

It has taken a long time for photography to establish itself as an art form equal in merit to painting and sculpture. For many people, the main role of photography is still to record an elusive reality. However, photography is the language of our time and I maintain that, in the last decades, photography has been the dominating artistic medium, perhaps because a photograph, like no other medium, engraves itself on our minds and inspires our imagination. Photographic images are omnipresent in our lives; everyone takes photos so everyone can relate to photography as an art form.

Photography made a relatively late entry on the Spanish art scene. However, the situation has changed rapidly and today one is struck by the innovative and intense expression of contemporary Spanish photography, which reflects the radical development that has taken place in Spain. In just a few decades, a closed society, trapped in its past, has been transformed into a multifaceted country in which contemporary culture enjoys a strong position.

Spanish photography does not shy away from the personal expression. We who lived in Spain in the nineteen-eighties experienced first-hand the major political, social, and cultural changes. The sociocultural movement *La Movida*, with the film director Pedro Almodóvar as its front figure, released a wave of suppressed creativity and tested the boundaries of freedom. The explosive Spanish culture of the nineteen-eighties expressed itself in many ways, but a common feature was an interest in capturing the intellectual currents of the rest of Europe, while, at the same time, relating to one's own cultural heritage.

The desire to come to terms with history may be a possible explanation for the powerful expression of photography in Spain. The participating artists in *Nuevas historias*—a new view of Spanish photography—are linked by an interest in approaching notions such as cultural identity, heritage, and history. The country's broad spectrum of regions, languages, and cultural diversity is reflected in the wide variety of expressions and constitutes a point of departure for many of the works.

The artist duo Cabello/Carceller sets out from classic Hollywood productions when, in their video and photographic works, they explore stereotypical gender roles and clichés in cinema. Naia del Castillo explores notions such as intimacy, seduction, and femininity, employing sculpture and photography to depict women who are trapped in their everyday existence. Based in a surrealist pictorial tradition, Chema Madoz blurs the boundary between reality and fiction in his unique imagery in which everyday objects are given new meanings and functions.

With references to classic portraiture, Pierre Gonnord visualizes the invisible in his photographs of people on the periphery of society. His monumental images present an alternative notion of beauty. When Cristina Lucas, using a hammer, attacks a plaster replica of Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses in her frustration about not being able to make it speak, she settles the score with tradition while at the same time, she recreates a historic performance.

The vulnerability of women and children, racism, and violation are central notions in Alicia Framis's work, which is characterized by social commitment. Her work often takes the form of concrete proposals for the creation of a better world.

These are some of the thirty-one artists participating in this book and exhibition project initiated by Timothy Persons and stemming from his enthusiasm for contemporary Spanish photography. With this exhibition and book we aim to put the spotlight on an area of contemporary photography that is still largely unknown to many people but definitely deserves attention. We would like to express our gratitude to all those involved in this project, our warmest thanks to the participating artists and their galleries as well as Seacex, Inervantes, and the Spanish Ministry of Culture for their support and commitment.