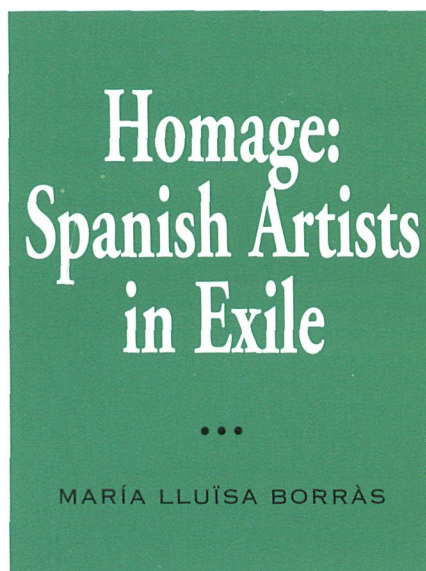


## REVIEWS

Latin America received new life-blood and a magnificent legacy of art and culture from Spanish artists in exile, while simultaneously in Spain, the younger generation of artists was orphaned by the exile of their artistic and intellectual role models, and left floundering in the cultural mediocrity of a country dismantled by defeat. By November 1939, almost 4000 Spaniards had arrived in the Dominican Republic, yet to become fully aware that they had fled an imminent dictatorship only to exile themselves in an already-established one. Rafael Trujillo welcomed them for two reasons: firstly, out of shame and guilt (and thus as a way of cleansing the stigma of responsibility for having ordered the killing of almost 5000 Haitians two years previously), and secondly, out of a need for farm laborers to re-populate the countryside. No-one knows if this first objective was achieved, but the second certainly wasn't. One year after the arrival of 3500 Spaniards, only about 300 remained in the Dominican Republic, all of whom were working not in the fields, but in the field of culture. These artists were not established figures; they were young men and women whose careers had just begun. But, they nevertheless came as quite a shock to the system and a catalyst for the already-existing artistic elements in the Dominican Republic. By acting as cultural monitors, they gave the cultural



sector considerable strength, and contributed to the definitive creation of a cultural and artistic infrastructure. An excellent exhibition in Santo Domingo is now paying homage to these artists. The exhibition is an initiative of Ana Tome, Director of the Hispanic Cultural Center (Institute of International Co-operation), whose energy, commitment and extensive knowledge have made her, in a very short space of time, one of the main supporters of culture in Santo Domingo.

In 1939, when the Spanish political refugees arrived, the Dominican Republic was not lacking in talent or noteworthy artists, but it is clear that there was a lack of cohesion among these artists. The founders of modern Dominican painting, still active at that time (Celeste Woss, Yoryi Morel, Jaime Colson and Darío Suro), had already taken the bold step of abandoning old-fashioned academic painting in order to reflect their environment. They were

already intent on addressing the traditions and customs of the Dominican people faithfully, and under a blinding light. In this exhibition, four artists represent the most important currents of the artistic panorama which the Spanish exiles would have encountered on their arrival. These artists maintained no links amongst themselves, nor were they assisted by the slightest infrastructure. After studying at the prestigious Academy of Fine Art in Santiago de los Caballeros and at the Art Students League in New York, Celeste Woss (1891 - 1985) shut herself away in her studio in Santo Domingo. Here she painted the country and its people, despite having only limited contact with the outside world through the pupils of her own prestigious academy (in which several of the new generation of painters were trained). Yoryi Morel (1906-1975) was a self-taught artist from Santiago de los Caballeros, where he was born and spent his life, painting inspired panoramas of close-knit hamlets set against mountain ranges, as well as country scenes full of charm and color. Jaime Colson (1901-1975), who is considered to be the father of modern Dominican painting, was a restless traveler who did not return to the country until 1950, after the arrival of the Spaniards. Darío Suro (born 1918), is the youngest of the four. He was determined to blend primitive cultures and modernity in his own incredibly

expressive syncretism. Furthermore, he was a dissenting voice, who expressed great reticence about the contribution made by the Spaniards, in his book *Arte Dominicano*, in which he states, that the foreign artists did not create Dominican art, nor can their art be considered Dominican.

It is however true, that the Spanish opened centers of learning such as the Instituto Colon (1939) and the Instituto Escuela (1941). They also taught at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, where Manolo Pascal (the Escuela's first principal), along with Jose Gausachs, Jose Zanetti and Eugenio Granell, laid the foundations of modern Dominican painting, mural design and sculpture through progressive and very successful teaching methods. The exhibition brings together the work of exiles from Bilbao (Manolo Pascual), Burgos (José Vela Zanetti), Catalunya (Shum, José and Francisco Gausachs and Antonio Prats Ventos) and Galicia (Eugenio Granell). Eugenio Granell and Vela Zanetti were later to return to Spain, where they have continued working and exhibiting with success. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look back to the beginnings of their careers and to examine the impressive work which they developed in the country which adopted them. Granell was one of the founding members of the journal *La Poesía Suspendida*. He also made significant contributions to the great inaugural exhibition at the Galería Nacional de Bellas Artes, and to the

founding of the newspaper *La Nación*, of which he was the editor. Vela Zanetti, in addition to playing an active role in the foundation of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1942, also adorned the Dominican capital with beautiful frescos and murals (at the National Library, Palace of Justice and National Bank). These works are still the pride of the city. Manolo Pascual was the first principal of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, which was founded in

1942. He moved to New York in 1951 to teach at the prestigious New School of Social Research, where he worked among many other illustrious men who had been forced into exile.

Of the four Catalans, two have already died: Alfonso Vila (also known as Shum) died in 1967, and José Gausachs in 1959. Shum, an anarchist born in Lérida in 1897, was imprisoned for several years and finally pardoned in 1924. A brilliant caricaturist, he arrived



Jaime Colson. *Untitled*, 1930. Oil on cartón piedra, 54 x 43 cm.

in Santo Domingo with his wife and two children, and was sent to La Vega as a farmer. Soon afterwards, he went to Mexico, where he remained until his death. José Gausachs was a considerable painter, highly regarded and of strong personality. As can be seen in his numerous paintings exhibited in the Bellapart collection, his landscapes are atmospheric rather than purely descriptive and are, for the most part, outstanding and unconventional works.

The other two Catalans remain illustrious members of today's artistic community in the Dominican Republic, and are the true protagonists of this exhibition, having also participated in an emotive round-table discussion.

Francisco Gausachs (born in Barcelona in 1924) is the son of the above-mentioned José Gausachs, and was one of the first pupils of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. Today, he lectures at the Pedro Henríquez University. The second remaining Catalan is the sculptor Antonio Prats Ventos (born in Barcelona in 1925), who arrived with his family at the age of 15, and then alternated sculpture with teaching. From 1950 to 1968 he taught at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes and then moved to the Pedro Henríquez University, where he is currently the head of the Department of Plastic Arts. During the round-table discussion, both of these important figures said that they were indebted to their adoptive country.

Prats Ventor, a sculptor with an extraordinary control over his materials (stone, metal and wood) is very well-known in the Dominican Republic. His sculptures can be seen in several public institutions and he has trained a legion of artists.

Just as the Spaniards brought their European artistic style to their adoptive country, thereby contributing in some way to modernity, the tropics afforded them a new, exotic and exuberant atmosphere. This mixture gave rise to an art that is neither Dominican nor Spanish, but truly Caribbean. It is an art of greatly expressive forms and bright colors, which is surprisingly related to the lively contemporary and post-modern art of today's young artists.



José Gausachs.  
*Montañas de Montserrat.*  
 Oil on canvas,  
 92 x 115 cm.