the nearest material at hand he could use as the underpinning of a philosophy that would provide him with a radical sense of life and sense of the world. This philosophy was imbued with a romantic spirit – in clear opposition to the aseptic, "natural" formalism of classicism – and I would even venture to claim that it contained the phenomenological essences of Husserl's philosophy."<sup>29</sup> Despite being self-taught and having somewhat fragmented thinking, Cassanyes was one of the few people in our country – perhaps the only one – who attempted to devise a theory that would promote or support the most avant-garde art.

"Logicofobia" (logicophobia) and "logicofobisme" (logicophobism) were words – concepts – that Cassanyes coined which meant a phobia of logic, and which he rhetorically justified in the exhibition catalogue. The opening, just like all Adlan events, was a socially brilliant, snobbish event. Cassanyes had envisioned an international show featuring Miró and Dalí, perhaps Picasso and others. But he was not able to draw in so many artists. Instead, the participants included Artur Carbonell, Leandre Cristòfol, Àngel Ferrant, Esteban Francés, A. Gamboa-Rothwoss, A. G. Lamolla, Ramon Marinello,

Joan Massanet, Maruja Mallo, Àngel Planells, Jaume Sans, Nadia Sakolova, Remedios Varo and Joan Ismael.

This show was particularly significant: it was the first time that a thematic show had been held on Surrealism with the goal of providing a sweeping overview of the movement. It was also the first time that an effort had been made to assemble a coherent group around a new trend. It was the first time that the artists working in Lleida – who were somewhat cohesive among themselves – and those who hailed from and worked in the Ampurdan were brought together. They were joined by artists from Barcelona and a few from abroad. For the first time, there was a certain theory – the one from Paris, the one established by M. A. Cassanyes – that supported the artists' work.

This positive step, which copied the one taken by Adlan itself one year earlier when presenting the three sculptors Ramon Marinel·lo, Jaume Sans and Eudald Serra, did not yield the expected results: just a few weeks later the Spanish Civil War broke out. With war came the exile, either temporary or permanent, of the majority of these artists. More importantly, many of these creators extricated themselves from the Surrealistic schemes. In other words, for most of them Surrealism was a longer or shorter, a more or less intense stepping stone in their careers.

Viewed with a certain perspective, this “logicofobista” show and its close proximity to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War were extremely important to Catalan Surrealism. I believe that the war was a highly negative factor, very specifically for how Surrealism fared in Catalonia: the “logicofobista” exhibition and the dynamism of the Adlan group and its leaders foreshadowed a heavy impetus for the movement – it should be borne in mind that Joan Prats was one of the prime leaders of the group, and a close friend of Joan Miró as well. And the small circle of artists who could be included in the group, or at least in the Surrealist trend, was gradually gaining momentum and expanding. The theory was increasingly structured, and the circle of artists was becoming more famous. The war radically cut short the trajectory that was beginning to take shape. There is no doubt that what the war affected the most was the Catalan Surrealist movement. In reality, Catalan Surrealism could not be.

Both the catalogues of all these shows I have mentioned up to now and the handful of sweeping studies that have been performed – histories of contemporary Spanish or Catalan art – cite very few artists, and if they do only those who were closer at hand. This is not the appropriate place to make a list that can be deemed more or less exhaustive, nor to leave a complete record. However, I would like to discuss several names a bit more extensively and highlight two events.

Àngel Planells tends to be at the top of any list of Catalan Surrealists. This is due to the fact that he was the closest to Dalí in the 1920s and the one who appropriated his initial aesthetic the most. Nowadays, his personality is being promoted by his foundation in Blanes.

Joan Massanet – Massanet de l'Escala (Massanet from L'Escala), as Santos Torroella liked to call him – is perhaps the least consolidated or famous of them all, as his professional work as a pharmacist always kept him away from the art scene, although he very closely tracked the art movements developing in Europe.

Esteban Francés is perhaps the Catalan Surrealist painter most often listed internationally. In Barcelona he hooked up with Óscar Domínguez and Paul Éluard; in his exile in France he forged contacts with the Surrealist group, of which he was a member; in Mexico and the United States, where he moved when World War II broke out, he had close relationships with the classic Surrealists who had also fled to America in exile.

Perhaps because of her connections with several personalities in the group that founded Surrealism in both Paris and Mexico, Remedios Varo might be the most storied artist of the Catalan Surrealists – except, of course, for the big three. However, in Mexico her oeuvre veered towards a symbolist illusionism. Curiously, Remedios Varo is the only picture of a Surrealist artist reproduced – full-page – in the ground-breaking, disconcerting catalogue *Surrealisme a Catalunya 1924-1936*, a publication that goes on to barely mention her. Perhaps she appeared because she was pretty, or out of feminist claims.

I would like to state for the record that these four artists were Surrealists or painted within the canons of Surrealism during a stage in their life, as did Àngels Santos. Yet I mention Santos here, singling her out in one of the two points I wanted to stress before closing these meanderings. Ángeles Santos is a disconcerting case within the Catalan literature. On the one hand, she is the artist that is the subject of the greatest number of rigorous studies. However, what is disconcerting is her oeuvre: one can say – as Lucía García de Carpi already has – that she is the Surrealist with a single painting, *Un món* (One World). She was barely involved with Surrealism, yet she left us one of the most influential paintings from this movement. In his document studying the painter, Vinyet Panyella writes this about the work: “Ángeles Santos painted the portrait of the world envisioned as a fragment of the universe, dreamt up via twofold intuition: construction and dream. And she brings in everything that she had seen, intuited or observed until then. She transplanted in her painting the sense of the spiritual life as she had learnt it in her parochial school in Seville – the universe, Heaven, Hell, souls – and the tangible world she knew: cities and houses, people's lives, trains, beaches, rivers, cemeteries. *Un món* defies mere description because the painting is the depiction of a metaphysical universe in which the Earth and the spirits are integrated as if in a cosmic geography.”<sup>30</sup>

Another fact that I regard as anomalous is the scant attention paid to Leandre Cristòfol. When the Catalan artists included in the Surrealist movement are listed, Cristòfol is just another name among many, if he is not indeed entirely neglected. And this is not fitting because his oeuvre

is among the most solid, far-reaching and creative in our country – with the exception of Miró and Dalí. I cannot understand how in 1988, in the Surrealist exhibition shown at Barcelona's Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Cristòfol could be treated the same as Viola and Lamolla, his colleagues from Lleida. And this is even more disturbing in that one of the organisers of the exhibition, who also wrote the article discussing Lleida, was Josep Miquel Garcia, one of the sculptor's leading analysts. In contrast, when she speaks about *La experimentación tridimensional en el surrealismo español* (Three-Dimensional Experimentation in Spanish Surrealism), Josefina Alix Trueba does give Cristòfol due recognition.<sup>31</sup> And Arnau Puig summarises it this way: "Though not bereft of sarcastic irony, Leandre Cristòfol still maintains a ravishing pleasure for everything around him, and from the detritus of this world he makes jewels of exquisite sensations for him and for others".<sup>32</sup>

All of this discusses historical Surrealism, that is, its life before the war. But in Catalonia many artists have persisted in this current. Thus, the early days of Dau al Set shows that the contact with Joan Miró bore its first fruit, even though the majority of painters from the group ultimately chose other languages. In some recent exhibitions on Surrealism, several more recent names have been tentatively included, yet without providing any overview of the whole. And owing to its breadth, the recent show "Il·luminacions. Catalunya visionària" (Illuminations: Visionary Catalonia) did not fully explore the subject. There is no doubt that a sweeping study of Catalan art would be a study of Surrealistic art from the second half of the 20th century.

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- [1] *Cobalto*, vol. II, first portfolio. Barcelona 1948.
- [2] A. CIRICI PELLICER. *El surrealismo*. Ediciones Omega, Barcelona 1949.
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- [4] Àngel GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, FRANCISCO CALVO SERRALLER. "Cuando en 1919 volvieron del frente...", in the catalogue *Surrealismo en España*. Galería Multitud, Madrid 1975, p. 18.
- [5] Lucía GARCÍA DE CARPI. "La respuesta española". In the catalogue *El surrealismo en España*. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, October 1994, p. 25.
- [6] André BRETON. *Le Surrealisme et la peinture*. Gallimard, Paris 1965 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 37.
- [7] André BRETON. *Op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
- [8] Rosa Maria MALET. "Joan Miró: el Surrealisme entre l'afinitat i la divergència", in the catalogue *Surrealisme a Catalunya 1924-1936. De L'Amic de les Arts al logicofobisme*. Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona, May 1988, pp. 17-23.
- [9] Rosa Maria MALET. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.
- [10] Rosa Maria MALET. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.
- [11] There are numerous versions as to when and how Dalí claimed that he was Surrealism for the first time: whether it was when the orthodox, intransigent Surrealist group decided to expel him from its historic core; whether it was when a few days after visiting Sigmund Freud, a journalist asked him what Surrealism was; whether it was... It is better just to cultivate the legend about everything surrounding Dalí. What does seem clear is that he issued the proclamation in the early 1930s.
- [12] Francesc MIRALLES: "Adiós... especial amigo...". In Lluís LLONGUERAS. *Tot Dalí. Vida i obra del personatge més genial i espectacular del segle xx*, Pòrtic, Barcelona 2003, p. 14.
- [13] J. A. GAYA NUÑO. "Esquema de Salvador Dalí". *Cobalto*. See *op. cit.* in note 1, pp. 35 and 38.
- [14] J. A. GAYA NUÑO. *Op. cit.*, p. 37.
- [15] "Surrealism had found mentors and creators abroad, but it was also a Spaniard who extracted from Surrealism the most artistic and real, less monstrous. Once Surrealism had been accepted as a school, there is no doubt that it owed Dalí its greatest artistic integration." "Picasso, Dalí and Miró continue their efforts, and we can still hope for new conquests and innovations from their aesthetic pursuits. With them, Spanish painting has achieved an admiration from abroad which has not been fashionable since Goya's work began to be valued." J. A. GAYA NUÑO. *Historia del arte español*. Editorial Plus Ultra, Madrid, pp. 433-434.
- [16] As the author does throughout the essay, he deals with *Vida Secreta* (Secret Life) using the same tone found throughout the entire text: hovering between capricious praise and radical disdain. "This document of shameless egotatry, though narrated with a certain clarity, leaves floating in the realm of the imprecise the bare principals of this diabolical, seductive story that the imposition of Dalian art has been. Therefore, this schema [referring to his article] was needed because in *Vida Secreta*, which is paranoid proof of Dalí's paranoid activity, what should be the most clearly explained is cleverly hidden behind the display of puerilities – what is not told is the juiciest. At the same time, in this unique book, alongside outrageously ingenious subtleties and transcendental revelations, tendentious claims are made, more than one of which is absurd." J. A. GAYA NUÑO. *Op. cit.*, p. 36.
- [17] José PIERRE. "La contribución española a la revolución surrealista". In the catalogue *El surrealismo en España*. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, October 1994, pp. 59-60.
- [18] Àngel GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA, FRANCISCO CALVO SERRALLER. *Op. cit.*, p. 16 and forward.
- [19] Isabel COLL. "El Surrealisme a través de tres revistes d'avantguarda: *Terramar*, *Mirador* i *L'Amic de les*

- Arts””. In the catalogue *Surrealisme a Catalunya 1924-1936*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 27-31.
- [20] As defined by Eugeni d'Ors, Noucentisme was a cultural movement that also touched on politics which started in 1860 and lasted until 1923, although it somewhat persisted until 1936. It was characterised by a focus on classicism and Mediterraneanism. Order, serenity, modernity and civility were its main values.
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- [23] Santos TORROELLA. *Del Surrealisme a l'Empordà. Catàleg de l'exposició*. Museu de l'Empordà, Figueres 1977. Jordi GIMFERRER. “Del Noucentisme al Surrealisme, Salvador Dalí”. *Revista de Banyoles*, no. 550 (1979).
- [24] The Tramuntana is a violent wind that blows down from the north and mainly buffets the Ampurdan, the region in northeast Catalonia.
- [25] Francesc MIRALLES. “Entorn del Surrealisme” [sub-chapter]. In: “L'època de les avantguardes, 1917-1970”. *Història de l'art català*, vol. VIII. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1983, p. 94.
- [26] See note 11.
- [27] Francesc MIRALLES. *Adlan* [sub-chapter]. See note 23, p. 138.
- [28] Josep CORREDOR-MATHEOS. “Adlan i el Surrealisme”. In the catalogue *Surrealisme a Catalunya*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 49-52.
- [29] Arnau PUIG. “El Logicofobisme i l'exposició logicofobista”. In the catalogue *Surrealisme a Catalunya*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-55.
- [30] Vinyet PANYELLA. *Àngeles Santos*, I. Viladot, Barcelona 1992, pp. 40 and 42.
- [31] Josefina ALIX TRUEBA. “La experimentación tridimensional en el surrealismo español”. In the catalogue *El surrealismo en España*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 110 and forward.
- [32] Arnau PUIG. See note 27.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francesc Miralles (Tarragona, 1940) is an art critic and historian of Catalan art. Educated at the University of Barcelona, he worked as a professor for many years. He was the director of Barcelona's Escola Massana. For many years, he was the art critic of the weekly *Destino* and the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, among other publications. He was the editor-in-chief of the prominent art history magazine *Estudios Pro-Arte*.

He coordinated *Història de l'art català* published by Edicions 62 (six editions from 1982 to 2007) and wrote the volume covering the 20th century. He has published numerous books, especially monographs on artists of today (Pla-Narbona, Gerard Sala, Elena Paredes, Daniel Argimon, Josep S. Jassans and others), but his main contributions are the monograph *Anglada-Camarasa* (1981), written in conjunction with Francesc Fontbona, which contains the catalogue raisonné of the artist's painting; the monographic catalogue on the drawings by Anglada (2006); the most extensive monograph existing on the ceramicist Llorens Artigas (1992) as well as the catalogue of his oeuvre; and a set of monographs on Joaquim Mir, a stage-by-stage study of this painter which has turned Miralles into the leading expert on Mir. Based on this expertise, he was appointed curator of the retrospective on this artist held at Barcelona's Caixafòrum in 2009. He has also published monographs on Oleguer Junyent (1994) and Pere Pruna (1998), as well as *Memòria dels somnis: Salvador Dalí* (2000), written in conjunction with Arnau Puig.