

**Versión inglesa**  
**English version**

## [TRIBUTE TO CÉSAR MANRIQUE]\*

Manuel Padorno

Even as a tot, he would take away  
a landscape, the light, the boats  
lying on the beach, the sea urchins, the stones fallen  
from a wall that not knowing why  
had a kindly composition.

He lived on a parched land.  
a seething soil:  
grabbing a bit of earth  
was like pulling on a tree from underneath.

There were people on his island,  
people dressed in cheap clothing, fishermen,  
farmers growing alfalfa, maize,  
drivers with rickety lorries,  
taverns he would never set foot in,  
a wharf, tiny like a child's arm...  
And for all the things  
and all the people on his island,  
for all the streets on his island,  
a wanderer,  
a prickle stuck in the wall,  
a scorching shadow: the sun.

The sun dwelled over beaches and fields,  
in the puddles and on the road, on the grapevines,  
under the sea you dove into, to explore.

Had I been older than you  
I would have gone to Lanzarote to buy grapes,  
I would have seen you on the wharf,  
your dirty shoes,  
collecting seaweed and snails,  
drawing a boat more yours than the one  
I'm sailing on  
older than you.

You would be at the railing on the wharf,  
with wrapping paper, drawing  
the bottom of a puddle where the sea urchins croaked,  
and the moss on the rocks would turn green or red,  
green and red,  
like the lights on fishing vessels at night,  
on a wave that swells and ebbs,  
visible toward the shore, green or red,  
green and red.

You used to go to the beach and run  
across the round pebbles,  
and you would stop still like a thought over the shapes  
that were waiting for someone. They were round and pure,  
green or grey. They were bodies  
that raised against the smooth stone  
would roll to their everlasting position.  
Your childhood was a wonder,  
like the world that surrounds you now.

It was a wonder to see your surprise,  
your eyes popping out of their orbits  
as you gazed at the shiny traps  
on the bow of a ship  
that might have been named "Casilla del Ángel".

You're no more than what you love,  
and what you love is no more than the beauty  
that your island gives you alone:  
Your round landscape  
to my stilled thoughts.

(\*) Manuel Padorno, "Homenaje a César Manrique", *La Tarde*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 22 May 1957.



## Forging the modern artist.

### César Manrique in the context of Spanish art (1950-1957)

Fernando Gómez Aguilera

#### The nineteen fifties: new modern things, hard won

After the dense eclipse that smothered all orders of life during Spain's civil and dire post-war, the nineteen fifties brought a sliver of light, a ray of modernization in the midst of the country's social, economic and cultural desolation. In 1949, against a backdrop of interwoven physical and moral misery, existential pessimism and collective craving for reconstruction, the isolation that the international community had imposed on General Franco's dictatorial regime began to yield.

Culture, stifled by the impact of sequestrations, repression, exile and autarky, had been abruptly cut off and deflected from the logic of its historic course. In an atmosphere characterized by hostility and hardship, the appointment of Christian Democrat Joaquín Ruiz Giménez as Minister of National Education on 18 July 1951 – he would later be dismissed in the wake of the political crisis set off by the 1956 university uprisings in Madrid – introduced a change of direction in the Government's cultural policy. The situation created had a beneficial impact on the renovation of the plastic arts, facilitating gradual, albeit limited, contact with foreign currents.

From that time on, art exhibitions and encounters were officially promoted to portray a false image of normalization to the rest of the world. With the change of scenario occasioned by the defeat of the axis in World War II and the friendly winds that began to blow from the United States, the dictatorship needed to whitewash its image and take at least a symbolic distance from fascist rhetoric – an ideological communion it realized it had best not stress, but rather play down to foster the country's recently initiated reintegration into the international community<sup>1</sup>. Spain wanted to extricate itself from any post-war discourse. It was undertaking a transition to a new status, driven by its alliance with the United States. In the framework of the political authoritarianism and historicist rhetoric so typical of the times, the new approach half-heartedly adopted by Ruiz

Giménez and his team had relevant consequences for culture, which the regime quickly turned to its advantage both at home and abroad<sup>2</sup>. Whereas the dictatorship failed in its attempt to create an imperial aesthetic, academicism was naturally a completely different story, for its rancid conservatism had imposed its rule and moulded official attitudes. Despite having to make headway in such murky waters, the advances in this period of change were ultimately irreversible, consolidating the cultural positions adopted.

The attempts to create a contemporary sensitivity able to dissipate contextual gloom and restore modern tradition continued throughout the decade, culminating in the creation of *El Paso*, an artistic group that polarized the aesthetics of renovation. The group's historiographic evaluation has actually rested on a hegemonic line of interpretation that has largely contributed to casting areas of doubt, underestimating relevant artistic events, shifting them off-centre when proceeding to map the continuity of Spanish modernity and understand the complexity of that mid-century decade. The reason, in part, is that in the reading of that decade the distinct symmetry between avant-garde and informal abstraction was reinforced by a political-social component that opposed the regime, a series of ethical and ideological demands imbued with civil and political commitment that adhered, in the end, to its aesthetic *acquis*. Spanish informalism has often been viewed as an exercise laden with critical and symbolic content referred to its times and national context, although channelled through international linguistic formulas. But the resulting identification between the aesthetic and political avant-garde has engendered something more connotative than real. It may also be that the group's prevalence has not been unrelated to the connection between its aesthetics and the essentialist, rigorous and austere – national or ultimately Hispanic – vein of Spanish-most plastic tradition, from Velázquez to Goya, whereby its historic coherence has been evaluated from the vantage of the avant-garde break.

<sup>1</sup> Vid. *El color de las vanguardias. Pintura española contemporánea 1950-1990 en la colección Argenteria*, [ed.: Delfín Rodríguez], Madrid, Fundación Argenteria, Madrid, 1993. [Texts: Delfín Rodríguez, "El color de las vanguardias"; Víctor Nieto Alcaide, "El color de la negación del color"; and Francisco Calvo Serraller, "Un magma colorístico igualitario"].

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive review of the changes taking place in art in the period, see María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco's thoroughly researched study, *Arte y Estado en la España del siglo XX*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1989, pp. 65-122. Also her essay, "Significados del informalismo español", in the catalogue *À Rebours. La rebelión informalista* [ed.: Dore Ashton], pp. 69-79, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1999. Another valuable analysis of period aesthetics and ideology can be found in an essay by Enrique Domínguez Perela titled, "Introducción al problema de las conductas estéticas durante el franquismo [I, 1939-1960], [Journal] *Arte, individuo y sociedad*, Madrid, No. 3, 1990, Facultad de Bellas Artes, Universidad Complutense.

Such cultural hegemony has indisputably veiled certain contemporary modern and even avant-garde tendencies such as geometric abstraction, lyrical abstraction, integrated art and non-conventional figurative currents, sensitivities which, as a whole, provide an overview of the formal nomadism characteristic of the nineteen fifties. According to Víctor Nieto Alcalde, for instance: "In the course followed by art in those years, the struggle between modernity and academicism virtually disappeared, establishing a dichotomy: the confrontation between avant-garde and modernity, as well, often, as between abstraction and figuration. And yet, between the nineteen forties and the nineteen sixties, none of these attitudes was strong enough to eradicate the others"<sup>3</sup>. The fact is that the nineteen fifties are usually seen, compactly, from an avant-garde perspective, an approach that generates hierarchy. If, on the contrary, the period is broached from the full breadth of aesthetic modernity in all its – independent or interwoven – plastic, architectural and functional dimensions, the outcome, which critical and historical reviews will have to address in greater depth, is a more nuanced and vibrant image<sup>4</sup>.

The incipient zeal for modernization that drove the creative activity of the most open and restive sectors of Spanish art of the day did not arise by spontaneous generation. The *heroic fifties* are rooted in the preceding decade and, of course, in the shared determination to resume the domestic avant-garde tradition, so abruptly interrupted by the Civil War. Neither the regenerative contribution of the new realisms nor, logically, the subsequent eruption of the informalist avant-garde that began to crystallize in the latter half of that decade in Spain, can be understood without reference to the attitudes and modern activity previously undertaken by numerous artists and architects.

The initial structuring of the plastic and architectural renovation that was to consolidate in nineteen fifties debate and practice took place between 1945 and 1951. Significant in this regard is the activity of the *Academia Breve* – with its anthological exhibitions and *Salones de los Once* –, a society founded by

Eugenio d'Ors in 1941 that remained active in Madrid through 1954. Reflecting varied languages, D'Ors' academy was moderately open to modern tradition and took it upon itself, from its private domain, to propagate artistic proposals ignored by academicism. Although limited in scale, the *Grupo Pórtico* – created in 1947 – and *Dau al Set* – which appeared in Barcelona in 1948 – were early forerunners of the avant-garde. The *Escuela de Altamira*, which in 1949 held the First International Contemporary Art Week in Santander, and the teachings of Daniel Vázquez Díaz – an artist whose connections with Parisian cubism dated from before the war and whose work would be decisive for many young painters, César Manrique among them – also paved the way to renovation and served as a nexus to the expressions of preceding avant-gardes<sup>5</sup>. Other initiatives fuelled the dawning of change, including the *Salones de Octubre* (1948-1957), the idealized and poetic figuration of the Buchholz group and LADAC, formed in 1951 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria by Eduardo Westerdahl, Felo Monzón, Manuel Millares, Elvireta Escobio, Juan Ismael, Alberto Manrique and José Julio. The period was more or less intensely pervaded by legacies such as surrealism, the ubiquitous and fertile Picasso, Juan Gris, Paul Klee or the School of Paris that contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of age with which the painting of the day could identify. In other words, there were immediate – albeit tenuous – precedents as well as historic continuity to nourish the transformational urge that drove the arts in the nineteen fifties, ushering in a new aesthetic cycle.

Renovation was not, then, as some accounts would have it, either an ambition or a creation of Francoism. With the 1951 governmental reform, the regime merely put its official seal on an existing sensitivity that connected with international art and co-existed with the conventional expressions reflected, for instance, in National Fine Arts Exhibitions. This was precisely the case of the First Hispano-American Art Biennial, whose 12 October 1951 opening in Madrid under the presidency of the Head of State formalized official support for advanced artistic trends: the third edition would be held in Barcelona in 1955. The Biennial was an event that shook the artistic scene violently: "a large-scale exhibition [that] altered the pulse of Spanish artistic life", to put it in José María Moreno Galván's words<sup>6</sup>. Faithfully reflecting the eclecticism of the day, it embraced several tendencies articulated in the preceding decade.

The creation of the National Museum of Contemporary Art on 9 October 1951 should be interpreted in this same appropriative vein. The director appointed in early 1952, José Luis Fernández del Amo, an architect prone to a renovationist and integrating approach to the arts, in which architecture played a central, modulating role, had to perform his well-intentioned task under very precarious conditions throughout the six-year term prior to his dismissal<sup>7</sup>. In August 1953, Fernández del Amo himself was

<sup>3</sup> Víctor Nieto Alcalde, "Reconstrucción de la modernidad y creación de la vanguardia", in the catalogue *III. Abstracciones-Figuraciones 1940-1975. Arte para un siglo. Colecciones del Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, [ed.: María José Salazar], [Texts: María José Salazar, "Figuración/Abstracción 1940-1975 en las colecciones del Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía"; Víctor Nieto Alcalde, "Reconstrucción de la modernidad y creación de la vanguardia"; Belén Galán Martín, "Arte español 1940-1975: el camino de la modernización"; Carmen Fernández Aparicio, "La reconstitución de la vanguardia escultórica en España (1940-1975). La colección del MNCARS"; and Catherine Coleman, "Figuraciones fotográficas"], Madrid, MNCARS, 2004, p. 32. *Vid.* also pp. 23-41.

<sup>4</sup> Certain studies have been forthcoming in this regard. *Vid.* Valeriano Bozal, *Antes del informalismo. Arte español 1940-1958 en la Colección Arte Contemporáneo*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Monografías de Arte Contemporáneo 1, 1996; *L'arquitectura i l'art dels anys 50 a Madrid*, [eds: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero and Patricia Molins], [Texts: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero, "Silencios y conversaciones. La arquitectura y el arte de los años cincuenta en Madrid"; Patricia Molins, "Misterio y geometría. La década de la abstracción"; Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero, "Preguntas a Antonio Fernández Alba"; and Guillermo Pérez Villalta, "Arquitectura desde el autobús"], Barcelona, Fundació "la Caixa", 1996; *España años 50. Una década de creación*, [eds: Juan Manuel Bonet and Carlos Pérez], [Texts: Julián Marías: "La vegetación del páramo"; Antonio Morales Moya, "Los primeros destellos"; Juan Manuel Bonet, "De qué estuvieron hechos, en arte, los cincuenta"; Mafalda Rodríguez, "Los cincuenta olvidados"; Emilio Giménez, "La segunda modernidad (arquitectura española de los cincuenta)"; Patricia Molins and Carlos Pérez, "Diseño industrial y diseño gráfico"; Andrés Trapiello, "Novela y poesía en los cincuenta (o los cincuenta de otra manera)"; Jorge Fernández Guerra, "Los años cincuenta, la atracción del abismo"; Carlos F. Heredero, "De la autarquía académica a la disidencia realista (cine español de los cincuenta)"], Madrid, Seace, 2004; and Víctor Nieto Alcalde, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> In June 1953, the recently created National Museum of Contemporary Art organized an exhibition in Madrid as a tribute to the teachings of Vázquez Díaz, on the occasion of his distinction with the Great Cross of Alfonso X the Wise.

<sup>6</sup> *Vid.* José María Moreno Galván, *Introducción a la pintura española actual*, Madrid, Publicaciones Españolas, 1960, pp. 120-121.

<sup>7</sup> José Luis Fernández del Amo's role in the institution of the National Museum of Contemporary Art is exhaustively discussed in the monograph by María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco cited above.



to organize the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of Abstract Art at the Menéndez y Pelayo International University in Santander, in conjunction with an International Abstract Art Exhibition which reflected the incipient and varied scenario of budding avant-garde tendencies. The Santander encounter addressed and amply formulated the heated controversy over figuration and abstraction that permeated the art of the day, while clearing the way for non-objective expressions to enter the Spanish plastic arena<sup>8</sup>.

The line of support for and propagation of avant-garde art that Fernández del Amo assumed while heading the museum – not to mention his rigorous concept of art collection and museum space – was relevant in a period decisive for the encouragement of modernization of artistic practice. Moreover, his role as cultural coach and catalyst, alert to the most audaciously vivid spirit of his times, bore fruit. And not only in connection with the institution of pictorial abstraction underway at the time, but more generally, by sensitizing opinion to a variety of expressions of the modern spirit, which he furthered and propagated. In a scanty appropriate framework and with a paucity of means, the director of the new museum – which was not officially opened until 1959, with Fernando Chueca Goitia at the helm – proceeded without shunning controversy or the contradictions of the political situation, and assuming one of the – romantically rooted – central ideas of that very singular decade: the integration of the arts and their functional anchorage in life under the lead of modern dynamism and the auspices of architecture. Shortly after accepting the position, he made it his explicit purpose to “assume the spirit of a generation I might represent; that means making art an exemplarily expressive accomplice of the social world; this I understand to be inescapable if we intend to make something that has life in it. That approach, the frequent debates in the university circle I frequent and encourage in a way, and a modest but firm and radical endeavour in which I’ve tried to group all the arts around an architectural core, restoring the functional value of each and every one, may be what has led me to enthusiastically accept this position”<sup>9</sup>. José Luis Fernández del Amo participated actively in the reconceptualization of aesthetic disciplines and practices taking place in the hands essentially of young architects – in Madrid, Sáenz de Oiza, Fisac, Corrales and Molezún... and in Barcelona, the members of *Grupo R* – but also of artists and designers.

Indeed, one of the most stimulating features of the decade, and one of the ones most neglected by critics, is perceptible in integrated artistic creation and the attempt to formalize the modernization of taste across all orders of life. Hence the commitment to furniture and decorative object design, the cooperation between architects and artists in public buildings and facilities and the – partially futile – desire to drive industrial design, interior decoration and environmental architecture. Such attitudes and practices were to make a profound impression on Manrique’s artistic imagination, marking his creative personality for years and well beyond the end of the decade. The proposals advanced by *Grupo R*, formed in Barcelona in 1957, reactivated design as a modern task, updating the concerns expressed by GATCPAC\* in the nineteen

thirties<sup>10</sup>. *Equipo 57* and the individual initiatives of many an architect in those times of extreme poverty and scarcity were also formulated in response to the atmosphere of reconstruction and modernization formulated by the country’s aesthetic and professional elites. Sensitive businessmen and developers – such as Huarte and Agromán – and innovative architects were obliged, in turn, to resort to self-supply to fit out their new architecture and adorn its living spaces in ways that concurred with the new penchant for modernity. Painting, sculpture, architecture, applied arts and the functional dimension of creation coexisted; they sought mutual reinforcement in their endeavour to weather the desolation and misery of the nineteen fifties and inspiration in the forms and resources glimpsed in cinema or the scant international journals accessible to them – such as Geo Ponti’s prestigious *Domus*, read and devoutly collected by Manrique –<sup>11</sup>.

To further the consolidation of abstract sensitivity, in 1956 José Luis Fernández del Amo, Vicente Aguilera Cerni and Manuel Millares organized the “1<sup>st</sup> non-Figurative Art Salon” held in Valencia from 16 to 30 May under the sponsorship the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Madrid. As María Dolores Jiménez Blanco notes, that showing constituted “the third major milestone in the nineteen fifties, after the 1<sup>st</sup> Hispano-American Art Biennial in 1951 and the 1953 International Congress on Abstract Art”<sup>12</sup>.

The accumulation of events and the vivacity of the debate, however, cannot be construed to mean that a radical change took place in art in our country. Except in advanced and minority circles, cultural awareness was essentially informed by classicism and patriotism and practised in a precarious context, limited by scarcity. Essentially devoid of any external source of information, the scenario was only barely vitalized by the initiation trips that painters began to take to Paris and the handful of international art exhibitions organized in our country that served as a stimulus for our artists and a point of contact with the tenets of abstraction<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> GATCPAC was founded by architects Josep Pratmarsó, Oriol Bohigas, Joaquim Gili, Antonio de Moragas, Josep Maria Sostres, Josep Maria Martorell, José Antonio Codorch and Maue Valls; they were joined, in 1955, by Josep Antón Balcells, Guillermo Giráldez, Francesc Bassó and Manuel Ribas and in 1958 by Pau Monguío, Francesc Vayreda, Javier Carvajal and Rafael García de Castro. See the exhaustive and well researched monograph by Carmen Rodríguez and Jorge Torres, *Grup R*, Barcelona, Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1994, which is also a useful guide to nineteen forties and fifties art, architecture and design in Barcelona.

<sup>11</sup> *Vid.* the catalogues cited above *L’arquitectura i l’art dels anys 50* a Madrid, [eds: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero and Patricia Molins], and *España años 50. Una década de creación*, [eds: Juan Manuel Bonet and Carlos Pérez].

<sup>12</sup> María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Some of the main exhibitions were: III Spanish and Latin American Art Biennial, Barcelona (1955); *Recent trends in French painting (1945-1955)*, 1955 at the Directorate General of Fine Arts exhibition rooms, Madrid, and that same year in Madrid, *Contemporary Swiss painters*, and *Contemporary Dutch painting. Other Art*, 1957, organized by the National Museum of Contemporary Art at the Gaspar Gallery in Barcelona and the Parisian galleries Stadler and Rive Droite and El Paso. An introduction to the major informalists, the showing was first held in the Gaspar Gallery in Barcelona. In Madrid it was exhibited at the Sala Negra Gallery. Works were hung by, among others, the following authors: Appel, Burri, Saura, Tàpies, Fautrier, De Kooning, Pollock, Tobey, Canogar, Millares, Feito, Wessel...; Abstract Art Week in Spain, Sala Negra Gallery from 7 to 15 March 1958; *Ten years of Italian painting (1946-1956)*, 1958 at the National Museum of Contemporary Art and *New American painting* in the same museum, with works from the MoMA – including pieces by Baziotes, Sam Francis, Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, Motherwell, Pollock, Rothko, Stamos, Gorki... For a more extensive chronological overview, *vid.* Francisco Calvo Serraller, *España, medio siglo de arte de vanguardia, 1939-1985*, [two vol.], Madrid, Fundación Santillana-Ministerio de Cultura, 1975, vol. II.

<sup>8</sup> *Vid.* María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-101; and José María Moreno Galván, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-125.

<sup>9</sup> In: María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

\* [N. del T.] Grupo de Arquitectos y Técnicos Catalanes para el Progreso de la Arquitectura Contemporánea (Group of Catalan Architects and Engineers for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture).

The situation was also improved by the incipient presence of young artists from other countries, an outcome of the policy implemented by Fine Arts Commissioner Luis González Robles, appointed in 1955 to organize Spain's participation in international biennials, among others<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to his efforts the most modern Spanish art began to travel beyond national borders, in particular after Tàpies and Chillida were awarded prizes at the Venice Biennial in 1958, a year that marked a turning point. González Robles, involved from the outset in the museum founded by Fernández del Amo – which González would himself eventually preside – deftly channelled the international promotion of abstract art through biennials and group touring exhibitions under the auspices of the Spanish authorities.

Outside the National Museum of Contemporary Art and the Hispanic Culture Institute, the fragile web supporting new artistic events in Madrid consisted in little more than the Ateneo and a handful of galleries. Exhibition rooms, primarily annexes to bookstores, were instrumental in this regard, particularly Biosca – which housed the *Salones de los Once*, Buchholz, Clan – which sponsored the “New artists” collection under the direction of Matías Goeritz, editor of a meritorious *Homenaje a Paul Klee* (Tribute to Paul Klee) – and Fernando Fe.

With the 25 February 1957 change in the Administration, some of the key positions were handed over to Opus Dei technocrats, whose agenda focused on furthering the economic development that characterized the nineteen sixties. That same year saw the birth of El Paso, whose important contribution would mark the art of an entire decade, largely eclipsing the stylistic disparity that characterized the period. But the profound transformation of Spanish art, which was clearly heading toward informal abstraction, was irreversible and wholly unaffected by the resignation of the Minister of National Education, who had ratified and assumed policies to support and assimilate the new sensitivity. Significantly, this was the year that the National Museum of Contemporary Art sponsored an exhibition of international informalist painting in the *Sala Negra* gallery that was to have a considerable impact in Spain. Titled *Otro Arte* (Another art), the showing concurred, moreover, with Jorge Oteiza's success in the São Paulo Biennial.

### The apprentice painter: preliminary notes

César Manrique began to show unequivocal signs of the renovation that inspired his art as early as 1952, i.e., very soon after graduating from the San Fernando Fine Arts Academy in 1950, a goal that had brought him to Madrid from Lanzarote five years prior. His creative production underwent a period of transition and exploration until 1958, immersed in the logic first of modernism, and

later avant garde, research. That year he held a solo exhibition at the Ateneo in Madrid, featuring informal terrestrial networks – his “orderly lands” –, in which matter assumed a notorious presence and where he introduced his specific pictorial language associated with lava and volcanoes, a line he would develop extensively beginning in 1959. Up until then, not only did his painting mature along an essentially eclectic course in keeping with the spirit of the times, but it was in those crucial years that his particular multi-faceted artistic personality was forged from his cross-disciplinary artistic practice and ability to overreach the confines of painting. This was the decade when his propensity for functionalism and the applied arts, art devoted to life, first rose to the surface; when, drawn by his experiences with murals and the creation of environments commissioned by architects, he began to relate to the spatial dimension of art that extended beyond the edges of a piece of canvas. In the heroic nineteen fifties, César Manrique grew as a modern painter, but in addition to the vibrant and colourist line of his pictorial horizon – utterly foreign to Hispanic asceticism – he moulded his festive taste and celebratory tones, whose uninhibited aesthetic was dominated by a passion for beauty and a certain jovial and Dionysian impetus that clashed with the prevailing austerity and rigour. At the same time, as he undertook his first ventures into public art, he underscored the indivisibility of his discourse from the poetics of the nature and landscape of Lanzarote, source of his creative imagination.

Manrique's first attempts at painting in the nineteen forties in his native Arrecife were conducted in the widely varied field of art focusing on local customs and manners. But soon after his academic parenthesis, he began to explore modern formulas under the artistic sway of Néstor de la Torre – whom he always admired – and the graphic influence of the journals of the day whose stylized exoticism, crystallized in surrealist scenes, was embraced by the artist. Perhaps idealizing those early encounters in the cultural desolation of post-war Lanzarote, years later he would recall: “I was fascinated by foreign journals during the Spanish war and post-war. I devoured them to understand contemporary architecture. I remember that I first discovered painting with Picasso and Modigliani. And I was fascinated by that freedom that had nothing to do with academic realistic painting. That's why I tried to be independent very early on, but then I remember that I went to the school of fine arts in Madrid and after I graduated I had to make a huge effort to re-discover my true personality and my defiance of reality, to create a more abstract world, a world full of fantasy and closer to the natural habitat in which I had lived”<sup>15</sup>. He held his first exhibition in the Lanzarote Island Council headquarters from 1 to 8 November 1942, three years before moving to Madrid. He showed thirty four works under the title “Drawings by César Manrique”. In addition to crayon drawings *per se*, he hung watercolours and gouashes. The subjects varied: portraits; local scenes with a clear Nestorian influence in their allusions to plant life, reiteration of architectural motifs and island anthropic environments – *Vecinos de Famara* (Famara villagers), *Tocando en Tahiche* (Playing in Tahiche), *Puente de las Bolas* (Las Bolas Bridge), “*Moslando*” –; compositions with a touch of exoticism, in which stylized figures taken from contemporary art journals appear in surrealist scenarios tinged with a certain magic realism – *Venus del cactus*

<sup>14</sup> In 1955, Spain participated in the I Mediterranean Biennial at Alexandria under the coordination of González Robles, a curator who ratified his firm support for abstract art two years later when selecting the Spanish representation – Millares, Tàpies, Feito, Rivera, Oteiza and Cuixart – for the São Paulo Biennial, where Jorge Oteiza was awarded the Grand Prize for Sculpture.

<sup>15</sup> *Confesiones de César Manrique*, [Transcription of conversations between César Manrique and Antonio Guerra], c. 1976, Fundación César Manrique Archives, p. 10.



(Venus of the cactus), *Oriente* (East) ... –; or, in short, graphic snapshots of modern life, generally depicting subjects with young, athletic bodies – *Deportistas* (Athletes), *Mundo actual* (Today's world), *Bronce y plata* (Bronze and silver)...<sup>26</sup>.

In 1947 he painted a mural – since demolished – in the former Arrecife Club house in Lanzarote which, even with its linguistic indecision, is surprising for its modern execution and intention, sporadically driven by a strong cubist vein. The subject was a picturesque island scene in which he included what were to become his archetypal icons: prickly pear, camel, local architecture, peasant woman, palm tree, leaf of a grapevine, volcano and black soil. To all this he added a strange masculine figure, a sort of mardi gras mask and a cubist guitar that might be found in a still life painted by Juan Gris or Pablo Picasso.

The artist filled the white wall with an amoeba-shaped organic stain that framed a sort of “landscaped still life”. The schematic and cubist figuration of the mural, based on the simplicity of flat, meticulously delineated forms, told the tale of the island's personality. From time to time throughout the rest of the decade, Manrique would use some of the resources silhouetted here, namely: intersection of simultaneous planes of colour to create intervals, sometimes with a soft and others with a more rational geometry; fragmentary figuration; schematic representation; objectification of presences; pursuit of chromatic transparencies; free distribution of pictorial elements; overlapping of figures; compositional function of colour; delimitation of the surface of the mural with a non-conventional form; or segments of some of the figures overreaching the bounds of the mural to spread on to the wall – here it was a palm tree, but the artist used the same device for several of the motifs in the murals painted for the “Parador” at Arrecife.

Both the rhetoric of the guitar and the richly cubist treatment of popular island construction – home and hearth – enlivened a faceted composition in which rationalist gesture prevailed but co-existed with more organic, modern figuration and even with the absolutely organic-like frame that delimited the area of the work. The compositional play on architecture pursued a certain complexity without naivety: the white surface was impacted by the plane of a guitar, a cactus, a gigantic grape leaf with a pop art-like execution over constructivist roots, and a camel head floating over the unblemished surface of a typical oven. The work stood as proof of the young artist's affiliation with modern art even while he was enrolled in the academy, and a prelude to his identification with the renovating tendencies of the late nineteen forties.

<sup>26</sup> The titles of the pieces exhibited were: *Mundo actual* (Today's world), *Bronce y plata* (Bronze and silver), *Meditación* (Meditation), *Oriente* (East), *Anatomía Guanche* (Guanche anatomy), *Viento* (Wind), *Vecinos de Famara* (Famara villagers), *Tocando en Tahiche* (Playing in Tahiche), *Campesinos de Timanfaya* (Timanfaya farmers), “*Mosiendo*” (“Mosiendo”), *Atardecer* (Dusk), *Ya llegó* (He came), *Venus del cactus* (Venus of the cactus), *Rostros actuales* (Today's faces), *Deportistas* (Athletes), *Ritmo* (Rhythm), *Venecia* (Venice), *Puente de las Bolas* (Las Bolas Bridge), *Retratos de jóvenes* (Youths' faces), *Adán y Eva* (Adam and Eve), *Rostro de mujer* (Woman's face), *Viejo desnudo* (Old nude) and *Caras de mujer* (Women's faces). *Vid.* the diptych *Exposición de dibujos de César Manrique*, Arrecife, [Cabildeo de Lanzarote], November 1942. For an introduction to this first stage of César Manrique's painting, see the following essays by Lázaro Santana, his most comprehensive exegete: *Vid.* Lázaro Santana, *César Manrique. Un arte para la vida*, Barcelona, Editorial Prensa Ibérica, 1993, pp. 26-38; *Manrique*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Edirca, 1991, pp. 15-20; and “La pintura de César Manrique hasta 1958”, in *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002, pp. 29-33.

Anticipating future concerns from a very early stage, he remodelled the environment that framed the work, building a small corner with the mural on one side and a walled arch made of volcanic stone on the other. His detailed approach to the overall architectural environment reflected a neo-Canary Island style that the artist would also deploy in the Guacimeta Airport bar, whose counter was to bear Manrique's signature. The brief decorative programme for the clubhouse might in hindsight be interpreted as a preview of his subsequent artistic interests: he garlanded the volcanic stone dado underneath the fresco with white cement build-ups; planted two stylized cacti in ceramic flower pots, similar to the ones in the still lifes he was painting at the time; hung a plate-like artisanal element on the wall; and installed an unusually shaped lamp in the abutment between the two walls, along with several lanterns. According to contemporary testimony, this work – which is documented – may have been supplemented with a second mural on the opposite wall, but no graphic verification of its existence has been found.

In late 1950 he painted two large murals – one in the cafeteria and the other in the dining room – for the National “Parador” or inn at Arrecife, Lanzarote, built on the city's marina by architect José Enrique Marrero Regalado and officially opened the following year. In the bar piece, *Alegoría de la isla* (Island allegory), Manrique painted a “poem of time” about Lanzarote, a symbolic account of the island's geological, anthropic and consequently scenic development. The sequence includes carefully selected volcanoes, eruptions, pre-Spanish archaeology – votive altar, petroglyph, altar – local human figures, sandy crops, camel, donkey, ceramics, century plant, fruit... a sort of symbolic map that synthetically represents the face of Lanzarote viewed from the perspective of its inland genesis. The mural located in the former dining room, titled *El viento, la pesca y la vendimia* (The wind, fishing and the grape harvest) is composed around three independent views of local life, constituting a fragmentary but emblematic illustration of the farmer's ongoing struggle with the ocean wind; a group of fishermen attired in traditional dress, with their catch; and finally a scene from the grape harvest. This work also contains a wide selection of iconographic motifs: farmers and fishermen dressed in the apparel characteristic of their trades, fish, boats, winepress, prickly pear, grapevine leaves, volcanoes, palm trees...<sup>27</sup>. These island motifs had already been repeatedly depicted both in the Arrecife Clubhouse mural and in prior drawings and paintings, fruit of the artist's earliest plastic experimentation.

<sup>27</sup> Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez's 1954 description of the murals is worth reproducing: “We recently had occasion to visit the exemplary and very appealing ‘Parador’ at Arrecife, Lanzarote. In addition to excellent service, the inn offers visitors an artistic experience authored by the distinguished island painter César Manrique: splendid and representative murals in the bar and dining room, chromatic sketches of landscape and life on this volcano-racked island, the ancient Tiferogatra or Torcusa. [...]”

“The mural frieze in the bar, ideally framed by the environment created by architect Marrero Regalado, accurately and beautifully depicts the poem of time, a theme of special relevance on Lanzarote, inasmuch as it represents, as if in a landscape: first the tragedy of erupting volcanoes and islanders desperately pouring milk into the ‘Quesera de los majos’, an altar to the Supreme Deity for offerings intended to placate the fury of the volcanoes. This is followed, in the foreground, by two coarse and discreet nudes whose emphatically rounded forms denote the ongoing struggle against the volcanoes and the wind; standing behind them, the liturgical symbolism of a menhir, stained greenish-grey by orchilla weed and bearing the “Zonzomas” carvings – a recently evaluated and studied petroglyph that now forms a part of the island's archaeological *acquis*. In the next scene, the volcano is dormant, leaving a still and restful landscape dotted by sandy crops where man, after the eruptions, begins to explore the

Lázaro Santana, who has studied this early stage in detail, stresses the synthetic and allegorical values of the symbols in these murals and in the one painted two years later for Lanzarote's Guacimeta Airport<sup>28</sup>. And indeed, the artist displayed indisputable narrative skill, an ability to compose relatively complex scenes from elements imbued with symbolic depth. As he progressed in the design of his creative universe, the reiteration of the iconographic repertoire present from the outset – cactus, century plant, fish, fishing basket, boat, home, camel, volcano, local ceramics ... – instilled in the elements of his plastic tale an archetypal dimension independent of the formula used in their expression.

The painter continued to explore the construction of believable fragments alluding to and representing reality, related to the quality, picturesque beauty and autochthonous value of place, whose figuration, however, is closer to modern classicism stemming from cubism than to naturalism. His training and manual talent enabled him to draw shapes more incipiently renovating than academic, while nonetheless deeply rooted in the discourse of local tradition. His figures are solid, volumetric, even stone-like, transmitting a certain objectual impression, i.e., exalting the material nature of lives and things, a theme he would later develop in his painting, where the tendency to individualize and objectify presences is particularly strong. These figures appear in sequenced historic scenes where nature and human activity are corrected and embellished by the painter. Wrapped in a veil of idealization and visibly monumentalized, their construction is suggestive of the Picassian influence present here and there in many of his earlier works, from painting to ceramics. The substantive quality of the artist's creative imagination, which would be reiterated throughout his life, soon also appeared in this preliminary stage: the insular roots of his world view – very closely related to nature and vernacular cultural components – and based as well on the metabolism of contemporary styles, whether abstract or figurative, in its eclectic or renovated version. In other words, he travelled the road that separates lava as allegory from lava as synecdoche.

resources he needs to miraculously eke a living out of the soil of Lanzarote. Also in the foreground, a majestic camel stoops alongside the harmonious composition of a woman in a straw hat and black cape with its fringe ruffled by the wind alongside a girl donning a 'parasol' hat and sitting on a very expressively foreshortened donkey with its colourful saddlebags; painted ceramics from the old pottery kilns at Muñique, the fleshy fruit of the soil and century plant; and then, the oldest volcano, eroded by time and the human hands that have mined its magic ash or *lapilli* to protect the island's crops under this very peculiar 'enarenado' or sand cover.

"This mural is an ode to time on Volcano Island, representing each phase of its evolution and the associated customs.

"The 'Parador's' attractive interiors are further enhanced by the dining room murals, full of light, colour and symbolism, titled 'El viento, la pesca y la vendimia' (The wind, fishing and the grape harvest). The first synthesizes a unique farming method known as 'enarenados' or 'sand cover', a technique used in the constant struggle against the wind and desolation, a sign of the hardship involved in living in a hostile climate with a dry, sandy wind; the figures of a farmwoman and her two children waging titanic battle with the environment add drama to this suggestive landscape. The second mural in the dining room is an extraordinarily realistic depiction of a group of fishermen gathering hake, grouper, salmon and other species from their nets. Among the prominent features of this mural are the women's typical attire and the men's peculiar hats, made of palm leaves. The third mural – more baroque, succulent and sweeter – portrays the grape harvest with winepress, grapes, men and women. In this painting the tender green, black and violet colours are offset by attractive and suggestive fleshy, golden tones." Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, "Las pinturas murales del Parador Turístico de Arrecife", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 19 January 1954.

<sup>28</sup> Vid. Lázaro Santana, *César Manrique. Un arte para la vida*, Barcelona, Prensas Ibéricas, 1993, p. 44, and "La pintura de César Manrique hasta 1958", in *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002, pp. 29–40.

In 1952 he began to take courses in the Institute of Cinematographic Research and Experiment in Madrid, a decision that was certainly not taken by chance. Given the cultural and social limitations prevailing in Spain at the time, cinema was a significant educational resource. In Manrique's case, it was a window from which he could view contemporary life elsewhere, acquire aesthetic and decorative references and visually appropriate a topical industry of the everyday. This in the long run proved to be valuable both for his agenda for integrating the arts in natural environments and spaces and for contrasting the vernacular with the abstract, and local material culture with modern international languages: his art of cosmopolitan living, his poetics of art for pleasurable life. In a conversation recorded in the nineteen seventies, after reiterating his fascination with Greta Garbo, one of his professed female myths, he recalled what the seventh art had meant to him: "Cinema also fascinated me because it gave us a view of the outside world, the European and American world, the civilized world, progress"<sup>29</sup>.

Beginning in 1952 and into the second half of the decade, he produced compositions with varied themes – essentially still lifes and island scenes – in which monotype, a technique that enabled him to explore textures and pursue his colourist leanings, was the common denominator<sup>30</sup>. He combined this with his oil paintings, particularly still lifes, in which he sought a sharp, renovated, incipiently orthogonal and pastel figuration, reminiscent of Morandi's lyricism. He sold five to the Castellana Hilton Hotel, wholly decorated by Luis and Javier Feduchi, a renowned father and son team of interior decorators who, with this initiative, created a new tendency in Spanish hotel and tourist architecture.

He exhibited his monotypes for the first time in 1953 in a showing organized by the Lanzarote Island Council. He hung twenty-some works that he had painted since that summer in his sea-front studio at La Caleta de Famara, Lanzarote, a small

<sup>29</sup> *Confesiones de César Manrique*, [Transcription of conversations between César Manrique and Antonio Guerra], c. 1976, Fundación César Manrique Archives, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> The curator – and later delegate – of Archaeological Excavations of the province of Las Palmas, Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, with whom the artist had shared many a stroll around the island in the nineteen forties and who had introduced him to aboriginal archaeology, a science that would leave an imprint on his iconography – votive offerings and ceramics –, published a descriptive chronicle on the subjects of these monotypes that is worth reproducing: "This latest production, which I have recently seen during the artist's short holidays on the charming La Caleta de Famara beach, includes fifteen very large (for this technique) monotypes.

[...]

"The predominant theme in this new pictorial phase is the beach with its typical cottages, shored boats, corals, fish skeletons, scales and marine fauna, but also the human figure: a plastic assemblage of lines and forms in splendidly balanced blocks, with no trace of the platitudes that so often characterizes such subjects. César Manrique's vision of the beach is like a cosmic sea with its strange fauna, some drawn from the abyssal depths.

"Fleeing from colour – César Manrique is the wizard of colour – the artist, ever unsatisfied, contrasts his range of blacks, depicting white women on black beaches. The island of Lanzarote, after all, is the result of volcanic eruptions that have made its soil a sea of black scoria, and hence the black sand on many of its beaches. Central to this other vision of black tones are wholly stylized female figures, rife with plastic highlights and surrounded by strange stars, indigenous flora, crustaceans, fish bones and white boats plying black seas.

"As a final treat in my visit to his La Caleta de Famara studio, César Manrique afforded me one last and very gratifying surprise: a huge mural, extraordinarily elegant in its utterly original composition and the sobriety of its black, white and ochre colouring. The theme is a primitive hunt, with a herd of deer desperately fleeing from a group of men, to their death at the hands of awaiting archers." Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, "Los monotipos de César Manrique", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 15 November 1953.

fishing village where his family had a summer home<sup>21</sup>. Famara always occupied a nourishing, foundational and vividly marked space in his intimate and artistic memory, providing him with a seedbed of sensations and images, of creative stimuli, that he never ceased to acknowledge and value. The village of his childhood summers left a visible imprint both on his figuration and his first informalist abstractions. It afforded him a world of plastic resources and intense natural observation rooted in the culture of the sea and its surroundings: ponds and fish, boats and marine backdrops, starry skies and lonely beaches... In short, the source of his painting was an archetypal marine landscape that he reinterpreted from a personal and anti-academic vantage inspired in synthetic and kindly neo-figuration and supported by freedom of composition. Shortly after the opening, Manrique, imbued with the missionary spirit typical of the advocates of modernity, delivered a lecture on the "Concept of contemporary art". By that time, he was working on the mural for Guacimeta Airport at Lanzarote.

Like so many others of his generation, the artist took an initiation trip to Paris in April 1953, travelling with Manuel Conde and Francisco Farreras. He spent several months looking at paintings and, as he himself would later report, meeting Picasso, a central influence in his artistic training. The trip was decisive in the consolidation of his modern leanings. Manrique himself felt that it sparked a change in his pictorial approach. It was to prompt a sort of time-wise and stylistic change of direction, particularly with respect to his abstract inclinations, which would materialize the following year in his solo exhibition at the Clan gallery. But beyond that, for him Paris embodied modernity in all areas of everyday life, a seductive horizon that beckoned him away from the stifling atmosphere and poverty of post-war Spain. That was not, of course, his only trip to Paris. He went back several times in 1957 and in subsequent years. In fact, he travelled extensively throughout that decade – Paris, Ibiza, Palma de Majorca, Balearic Isles, Canary Islands, Italy ... – and the rest of his life.

For César Manrique, 1953 was a start-off year. In a trip to Ibiza he became acquainted with the island architecture, a circumstance that was to influence his landscapist decisions in Lanzarote in the nineteen sixties and seventies. He also began to work with architects.

The first monotypes that he painted in 1952 are still lifes that reveal a certain lack of skill. He had yet to acquire a command of the medium, to which he would soon devote his technical talent. But they herald some of the features that characterize his modern figuration in the nineteen fifties and particularly in the first half of that decade: schematization of visual reality; lyrical expression; stylization; chromatic lavishness; individualization of the objects depicted – accentuated by their isolation and detachment from the background through blank intervals or linear strokes around the perimeters; flat, depthless

presentations; monumentalized figures, freely or even randomly distributed all across the pictorial plane, sometimes with no points of support, as if they were floating... His intention is to suggest strictly plastic realities. The articulation of planes or geometrization clearly marked by chromatic variety is anticipated in an early oil painting dating from 1951. In addition to the exaltation of colour typical of this initial period, these monotypes reflect Manrique's compositional skill, his ability to rhythmize planes of colour, creating fairly complex visual colour frames. In this still life, he resorts to a classic device, a window opening on to a landscape – volcanic, in ochre and black tones – to create a sensation of depth in the interior and its subjects, pieces of fruit and ceramics. The schematic intention is clearly perceptible in the former, consisting in genuine masses of colour, and in the decorative plants in the background, a resource he would re-use in works such as the mural painted in 1955 for the Banco Guipuzcoano titled *La industria, agricultura, ganadería y pesca* (Industry, agriculture, livestock raising and fishery). As in the monotypes in particular and very visibly in the early still lifes painted in 1952, there is an incipient tendency to present plastic symbols with orthogonal, highly individualized strokes and to allow the pictorial energy of the painting to rest on its retinal quality.

The monotypes served the purposes of a laboratory where he could explore two basic dimensions: analysis of form and freedom of colour, geared to the abstract values that characterized the work he was doing at the time. Manrique rendered reality endearingly problematic, while delving further into the independence of pictorial reality as regards representation. The approach to this series was based on hesitant logic: throughout the period, until 1956, advances alternated with stylistic reversals. His many still lifes, paintings with an abundance of plants, were the expression of decorative intention, underscored by enflamed chromatism. These works, while generally more conservative than island country- and seaside scenes, are above all paradoxical. While the execution of floral figuration is associated with explicit references – located in the upper half of the paintings – it usually also includes incipiently abstract values in the lower half – linear decompositions and criss-crossing, plays on planes... This is particularly visible in the long series painted for the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, a national inn at Santiago de Compostela. In these as in other works, the festive use of colour, unusual in Spanish pictorial tradition, assumes an essential role, distributed over schematic shapes and incipient curvilinear geometries. Manrique, who soon earned a reputation as a colourist, was generous with his magnificent palette, with very pure ranges alternating with backgrounds where, using frottage and varying textural quality and tone, he sought an effect that led him to an appreciation of Pancho Cossío's painting. He cultivated luminosity and chromatic purity, exploring the most musical tones of a palette evocative of Arcadian colouring – associated with the beginning of time and the warm joy of the tropics – and perhaps of the legendary remembrance of the Hesperides. With time and in an atmosphere in which much of Spanish painting gravitated toward austerity, tinged with ethical-political nuance and a naturalist disposition, the artist circumstantially attenuated his chromatic exuberance, to which he nonetheless regressed from time to time. His unique palette, indisputably one of the most optimistic and Matissonian of the time – the Frenchman's fervour runs through his painting like a familiar presence – isolated him from his context while distancing him from Spanish specificity and roots, a

<sup>21</sup> According to the press he hung seven pieces on subjects depicting "our incomparable La Caleta beach", two still lifes, two paintings of the black sand characteristic of Lanzarote, an island theme titled *Cielo y mar* (Sky and sea), a number of pieces on votive offerings and figures custodied in the church at Femés; a still life titled *De la figura románica* (On the Romanesque figure), a version of a similar painting submitted that same year to the II Spanish and Latin American Biennial in Havana; and a mural on a silver base portraying a hunting episode. The exhibition was on display for a week. Vid. Guillermo Topham, "El próximo domingo, será inaugurada la exposición de pinturas de César Manrique", *Antena*, Arrecife, 10 November 1953, p. 2.

theme present in nineteen fifties plastic culture<sup>22</sup>. César Manrique initially opted for artificial colour – used independently of reality, for its sole purpose was visual – as opposed to the natural colour associated with organic or mineral matter, a trend in those years eventually imposed by the El Paso group. In other words, his painting was clothed in pigment, understood as merely aesthetic and sensual substance. Hence its synaesthetic value. His modern chromatic break away was to be gradually corrected, especially after 1954, by the sober air of the times and mainstream pressure, which he chose not to resist, resorting to eclecticism to resolve the contradiction generated by the conflict between impulse and culture.

Against the backdrop of the transformation strategies that aimed to change the statu quo in painting, Areán identified twelve “variations on neo-figuration”: “schematic, neo-cubist, harlequinade, fluctuating, spatialist, magician, physiologist, effervescent, gesticulating, muralist, demythologizing and political-narrative”<sup>23</sup>. This taxonomic diversity is indicative of the plurality of sensitivities comprising the renovating web, the magma of new approaches to figuration prevailing in the nineteen fifties: multiple albeit sketchy paths in the midst of the uncertainty that preceded the change of course. Manrique introduced a break in style that drove his figuration towards the renovation advocated by modern realism, more intent upon building strictly plastic truths than on reproducing reality. A latent force in this break, naturally, was his absorption of French painting through Vázquez Díaz: the School of Paris, Borens in particular, and the larger influence of post-cubism – his professed admiration for Braque and Juan Gris – constantly enlarged upon by the artist. As he advanced in his aesthetic programme and gauged his own language, he continued to explore the construction of figures and the painting as a whole by means of segmentation through colour. He proceeded in his re-reading of cubism, a central legacy that would inform his innovative venture in these early years, although the reference would tend to vanish with his constructivist progression. It is hardly surprising, in the context of predominant classicism and the quest for modernity, that this non-objective treatment of image was interpreted by newspaper art critics as “abstractist”. The artist himself viewed it from that perspective to put a distance between his own and the poetics of mimesis. The works are actually linguistic scales, evolutionary sequences integrated in the process of full liberation from reference and the attainment of plastic autonomy. This might also be the case of Piet Mondrian, for instance, whose internal logic has some points in common with the Manrique’s development, i.e., the successive decomposition of figures and the constructivist articulation of fragments, formerly integrated in a larger structure. The systems of internal composition developed in his monotypes – a sort of educational workshop – contain the embryo of the abstract approach initiated with the Clan Gallery exhibition in December 1954. His recognizable soft geometries, resting on planes generated by the intersection of straight or curved coloured lines, are visible in the backgrounds, supports and images of a good number of his figurative monotypes. That is to say, following a route common to other artists of his generation, he evolved from the cubist geometrization of reality to geometric or constructivist

abstraction. In an interview granted to Juan Manuel Bonet in 1991, Luis Feito made this very clear: “How did you end up doing abstract painting?” “I evolved toward it naturally. I went through a cubist phase. I didn’t read about cubism in books, rather it responded to a need I felt at a particular time. The idea was to break away from the use of models, to stylize, to geometrize reality. After that cubist stage, I felt a need for pure painting, to do away completely with any figurative reference and express myself in the language of pure painting. That was actually the biggest, the hardest step to take”<sup>24</sup>.

Contemporary art critique stressed the decorative value of Manrique’s local scenes and still lifes, built on a firm foundation of good taste, an interpretation often reiterated in subsequent analyses. In 1956, for instance, Sánchez Camargo called the artist “our most decorative practising abstract painter”<sup>25</sup>. Never an artist entrenched in the ferocity of the Spanish “*veta brava*”, Manrique allowed his Atlantic personality to revel in young, lyrical and sensory painting, art that celebrated life. His uninhibited behaviour and wit, framed by an attitude characterized by *joie de vivre*, along with his explicit exaltation of beauty and aestheticism, set him apart from the moral density and Calvinist spirit of his generation. His production, devoid of any dramatic implications, took a kindly and materialistic view of painting, not only relieved of any ideological, moral or mystical content but resting on retinal values and sheer aesthetic pleasure, very much in line with the School of Paris. Exuberant colour, in turn, used in abundance and with exceptional freedom constituted a grand and vital argument, his central metaphor. His was optimistic and joyful art that viewed life from the bright side; the aim was to contribute to individual and civil well-being by blending into larger spaces designed to be lived in, where painting would concur with other arts – sculpture, architecture, ceramics, decoration... Nearly from the outset, this mirthful, functional and strictly modern horizon was running through his poetics, in keeping with a certain contemporary style or spirit.

As noted above, he painted many still lifes, a *genre* accredited in art history as an avenue for formal exploration – very likely the core theme of modernity. One avant-garde after another has attested to its passion for still life; and indeed, the various movements appearing after World War II enhanced their prestige by updating content and revising form. Cubism itself, which rested its revolutionary

<sup>24</sup> Feito, [Texts: Francisco Calvo Serraller, “Una trayectoria en tensión”; and Juan Manuel Bonet, “Conversación con Luis Feito”], Madrid, Caja Madrid, 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Manuel Sánchez Camargo, “Noticia y crítica de Arte”, *Pueblo*, Madrid, 24 March 1956. Two years later the same reviewer, reiterated the kindly and colourist nature of Manrique’s murals, as an introduction to a laudatory evaluation of his evolution to informalism and matter painting after the 1958 showing in Madrid’s Ateneo. Sánchez Camargo praised the artist’s responsibility, his refusal to bow to success or settle comfortably into a type of painting that would readily connect with public taste: “[...] We have witnessed an intimate, meditated transformation, deeply felt by this painter whose sincere dialogue with painting has driven him from jubilant, light, kindly, funny and intelligent play – and here the intelligence is clearly evident – to his present works. It would have been easy for Manrique, more than any other abstract artist, to consolidate his *oeuvre* with successive decorative murals or easel paintings. His pictures were of the sort liked by those who don’t understand the abolition of anecdote, where forms and colour were handled with such grace, ease and intention that any viewer could retain the visual play on his retina. It was a weighty and measured *oeuvre*; but Manrique wanted to take his art further, he understood that he was obliged to intensify the dialogue between himself and matter and that the white canvas that he could fill, certain of success, demanded more of him...” Manuel Sánchez Camargo, “El expositor ha llegado a la meta tras un largo proceso, como ha sucedido en todos los artistas, desde Zurbarán a Goya”, *Pueblo*, Madrid, 16 December 1958.

<sup>22</sup> Tomás Llorens, “Paleta, gusto, hispanidad y autenticidad en la pintura española de los 50”, in sev. auth., *Pintura española de vanguardia (1950-1990)*, Madrid, Fundación Argenteria-Visor, 1998, pp. 63-69.

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Areán, *Treinta años de arte español*, Madrid, Guadarrama, 1972, pp. 32-33.

diction on still lifes that now form a part of the memoir of contemporary painting, adopted the formula as an instrument for waging battle. It is unsurprising, then, that Manrique would have resorted to this *genre* to pursue his modern venture, immersed in the frenzy that defined the Spanish artistic scene in the early nineteen fifties. In fact, the artist's expression throughout the period reviewed in this exhibition (1951/52-1957) should be seen as a training grounds, as linguistic research subjected to the itinerant aesthetics and stylistic discontinuity characteristic of transition periods and the acquisition of new languages. Manrique's production contains echoes of the eclecticism and formal and conceptual tension of his times. José María Galván, who defined the phase corresponding to the early attempts to break the tedium of the "invariable situation" as "dynamic modernism", wrote that "the dynamic possibilities of style were the fundamental ingredient of that undertaking"<sup>26</sup>. This is applicable to Manrique, whose *oeuvre* is illustrative of the dichotomy between neo-figuration and abstraction prevailing in 1954. In these early years of the decade, his mind was a workshop of plural sensitivities, very much in keeping with the period. While clearly responding to diversity, he connected with what was indisputably an air of period, a sort of precipitate where a variety of echoes converged, from cubist geometrization and composition, the lyricism inspired by Klee and Picasso's hegemonic presence, to the School of Paris and Vázquez Díaz's teachings.

But even as a young artist, Manrique did not concentrate solely on painting. His work with architects on murals, interiors and environments broadened his sensitivity, landing him squarely in one of the most unique lines of aesthetic renovation of the decade: interdisciplinary practice and artistic integration with a functional perspective. Manrique turned to architecture, design, decoration, sculpture, cinema... imbued with militant modernism, a fervent advocate of the cause<sup>27</sup>. His interdisciplinary leanings and practice as well as the philosophy of total art and aesthetic functionalism that he would develop in the following two decades began to take root at this time. And although he had still to formulate his discourse on nature, throughout the nineteen fifties as he added depth to his abstract vocabulary, reflecting on the links between his expressivity and the island landscape to which he would eventually refer his painting to engender a sort of naturalist aesthetics.

His neo-figuration often borrowed from the same domain of local manners that he had reflected in classicist language. He proceeded to a very synthetic re-reading of that domain from the perspective of the new languages. These works hold a broad repertoire of intersecting elements characteristic of the island's cultural landscape: fish, fishing baskets, boats, sea urchins, flue-nets... that were to become symbols of his creative universe. On occasion, he used them with

accumulative fervour in the midst of an uninhibited explosion of colour, linking local architecture, palm trees, camels, monumental doors, ovens, moons, volcanoes, water tanks, cacti, ceramics, hearths or peasant women and men attired in regional dress and always donning typical island hats. Most of these motifs became genuine iconic matrices that he would use throughout his artistic life, in painting, graphic design and interiors alike. Like a retable reflecting island life or a shot for a motion picture, his flat paintings are awash with signs that constitute a narrative translation, deliberately devoid of syntax, of the personality of Lanzarote: genuinely modern, country paintings. There is an overwhelming but effective overlay of presences in the dense staging of these creations, due to their dual construction: the figures themselves, segmented into facets, and the scene represented as a whole, likewise articulated around fragments. He builds a visual mythology from details of everyday life<sup>28</sup> and in so doing, gives his island its modern portrait. His stylistic formulation is intense, by dint of geometrization and decomposition of image and the inclusion of planes delimited by lines in sequences marked by colour and simultaneity that absorb cubist logic without forgoing joviality. This new morphology does not, however, conceal the landscapist dimension of these works, conceptually akin to the Guacimeta Airport terminal mural, a major and artfully resolved piece. Lázaro Santana described the progress observed in this work compared to the murals painted for the Arrecife "Parador" three years earlier: "The stylistic evolution of Manrique's painting can be established by comparing this mural [Arrecife "Parador"] to the one done three years later for Guacimeta Airport, likewise in Lanzarote. The elements appearing in the new painting are exactly the same as in the earlier mural: the island marine and peasant worlds (volcanoes, camels, cacti, prickly pears, dinghies, palm trees, women, houses and so forth); but the way they are organized and represented has varied completely: the painting is flat, the drawing is sage in its child-like expression, the colours are arbitrarily distributed, the planes of the different scenes overlap with no thematic continuity; all the figurative signs are subordinated to the plastic rhythm imposed by colour, which here is cheery and vivid, inescapably touched by the magic light of the Atlantic"<sup>29</sup>.

And that is indeed the case: he had developed the grammar of his new language. His findings respecting colour, stylization, iconography and composition, areas he had explored in his monotypes, crystallized in this mural, which he began to paint in November 1953 while the monotypes were on exhibit at the Lanzarote Town Council. The sheer scale of this large piece, located in the lobby of the passenger terminal in Lanzarote's first airport, afforded the artist the opportunity

<sup>28</sup> Lanzarote island author Agustín de la Hoz, Manrique's contemporary, left a record of his own reading of the piece, stressing its emblematic character: "This mural is the truest interpretation of what travellers admire about this island, because our renowned painter has accurately reflected the mineralogy of his birthplace, its torrid soil, its austere and scorched colours, particularly the antagonistic lime whites and typical blacks, with none of the stale greys so readily attributed to lava scorias. In this antechamber to his island, César Manrique combines landscape with its peasant inhabitants, but without ever disrupting its order; on the contrary, he paints with astounding plasticity and glories in proving to what extent this painting should be regarded to be his, despite its disconnection with the likewise masterly abstractions he paints today. With this Guacimeta mural, César Manrique may have wanted to show everyone who visits the island his enormous professional knowledge, painting rusty sand, cottages submerged in the light of their own lime, stones biting famished roots... In short, the whole island, whose facial features are lined with the will to live..." Agustín de la Hoz, *Lanzarote, Lanzarote*, Cabildo Insular de Lanzarote, 1962, p. 282.

<sup>29</sup> Lázaro Santana, "La pintura de César Manrique hasta 1958", in *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> José María Moreno Galván, *opus cit.*, pp. 88-90. *Vid. also ibidem*, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> He started to paint by doing the posters for the films shown in the Arrecife movie theatre. Incidentally, there were certain similarities between the house he built at Taro de Tahiche in the late nineteen sixties and the environments, shapes and materials that appear in Blake Edwards' feature length film *The party* (1968), interpreted by Peter Sellers, Claudine Longet and Jean Carson, among others The planters, indoor plants, ponds, yard, large open spaces, paintings hung on the walls, long masonry seating, bathtub surrounded by plants, large floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the yard... are akin to the home that César Manrique built on the lava in Lanzarote at around the same time.



to develop his poetics on Lanzarote at length<sup>30</sup>. He pooled the symbols of his reading of island mythology and, as in an anthropological topography or ethnographic map, he set out a substantive, stage-designed portrait of Lanzarote. The sound support for his figures is softened by the intense formulation of style to which the representation is subordinated, subject to a precise artifice of synthesis and schematization and resting on the free exuberance of colour and constructive power. Again in this work, the viewer finds objectification, a jovial approach to pictorial expression, the cubist imprint and the artist's ability, through cumulative and simultaneous plastic syntax, to compose and balance complex scenes: in this case, in response to the space occupied by the mural and the internal order of the painting. The deliberate distribution of the motifs as a triptych, the many and varied symmetries and the intensity of the planes of colour underlie the indisputable beauty and pictorial solvency of this psychomap of the island. Vernacular custom is aesthetically updated and reflected in a work that appears to respond to Juan Gris's view of painting, as described in his famous conference at La Sorbonne in 1924: "a sort of flat, coloured architecture".

Broaching vernacular content with renovated linguistic formulas was one of the tasks that aesthetic modernization had taken it upon itself to perform in the nineteen fifties, as can be seen from the language and behaviour of the works authored by young architects. In Canary Island painting, the Luján Pérez School had attempted something along those lines twenty years earlier. Certain types of contemporary architecture refused to forgo the identification with its own roots or the exploration of – revised, naturally – popular typologies. Examples include Fernández del Amo's new urban developments – Belvis del Jarama (1952) and Vegabiana (1956) in the province of Cáceres or Cañada del Agra (1956) in Albacete; Coderch's structures, based on traditional Catalanian and Majorcan building models; or, in the pursuit of organic forms, Sáenz de Oiza's emblematic *Torres Blancas* (White Towers) in Madrid. César Manrique's architectural undertakings in Lanzarote in the nineteen sixties and seventies<sup>31</sup> and his approach to public art initially sprouted in this architectural and cultural climate, to which the artist remained loyal while enriching it with both his peculiar concept of nature and the experience gathered during the time spent in New York.

Island archaeological motifs and popular votive offerings left a mark on his work, both in murals – a hunting scene done on silver in 1952 at Caleta de Famara; a frieze for the main lobby in the building where he lived in Madrid; and the Fénix Hotel grille – as well as in a number of monotypes – *Objetos enterrados*, 1954 (Buried objects); *Sin título* (Untitled), c. 1954; *Ídolos y exvotos guanches*, 1954 (Guanche idols and votive offerings), also known as *Bodegón de los exvotos* (Votive offering); *Sin título* (Untitled), c. 1954; *Sin título* (Untitled), 1955; and *Sin título* (Untitled), 1955, the last four of which are included in this exhibition. Manrique came across this type of content in his outings around the island with Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez and during visits to San Marcial Church at Femés, Lanzarote, which houses the votive

offerings he drew. The Director of the Commission – later Delegation – of Archaeological Excavations of the province of Las Palmas (1940-1969), Jiménez Sánchez, introduced him to the world of archaeology, and the two friends shared finds that Jiménez documented with scientific erudition and Manrique drew with artistic relish. In any number of – sanguine – sketches, most likely done in the mid nineteen fifties – although the artist subsequently signed and dated them in 1947 – Manrique experimented with ceramic designs – plates, figurines, glasses, vases – some with a pre-Hispanic accent and others in what is obviously a Picassian vein. They attest to his appreciation of such objects, reiterated years later in his monotypes and oils. The artist's own writings refer to his interest in certain popular offerings and pre-Hispanic remains "of enormous archaeological interest, such as '*Zonzomas*' and the '*Quesera de los Majos*' (Majos votive altar); but especially the exceptional and historic Rubicón region with its San Marcial Church at Femés where, while Mr Jiménez Sánchez conducted his surveys, I would entertain myself sketching the tiny sculptures, rough and primitive wood and wax votive offerings, made by farmers for the island's patron saint"<sup>32</sup>. Seduced by their modernity, he kept some of these tiny statues in his home in Madrid. He was attracted to this world of rudimentary signs and figures which he broached with plastic curiosity, for its primitive forms, seen with eyes hungry for modernity, constituted an imaginative resource. In 1957, in a profession of his fascination with island geology, the source of his creative imagination, the artist himself recalled that: "Back on my peaceful island during the summer holidays, I used to take constant notes and observations about its very odd geology, which meant that I was ever on outings. I accompanied archaeologist Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez on several occasions. Happily for me, his research concurred in many ways with my concerns, for I was driven by the idea of finding new forms to enrich my plastic world, as some of the works in my forthcoming exhibition show, particularly one titled '*Objetos enterrados*' (Buried objects). We used to visit different places..."<sup>33</sup>. Escorting Jiménez Sánchez, who reviewed at least two of the artist's early exhibitions in the local press, was very beneficial for the artist, as it awakened him to the expressive and cultural universe of the Guanche peoples and deepened his relationship with the island's telluric history. This was a link that connected him with a cultural legacy shared with other members of his generation, for whom archaeology and early artistic expression were a relevant reference from which to call conventional representation into question and advance towards abstraction. The primitivist attitude – generally accepted as a constant in contemporary art – played a role in the plastic transformation that took place in the nineteen forties and fifties, renovating the admittedly limited influence that the approach had exerted on the historic avant-garde. Both its simplicity of form and its revaluation of the aesthetics of objects seduced restive painters who sited their artistic horizon on the vanishing point of the problemization of representation, and consequently, of reality. Willi Baumesiter, in the nineteen thirties and early forties; the Altamira School; Manuel Millares with his Guanche "pintaderas"<sup>34</sup>, in the context of the LADAC<sup>35</sup>; or the Indalians of Almería who related their aesthetic code to prehistoric culture, constitute examples of a certain atmosphere prone to taking the time to value and absorb ancestral cultures.

<sup>30</sup> The first civil passenger service to the military airport at Arrecife was launched in 1946. The passenger terminal and control tower were completed five years later. César Manrique also participated in the terminal interiors, including the counter in the bar, which he designed with a creative twist. In this regard, his participation followed much the same pattern established when he painted the mural for the Lanzarote Clubhouse in the late nineteen forties.

<sup>31</sup> Vid. César Manrique, *Lanzarote. Arquitectura inédita*, Lanzarote, Cabildo Insular de Lanzarote, 1974.

<sup>32</sup> Aguayo, "Para César Manrique la pintura canaria no existe...", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 21 April 1957.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> [N. del T.] aboriginal fired clay "seals", adorned with geometric motifs.

<sup>35</sup> [N. del T.] "Los Arqueros del Arte Contemporáneo" (Archers of Contemporary Art).



Manrique strode steadily forward in his constructivist plastic endeavour, in his re-reading of cubism, attenuated with poetic features. In 1947 he had anticipated geometric pseudo-forms, visible in the series that he did for the Arrecife "Parador" in the late nineteen forties that presently hangs in the La Palma "Parador", after having belonged to the one at Tejeda, Gran Canaria. The series actually comprises combinations of realist drawings of different island plant motifs, a sort of short iconographic repertoire: spurge, prickly pear, lizard, century plant, squash, cactus, palm tree, grape leaf, Aeonium..., all on stony pedestals, forceful in their geometrized volume and bearing autochthonous signs and inscriptions. The cubist concerns that ran through the eclectic magma of non-academic opinion beginning in the nineteen forties were incorporated into the diffuse style of the early years of the following decade. Post-cubism, widely known to have become an ongoing reference, was re-formulated time and again after World War II.

Manrique's artistic evolution grew from hesitant geometrizations to abruptly abstract constructions – *Sin título* (Untitled) –, but also included rich planimetric mosaics that concealed barely legible still lifes, such as the significant *Sin título* (Untitled). That evolution did not, however, exclude other forms of expression, for abstract geometric compositions co-existed with more visibly figurative works, lyrical abstractions and even strictly modern figurations. That convergence reflected the exploratory nature of the process. The artist's constructivism was rooted in the analytical development of the geometric segments with which he began to break up and articulate pictorial motifs. Beginning in 1954, he occasionally isolated facets overlaid on backgrounds with rich chromatic and textural qualities.

Plastic architectures are sustained by the rhythmic articulation of forms and colours. Line, plane, colour and composition spring from a renovated pictorial language. But to elude the coolness of their geometrism they are supported by soft, organic-shaped assemblies – ovoid or elliptical segments resulting from intersections between circular surfaces or between straight and curved lines – that constitute colourful webs of inter-related planes devoid of perspective, for they work with a frontal view. The legacy of Picasso and Miró, the artist's guiding stars, is explicit here.

### Facing the avant-garde. Towards another reality

The Fernando Fe Gallery, an offshoot of the eponymous bookstore, opened in April 1954 under Manuel Conde's management. César Manrique, encouraged by his trip to Paris with Conde in the spring of the preceding year, participated in the development and consolidation of the project in a desire to explore new possibilities. Asked in October 1953 to judge of his own work, he told the press: "I wasn't happy with my previous work. That's why I've always been very reserved. I plan to wage an important battle in the forthcoming year. I'm presently associated with a group of young painters, including Fernando Mignoni, Agustín Úbeda, Francisco Farreras and Carlos Lascas who cooperates with us from Paris, through Manuel Conde, an exceptional poet. Manuel Millares is also willing to work with us, and add his immense artistic personality to the

group's efforts... In short, a battle"<sup>34</sup>. He was announcing a new impetus to his work while associating himself with the group that founded the new Madrilénian gallery, an institution that would infuse momentum into the scenario of plastic renovation.

The exhibition room opened to the public on 2 April with a group exhibition which, under the title *Artistas de hoy* (Today's artists) brought together the work of "ten rising stars" of modern art: Farreras, Feito, Lara, Mampaso, Manrique, Mignoni, Molina Sánchez, Nellina Pistolesi, Stubbyng and Vento. César Manrique hung two works, *Bodegón de las cerámicas* (Ceramics still life) and *Bodegón de los exvotos* (Votive offerings), the latter inspired by the wax and wood figurines kept in San Marcial Church at Femés. The reviews of the day referred to him as a relatively unknown artist, describing him to be "a magician of colour and stylized form"<sup>35</sup>, an opinion that would be echoed by Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño: "Most of them [the painters participating in the exhibition] being well known, as regards those who are less so, we might emphasize the very rich quality, graphism and colour in Manrique's *oeuvre*"<sup>36</sup>. The paintings, which related to his archaeological sensitivity, were very likely part of the series exhibited a few months earlier in the Lanzarote Town Council and therefore did not anticipate the aesthetic turnabout to be revealed in the works shown in the Clan Gallery nine months later.

Gallery, where he presented his credentials as a modern painter. He showed twenty three pieces, three more than in the catalogue, which carried a text by postist poet Carlos Edmundo de Ory. By that time he was 35 years old and had the sound technical background that a meticulous painter like Manrique always felt was indispensable: "For me – and for everyone – the mechanics of painting is of cardinal importance. Without a command of the craft, no-one can make anything worthwhile, whether with a paint brush or a jack plane. To me, all the parts of the work, mechanical, artistic, intellectual, are indivisible. They mutually balance and reinforce their respective value. This, as you see, is a classic concept, whose validity even classic artists sustain. What I seek, specifically, is beauty, art with emotion and authenticity"<sup>37</sup>. But he also admitted that the time spent in the San Fernando School had bridled his freedom and, in short, retarded his growth: "When I was awarded a scholarship in Tenerife to come to Madrid to study, I had a more modern conceit of painting. After I enrolled in the San Fernando School I became more of a craftsman, I learned the trade in demanding and rigorous terms, but I unquestionably fell behind from the standpoint of concept. Later, I had to make a tremendous effort to return to my original, fresh mentality. But I didn't give up despite the difficulties. I think I found my real artistic self in the paintings I showed in my first exhibition, in Clan"<sup>38</sup>. He constantly reiterated that he regarded the 1954 exhibition at the Clan Gallery to be his true starting point,

<sup>34</sup> Luis Jorge, "César Manrique, pintor canario en el 'Castellana Hilton'", *La Provincia*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 6 October 1953.

<sup>35</sup> Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, "El pintor César Manrique en la Galería Fernando Fe, de Madrid", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 8 April 1954.

<sup>36</sup> Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, "Crónica de exposiciones", *Ínsula*, Madrid, No. 102, 1954, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> José de Castro Arines, "Para César Manrique la pintura sólo tiene un futuro próximo: lo abstracto", *Informaciones*, Madrid, 5 February 1955.

<sup>38</sup> Julio Trenas, "Julio Trenas visita a César Manrique", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 8 April 1960.

his debut with incipient abstraction, his alignment with a more open contemporary spirit. His previous work in the context of modern figuration would be understood by the artist to be a preliminary workshop exercise, which, he pointed out whenever the opportunity arose, he never showed in a solo exhibition in Madrid. He defended his abstract position with militant fervour, relegating any prior painting – nonetheless retrieved for his anthological exhibition in Las Palmas in 1957 – to oblivion. “It was a spiritual necessity [that led me to abstract painting]: to paint for my times; figuration bored me. After doing a detailed historic review, what I clearly found was total exhaustion of figurative form and the logical aversion of painters to represent a common and easy object, with no new angles from which to generate emotion. [...] In 1950, before my exhibition in Clan, I was a figurative painter but with poetic stylization. I did that sort of painting fully aware that it lacked any interest. That’s why I never exhibited it. I began my artistic career *per se* with abstraction”<sup>39</sup>.

Naturally, the effervescence of the most advanced artistic circles in Madrid, the turnabout in official policy with respect to abstraction, the debate generated in the media on the issue, not to mention the many and varied artistic events that stirred the world of art at the time – congresses, biennials, encounters, exhibitions – were determining factors in his evolution. But his trip to Paris also had a considerable impact, as he himself admitted on many an occasion, as a way of reinforcing his affiliation with the core of the Spanish avant-garde: “In the wake of that trip I was also able to see that what I had painted up to then wasn’t what I wanted to do”<sup>40</sup>.

With the break from academia now behind him, his objectives were dissociation from explicit references to visible reality and immersion in abstraction, regarded by the artist to be the language that best expressed his historical circumstance: “the only authentic expression of our time”, he repeated time and again after the mid nineteen fifties, with the genuine faith of an avant-garde apostle. In keeping with his time, he pursued renovation with a type of painting that was to develop amidst the lyrical abstraction of backgrounds and the constructivist norm. In the mean time, in murals, monotypes and paintings, he continued to cultivate his former modern figuration, to which he appeared to attribute a more decorative function.

After the exhibition in Madrid, which fixed his vocabulary until the 1958 solo exhibition held at the Ateneo, also in Madrid, critics regarded him to be a “non-figurative painter”. His poetics adopted the form of very elaborate backgrounds with an abundance of chromatic nuance, achieved by scraping and stripping. At around this time, very clear signs began to appear of his attraction to informalist painting, to which he would be led by these earlier works – a shared experience, moreover – with the vigour of their exhaustively worked textures. His scratch work matter-enhances pieces with tempered colour vibrations, now attenuated to ranges of grey, green, blue or sienna. The formal counterpoints positioned over these sober and sensory surfaces, by way of curvilinear or organic planes, are borrowed from his immediately preceding cubist constructions, as can be seen in *Origen del hombre* (Origin of man), 1954. The scale varies. The geometries

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> Gilberto Alemán, “César Manrique habla para los pintores canarios”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, April 1957.

sometimes occupy the entire pictorial area – *Abstracción* (Abstraction), 1954 and *Sin título* (Untitled) 1957, generally with no integrating aim, but simply deposited there or emerging from the depths: *Sin título* (Untitled), 1954 and *Sin título* (Untitled), 1954. Eduardo Westerdahl saw these lyrical constructions as a “rising of forms in space”<sup>41</sup>. They introduce a rationalist counterpoint, albeit mitigated both by their own formal attenuation – eluding pure, faceted figures – and by the sheer force of the backgrounds. In some cases the hegemony of the scratch work surface is much more conspicuous and absolute, such as in *Sinfonía azul* (Blue symphony), 1954, a veritable decalcomania. Signs or compact forms, whose presence is reduced, may float in space or be interconnected with lines or traces of lines – *Sin título* (Untitled), 1954, *Dédalo* (Thimble), 1954, – that Lázaro Santana called “linear tensions”.

Contemporary readings – which must be taken in a cultural context marked by the inertia of the realist code – soon attributed organic, mineral, submarine, microscopic or astral resonances to these non-objective paintings to<sup>42</sup>. Carlos Edmundo de Ory himself paved the way for such interpretative analogies in his text for the catalogue of the exhibition, where he wrote: “César Manrique has delved into the oceanic depths or, on other occasions, into the organic and forest-bound lineage of being and nature, i.e., into the protoplasm, worm and germinal fruit on which he bases his visual concept of the universe, applied to his respective pictorial representation”<sup>43</sup>. The translation of plastic discourse to objective terms of reality can only be arbitrary. Manrique dissociates himself from representation of reality while exploring delicate poetic emotions. His work, included in what Carlos Antonio Areán called “non-imitational tendencies” pursues autonomous plastic structures, pictorial spaces of sensation and suggestion supported by the strict materiality of painting, devoid of any translational intention. This does not, however, prevent the artist from seeking inspiration in the observation of fragments of life to create pictorial realities, as he would acknowledge on a number of occasions. Throughout the second half of the decade, he increasingly insisted on relating his new poetics to the nature of his native island: “All my abstraction is a response to the environment of my island: Lanzarote”<sup>44</sup>. But he was quick to explain that the support he sought in nature consisted not in visual models but sources of feeling, emotions, explicitly

<sup>41</sup> Eduardo Westerdahl, *Manrique*, Colección del Arte de Hoy, Madrid, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> Juan Antonio Cabezas alluded in an article to “backgrounds with a lyrical and surprisingly geological character”, “water seepage with mineral traces”, “artificial mineralization of surface”, “insinuated volcanic rock and cactus in bloom”, “mysterious, geologically sterile flora”, “floor of the sea”, “microscope performances”... Juan Antonio Cabezas, “La pintura abstracta como decoración mural. César Manrique y sus fondos geológicos”, *España*, Tànger, 19 December 1954; and José de Castro Arines wrote that “The dramatic intensity in Manrique’s work aims, in noble expressive aspiration, toward the solitude of volumes overlaying the earth’s crust in which these volumes, these forms, seek their transcendent point of support.” José de Castro Arines, “Manrique. Galería Clan”, *Informaciones*, Madrid, December 1954.

<sup>43</sup> Carlos Edmundo de Ory, “El nivel estético de César Manrique”, in *Manrique*, Madrid, Clan Gallery, 1954.

<sup>44</sup> Gilberto Alemán, “César Manrique habla para los pintores canarios”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, April 1957. He left a record of that debt in many other places: “I’ve never been a completely abstract painter. I was a non-figurative painter, but my painting was never abstract. My starting point was reality, earth itself. If you take a piece of earth and you set it into a plane, that’s abstraction”. *Confesiones de César Manrique*, [Transcription of conversations between César Manrique and Antonio Guerra], c. 1976, Fundación César Manrique Archive, p. 78; “Mampaso may have started out with fishing nets or Feito perhaps

denying any reproductive aim and stressing the mental or creationist nature of his approach: "Therefore my painting, directly inspired by nature, may seem to be tremendously cerebral. And it is, of course, inasmuch as today's painters have to ponder their inventions. Figuration ... what we've been given to call figuration, no longer holds any interest for us. Or at least, it holds no interest for me. It's no more than decaying, worn out forms and formulas. The 'earth' may provide sentimental support, but today's art extends beyond such naïve naturalist references. It's not the architecture of my island's landscapes that intrigues me, but their dramatic impact, their essence: that, in my opinion, is what's truly important"<sup>45</sup>. Observation both on the cosmological and microscopic scale might also afford the possibility of reducing reality to its elementary forms and structures, an attitude present in the art of the nineteen fifties as it drew away from mimesis and adopted the perspective of abstraction. Manrique would soon open the sluice of telluric myth, the grand tale of nature associated with his creative world; a constant and core theme in his poetics, it enabled him to insularize the sources, first of his initial abstraction and later, more obviously, of his informalism, organized around the synecdoche of volcanism – colours, textures, matter. As early as 1955 and more directly in 1957, he explicitly positioned Lanzarote's energy at the very heart of his creative system. And from the nineteen sixties onward, he would devote his own efforts to the aesthetic recreation and cultural and environmental defence of the island. "...Lanzarote is the theme of my entire *oeuvre* [...]. My internal world is seeped in the abrupt wonders of this island"<sup>46</sup>. In this respect, Mariano Navarro has drawn attention to the relevance, for understanding Manrique, of applying two of the key features of nineteen fifties European lyrical abstraction as described by Edward Lucie-Smith: "its links to the historic avant-garde and its attention to landscape as a starting point for abstraction"<sup>47</sup>. Both, certainly, are substantive dimensions in this painter's task, channelling the spirit of his times. The nineteen fifties, then, was a germinal period in which he acquired substantive form as an artist, with all the complexity and originality that entails.

The ambiguity fostered by the artist's insistence on the link between his works and the island soil and landscape – a truly exotic component in nineteen fifties Madrid – together with his vacillating approach to abstraction between 1954 and 1957 – the period of transitional abstract language which he brought to an end in 1958 – are very likely what has prompted recent reviewers to allude to

these pieces as "equivocal abstracts"<sup>48</sup>. César Manrique, certainly, was evolving in the midst of the uncertainties and paradox characteristic of a period of exploration, a constant theme in that decade, as may be readily deduced from the discourse of art critics and the reviews of avant-garde exhibitions. The misunderstandings in the analysis of these incipient abstract proposals stem from the language attesting to the processes, intentions and results. Both the *oeuvre*, although still immature, and the artist's creative attitude are openly suggestive of a denial of realist objectivity and representation and a need to advance further along the lines of abstraction, which by then had become a subject of critical analysis in Spain. His formal proposals evolved in an atmosphere and sensitivity shared with other members of his generation. As the years lapsed, these artists progressed in their command of both the conceit and practice of abstraction; the latter was generally interpreted or translated by reviewers in terms of analogies to nature themes, as Luis Feito would remorsefully recall in a conversation with Juan Manuel Bonet many years later: "Quite a number of critics, however, have interpreted your late nineteen fifties works as landscapes..." "I've never accepted such interpretations. I find them much too simplistic. They're interpretations sought by people who need a reference, a kind of certainty. It's the fear of treading on unknown ground. And so they look for something like that, landscapes. Or they take refuge in concepts like "the cosmic dimension"<sup>49</sup>. For more than a few of the emerging abstract artists, the observation of fragments of reality was a starting point from which they later evolved toward purely plastic creations, never purporting to reflect bits of reality or expecting them to be recognized. They were driven by the quest for perceptive autonomy, even when the germ that informed their art was not strictly independent of visible reality. What they in fact did was to problemize reality and, with their purpose in mind, they pursued a new plastic reality expressed in languages that sought not symmetries or translations but aesthetic truths. This

with something, well, cosmic: I started from soil". *Ibidem*; "The abstract painting that I'm doing today borrows from the landscape of my island, the most volcanic island in the world... [...] I mean, my painting is about the island that's not in the catalogue, full of places where nature is still virgin. I'm not working along the same lines as artists whose abstraction is based on three or four formulas they've learnt by heart". Julio Trenchas, "La pintura abstracta que estoy haciendo responde al paisaje de mi isla, dice C. Manrique", *Pueblo*, Madrid, April 1956; "Where's the fountain of abstraction that you drink from?" "In my island's oceanic depths". Julio Trenchas, "Yo he sido de los pioneros de la pintura abstracta en España", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 8 April 1960.

<sup>45</sup> José de Castro Arines, "La pintura sólo tiene un futuro próximo: lo abstracto", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 10 February 1955.

<sup>46</sup> Agustín de la Hoz, "El sólo hecho de nacer en esta isla es un privilegio para cualquier artista, dice César Manrique", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 June 1957.

<sup>47</sup> Mariano Navarro, "César Manrique", in sev. auth., *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Vid. Lázaro Santana's chapter titled "El equivoco abstracto", in Lázaro Santana, *César Manrique. Un arte para la vida*, Barcelona, Editorial Prensas Ibéricas, 1993, pp. 45-46. The same author regarded the *oeuvre* from this period to be "valuable as an indication of the search for new expressive forms, but of minor interest in itself." Lázaro Santana, *César Manrique. Un arte para la vida*, pp. 45-46. He also objects to terming these paintings as abstract constructivism, preferring the term "preconstructivist conceptions". *Ibidem*, p. 22. In another paper, he suggests that "In Manrique there is always a will to represent in allusion to objects, things and pre-existing facts; everything that appears in most of the paintings from this period is perfectly recognizable [...] a drop of water or a piece of moss, seen under a microscope, can portray the image of planets and suns in their orbits, or unending, arbitrarily bristled immensities". Nonetheless, he concludes by acknowledging an incipient abstraction: "... but it is also true that the very attempt in his drawing to disguise – or substantiate – reality by preferably attending to another sort of plastic demands (composition, colour, distribution of planes and so forth) infers the determination on the part of the painter to sever the link with the most immediate visual sources of the object to be depicted, for the sake of plastic results that he believes to be more accurate and effective. This attitude implies the existence of a tendency toward abstract thought, which, while perhaps not finding the purest pathway to its material definition, is nevertheless striving in that direction", Lázaro Santana, "La pintura de César Manrique hasta 1958", in sev. auth., *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002, pp. 37-38.

Gloria Moure, in turn, refers this production to non-figurative tendencies and notes that "they were carefully constructed paintings, but in no way comparable to the normative trends of the age; their streaked backgrounds, like colour frottage, served to generate a free and straightforward morphology of sign, clearly defined by chromatic contrast but barely overlaid, seeming to intermingle with the coloured scratchings that completely filled the background." Gloria Moure, *César Manrique*, Barcelona, Caixa de Pensions, 1983. Mariano Navarro concurs with Lázaro Santana that this is ambiguous abstract painting. Vid. Mariano Navarro, "César Manrique", in sev. auth., *César Manrique. Pintura*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Juan Manuel Bonet, "Conversación con Luis Feito", en *Feito*, Madrid, Caja Madrid, 1991.

exploration entailed a diversity of both figurative and abstract sensitivities, growing from shared formal registers. As José María Moreno Galván has noted, in the nineteen fifties, particularly between the Latin American Art Biennial (autumn 1951) and the middle of the decade, the alternative between abstract and figurative marked “the stylistic entities”, with debate focusing on the confrontation between the two. But abstraction was plural, with no specific identity of its own except in opposition to figuration, i.e., it was defined in the negative, as what it was not. It was only with the rise of informalist abstraction on the Spanish cultural horizon that abstract tendencies were obliged to restate their vague formulations, characterizing themselves in positive terms and, as a result, reorganizing within the context of abstraction itself<sup>50</sup>.

By 1954, Manrique was a militant abstract painter. But he advanced hesitantly, or more precisely, he progressed from two major sources of language: more or less post-cubist, vividly coloured modern figuration with its analysis and recomposition of real figures in terms of new, planar plastic syntaxes; and abstraction, sometimes based on organic and others on more geometric forms. Two approaches, a two-headed pictorial practice sustained by a common literary undercurrent, co-existed in him throughout his life, for his production generally contains lyrical and delicate works that aim to explore the poetic zone of painting. Richness of texture and formal preciousness were favoured by the use of new materials, a symptom of his restlessness and the innovative leanings of the decade. He started to use casein, rubber, varnish and plastic pigments for their greater flexibility in murals and paintings and to achieve certain qualities of matter and colour, as well as clearly outlined forms, perceived surface liquidity, and in short, the lavish technique that was acknowledged and unanimously esteemed by contemporary critics. His paintings, always soundly structured and anchored in classic balance, benefit from the guarantee afforded by geometric symmetries and schemes, divested of all anecdote.

In 1956 he participated in a group exhibition at the Clan Gallery<sup>51</sup>. The following year, on 20 April, he organized an anthological exhibition of his painting at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on the occasion of the festivities commemorating the 474th anniversary of the annexure of Gran Canaria to the crown of Castile. The showing included around seventy works running from his most conventional beginnings (1945) depicting local themes and manners to his most recent (1956) abstract paintings, including modern figurative and even certain ceramic works done in Talavera de la Reina, Toledo (circa 1955)<sup>52</sup>. Part of the exhibition – scaled

down to twenty four paintings and a sketch for a mural – later travelled to the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Municipal Club and finally twenty of the works were shown at the Lanzarote Island Council headquarters. At the Gran Canaria venue, he participated in fitting out the space where the ceramic works were exhibited, designing a neo-plasticist style frame along very modern rationalist lines, bathed in lighting provided by specifically designed ceiling fixtures. The brochure on the paintings included a brief text by Canary Island critic Ventura Doreste who, in a minute analysis of the artist's evolution, alluded to his abstract affiliation, unrestrained chromatism and ascent to “zones of exceptional poetic beauty”<sup>53</sup>. In Tenerife, the text that presided the presentation of his showing was written by Eduardo Westerdahl.

After 1958 – notwithstanding a precedent or two dated in late 1957 – his painting was hurled from geometric abstraction and eulogy of texture toward the tremor of matter, domesticated by means of trembling lattices reminiscent of both the geometry of salt mines and a bird's eye view of checkered fields. Within the short space of a year, his painting burst out of formalist confines, turning into strict informal matter that extols the splendour of a volcanic landscape. Thereafter Manrique, driven by his telluric aesthetics, nested in the language and heart of lava.

Gran Canaria, 30 April 1957; Gilberto Alemán, “César Manrique habla para los pintores canarios”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, April 1957; Luis Jorge Ramírez, “César Manrique inaugura su Exposición Antológica”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2 May 1957; “Inauguración de la exposición de César Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2 May 1957; Luis Doreste Silva, “Marginación rápida a la gran exposición de César Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2 May 1957; A.Q.P., “Notas a la exposición de César Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 5 May 1957; “Falange y Diario de Las Palmas enjuician la Exposición de César Manrique: ha sido visitada por varios miles de personas”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 May 1957; Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, “Impresiones sobre la exposición antológica Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 10 May 1957; Eduardo Westerdahl, “En torno a César Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 11 May 1957; Juan del Río Ayala, “César Manrique en Triana”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 13 May 1957; Fidel Roca, “César pintor y las pinturas de César”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 13 May 1957; “Exposición César Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 15 May 1957; “Clausura de exposiciones”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 17 May 1957; Juan Marrero Portugués, “Primer éxito”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 21 May 1957; Felo Monzón, Henri Robert and Manuel Padorno, “Homenaje a César Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 22 May 1957; Luis Álvarez Cruz, “Un pintor: César Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 24 May 1957; Almadi, “César Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 25 May 1957; Eduardo Westerdahl, “Ante la exposición de César Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 25 May 1957; Vicente Borges, “La exposición Manrique”, *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 26 May 1957; Alicia Sarmiento, “César Manrique”, *Mujeres en la isla*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, May 1957; “Próxima exposición de César Manrique en Arrecife”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 June 1957; Guillermo Topham, “César Manrique inauguró su exposición”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 June 1957; and “César Manrique habla por Radio Nacional de España a su regreso de Canarias”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 13 August 1957.

<sup>50</sup> José María Moreno Galván, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-127.

<sup>51</sup> Manrique, Mignoni, Quirós, Abela and Paredes-Jardiel, among others, conducted a group showing from 21 February to 3 March where César Manrique hung four paintings.

<sup>52</sup> The exhibition and its successive venues received broad press coverage. *Vid.* Guillermo Topham, “César Manrique expondrá en Las Palmas en los primeros meses del próximo año”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 22 November 1956; Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, “César Manrique, pintor de figuraciones abstractas y de la gracia en equilibrio”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 16 December 1956; “César Manrique exhibirá en esta capital una exposición antológica”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 9 April 1957; “El veinte de abril inaugura César Manrique su exposición pictórica en Las Palmas”, *Antena*, Arrecife 16 April 1957; Luis Jorge Ramírez, “70 cuadros expondrá César Manrique en esta capital”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 April 1957; Guillermo Topham, “César Manrique expondrá en Arrecife y Santa Cruz de Tenerife”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 April 1957; Aguayo, “Para César Manrique la pintura canaria no existe”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 21 April 1957; “Exposición de César Manrique”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de

<sup>53</sup> To quote him literally: “The visitor will note that César Manrique moved from figurative to abstract painting, where the assumption of form and colour is supreme. We'll ignore the early, overly realist canvases, where he is still quite clearly learning. There are figurative works that reveal the painter's struggle with the objects of the visible world and constrained colour, for both seem to want to transcend themselves to reorganize on a new and higher level of freedom. A pure universe, not yet tread upon by man, will appear and evince the contemplative and creative sensitivity of another man: the artist. Undersea landscapes, nude skies, nearly lunar deserts. At its best, abstract art expresses cosmic nature ... [...] The artist escapes from the narrow surrounding world to rise to zones of exceptional poetic beauty, the isolated flames of his early paintings are converted into the controlled ardour of his later works”. *Manrique. Exposición antológica*, [Text by Ventura Doreste], Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Ayuntamiento de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1957.

### Apostle of modern life. The splendour of 19 Covarrubias Street as a metaphor

The 1954 Clan Gallery exhibition brought him notoriety in Madrid, where his popularity grew particularly in the second half of the decade. He often appeared in the media, both in the capital city and the Canary Islands and especially Lanzarote, from where he never strayed for long. His reputation as a media-minded artist that lasted throughout his career was forged during this period, unquestionably helped along by his open and festive personality and the pronounced social vein in his work that anticipated the logic later prevailing in nineteen eighties artistic ecosystems. He received numerous commissions from that time onward. 1954 was a key year for artistic renovation and its consolidation in Madrid: the Fernando Fe Gallery opened, the Ateneo reformulated its art programmes, and debates around abstraction intensified as new plastic proposals advanced in that direction and were consolidated by around 1956<sup>54</sup>.

The artist's public notoriety grew steadily as he became a well-known benchmark for modernism in Madrilenian cultural circles. In the context of Spain's post-war devastation, backwardness and moral misery, the daring design of his home, the parties he organized – known for their creativity and good taste, such as his new year's eve costume parties – reinforced his uniqueness and modernity. These circumstances indisputably constituted aspects of relevance for the shaping of his creative profile: off-centre with respect to the Spanish context, brandishing manners and attitudes that would increasingly associate him with the culture of relaxation characteristic of nineteen fifties and sixties development politics, an aesthetic that he would personalize on his native island with the territorial dimension of his public work and the furtherance of a "Manrique brand" of tourism, while bringing a genuine "Lanzarote" style to the economy of leisure. Devoid of any resistance to or complicity with the political regime, he lived his freedom affluently, oblivious to the political and social circumstances of his times, exhibiting ingenuous, expansive and gregarious behaviour characteristic of the *joie de vivre* that oriented his life project and contaminated his aesthetics, attitudes all that likened him more to artists living on the coast of California than the austere and politically committed Spanish painters of his generation. His personal originality, not devoid of frivolity; his political alienation, the hybrid and cross-disciplinary nature of his creative endeavour revolving around total art and habitability – painting, public art, landscape architecture, design, decoration, sculpture, architecture – all in the context of tourism; and his acutely hedonistic and frolicsome attitude tinged, at the time, with modern provocation, contributed over time to a relegation of the artist and a certain critical neglect and incomprehension of his barely classifiable work, with its independent and anomalous personality. Actually, Manrique was refuting the conventional model of what an artist was supposed to be and establishing a new contemporary profile impervious to Spanish solemnity, eschewing the rigour of isolation and self-absorption and evolving toward popularity, social involvement, community leadership and the plurality of aesthetic interests. He was anticipating ideological-social formulas and artistic practice more closely associated with the nineteen eighties and nineties than the fifties – including certain post-modern traits. But that historic maladjustment,

along with his peripheral situation in Lanzarote from the late nineteen sixties, thwarted his acceptance in Spain, creating misunderstandings around his *oeuvre*, often neglected for a want of the hermeneutic tools that might facilitate its interpretation. At the time his world appeared to feed on models drawn from cinema and the international journals to which he had access, supplemented by his fascination with travel, particularly to Paris. Immerse in what might have been construed to be veritable escapism, he exalted good taste, design, vital pleasure, comfort and festive joy, while his country cowered in sour drabness.

The revenue from his many commissions for murals and interiors, added to the brisk pace of his painting sales, had a very favourable impact on his financial situation. By the second half of the nineteen fifties, he had earned notoriety as an artist in Madrid, social success and a niche on the market, as critic Antonio Manuel Campoy pointed out in a letter written to the artist in 1953: "I know you're selling paintings right and left and breaking the folkloric curse that weighs on the art of your islands, once mythologized by the grace of Nestor the divine and long deceased, inventor of fauns more elegant than mine"<sup>55</sup>. In October 1956 he decided to buy a new home in the Chamberí quarter, celebrating the purchase with a housewarming party that was the talk of the town. His new flat on Covarrubias Street, a symbol of his success, embodied his modern aspirations to a tee. He had already decorated his first flat on Rufino Blanco Street with elements from the islands and had even painted a mural there with motifs typical of Lanzarote – *Camellos en celo* (Camels in heat) – in the same vein as the mural done for the "Parador" at Arrecife<sup>56</sup>. But the decoration in his new home was a comprehensive programme of modern renovation and vitality which, like other contemporary projects, particularly in the fields of architecture and incipient design, harboured a latent desire to bring Spain into line with the developed world. Throughout these years, which saw the birth of his concern for extending good taste to everyday objects, Manrique not only produced canvases with professional devotion and painted a number of murals, but designed textile prints, tapestries, mosaics, lamps, ceramics and masks, while at the same time engaging in interior decoration and projects for creating environments and reconditioning public spaces.

His spacious home-studio itself became an object of admiration for its intensely modern atmosphere and decoration, a home "in a class by itself"<sup>57</sup>, "a dream flat"<sup>58</sup>, where the artist lived with his partner Pepi Gómez "like a movie star"<sup>59</sup>, according to newspapers and magazines: "[César Manrique's] private [museum]

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Antonio Manuel Campoy to César Manrique [undated, 1953], four handwritten pages on one side, César Manrique Archives, Fundación César Manrique.

<sup>56</sup> The press carried the story as follows: "At the end of this month he will move to his new studio and home in one of Madrid's most distinguished quarters, leaving behind a veritable museum in his present home, with interiors decorated around Canary Island themes and typical objects. One of these, a mural titled *Camellos en celo* (Camels in heat), with Montaña de Fuego in the background, presided the living room, where we spent so many enjoyable hours reminiscing about the island". Ignacio H. de la Mota, "70.000 ptas. por un cuadro de pintura abstracta", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 30 March 1956.

<sup>57</sup> Pedro de Castilla, "César Manrique, triunfador en el arte abstracto", *Semanario Gráfico*, Año XXII, No. 1142, Madrid, 17 May 1959.

<sup>58</sup> I. M. S., "Diálogo en casa del pintor Manrique", *Semanario Gráfico*, Madrid, Year XX, No. 1092, 1 February 1958.

<sup>59</sup> Ignacio H. de la Mota, "En Madrid hay dos museos César Manrique", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 14 September 1956.

<sup>54</sup> Vid. Carlos Areán, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

is located on the sixth storey of a very modern building. The artist's imprint is obvious in the downstairs lobby and even in the lift, and as you come into his home you step into a museum overflowing with works of all kinds. The decoration, furnishings, discotheque, lighting – everything in a word – bears the artist's signature. It's more modern and original than anything we've seen and yet there's an air about the place that unmistakably bespeaks its Canary Island origins, even in the oddest details. One example should suffice. In his spacious balcony and garden – Manrique lives like a movie star – the lighting pours out of huge locusts – those voracious insects that had us all clanging tin cans a few years back – that look as though they're climbing up the walls"<sup>60</sup>. The atmosphere, in fact, was the artist's own creation, a combination of painting, mobiles, functional objects such as lamps and fixtures that he himself made, sculpture, tapestries, his own ceramics, traditional crafts exhibited with an avant-garde twist and the contemporary furniture so hard to find in Spain, despite the brave efforts of a few fervent architects, designers and creators who dabbled in this sort of industrial design. He lent special attention to lighting – an aspect that would play a relevant role in his public art works – whether overhead, from windows and open spaces, indirect or filtered through colour screens: "The flat is also a lesson in good taste, decorative sensitivity: bottles filled with coloured water, where light bounces and contrasts; rows of iron bars folded over like a fringe from which lamp screens hang; A black beam and coarse white wall on one side, with lit openings displaying originally shaped, sinuous iron or porcelain figurines. César Manrique also has his studio here. Sometimes he paints his canvases on an easel and others flat on the floor."<sup>61</sup>

He re-designed the interiors of the flat as well, removing partitions to create wide open spaces in which the predominant note was vigorous modern rationalism, swarming with light. This was particularly visible in a typically neoplasticist, white masonry piece in the living room decorated with wood, mosaic and brick incrustations, whose tiny cubic cavities distributed with a keen sense of composition were designed to house different objects, from ceramics to bottles containing coloured water. Its textural rippling caused by rough-finished plaster under a black ceiling, a matter painting-like effect, was reflected in another of the walls in the flat, relating the interior architecture to the scratch work of its pictorial surfaces. The combination of different construction materials – glass, wood in abundance, cement, plaster... – deepened the quality of the atmosphere created. He designed vases and light-hearted lamps from island gourds decorated with geometric organic shapes painted with the artist's characteristic brush. The flat also harboured mardi gras masks, creatures of his playful ingenuity, as well as paintings and the mobile sculptures he had begun to build at the time, opening up a line of work that he would continue in subsequent decades with his *Juguetes del viento* (Toys in the wind) and other outdoor movables. And the exuberant interior garden on the large balcony was a preview of his plant metaphors in buildings and public art works.

He made his home a place of cheer and encounters, good taste and modern

renovation. His life was wrapped in and driven by aestheticism: "César Manrique's design for his own home in Madrid gives us an indication of the kind of architect he would have been. A home where everything revolves around his two ways of painting, where his ceramics and gourds, whitewash and wood, the fire in the fireplace and the flowers on the balcony, serve their respective purposes in tasteful harmony. A home where there's always a place for friends and time to work, lend a helping hand or simply enjoy"<sup>62</sup>.

With his personal attitude he capitalized on his home's interior architectural programme. Manrique repeatedly had himself photographed surrounded by chairs he had bought or himself designed, or with his lamps, ceramics and paintings. He drew attention to the texture of the walls and his photogenic furniture and posed in his garden balcony surrounded by flowers, displaying some household treasure, always in youthful and casual attire. The painter sought a decisively modern domestic context, where plastic and applied arts converged. This aesthetic scenario, often the backdrop for (jazz) musical or artistic or literary gatherings, was also a venue for dynamic social and cultural activity, from parties and receptions to recitals and exhibits, not to mention the artist's work in the room reserved for his studio. He was, in short, firmly and visibly convinced of the need to regenerate and upgrade taste in everyday objects. And he converted that personal pleasure into a militant avant-garde artistic mission. He connected in this respect with the concerns of artists, designers and architects engaging at the time in the creation of new painting and sculpture, new functional objects and new buildings and housing – as reflected, for instance, in the *Nueva Revista de Arquitectura*. One and all were drawn in admiration to journals such as Gio Ponti's *Domus*, which might well have featured Manrique's home: "[...] The decoration is astonishing from the very first glance. He did the designing himself: an eighteenth century earthenware jar bought in Toledo next to an ultra-modern chair; across the room, three stones laid out in delicate harmony; a shiny black mobile that seems to float in the air; big jugs filled with coloured water made into table lamps; a library filled with books of poetry and treatises on painting; ceramics on some of the shelves, authored by the artist; iron lamps, also products of his ingenuity; records with modern music and whisky; a table made of tree trunks and a glass top sitting on an imitation lawn rug; parquet floors and indirect light that filters through the jugs filled with green or red water"<sup>63</sup>.

The young painter had even redesigned the lift and the main lobby on the ground storey. In the former, he burnt decorative geometric incisions in the wood. He embellished the lobby with a mural sash thirty centimetres high by three metres long, containing indecipherable symbols of prehistoric inspiration, a sort of ideographic, bas-relief Kufic script bringing to mind Canary Island stone carvings and embodying his primitivist vein.

The flat as a whole was "an abstract house, with balcony, fireplace, bedrooms, living and sitting rooms and kitchen, but abstract; a house he himself designed

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> Julio Trenas, "Yo he sido de los pioneros de la pintura abstracta en España...", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 8 April 1960.

<sup>62</sup> Isabel Cajide, "César Manrique, el pintor abstracto de la lava", *Teresa*, Madrid, No. 64, April 1959.

<sup>63</sup> Gilberto Alemán, "César Manrique habla para los pintores canarios", *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, April 1957.



where everything is in a strange sort of balance, so wonderfully modern that it is one of the most classic homes in Madrid"<sup>64</sup>. As he revised the concept of home, he sketched out a world of resource and practice that previewed his nineteen sixties and seventies environmental creations and public art. The precedents for the aesthetics of total art that he would develop in natural spaces on the islands can be found here, as well as in a sound and suggestive – for its comprehensiveness and contemporaneity – creation in the Fénix Hotel bar and grille. At the same time, his work in his own home ratified the central position afforded the poetics of habitation in his *oeuvre* as one of the mainstays of the ideal of creating art for life that he would methodically implement in the following decade.

One of the visual sources of prime importance in the construction of Manrique's modern taste was *Domus*, which also served as a fundamental guide for the supply of materials, strategies and formal imagery for his interior design and decorating initiatives. From the second half of the nineteen fifties onward, the artist was a faithful reader of the journal – which he purchased on a regular basis in the Buchholz bookstore – and kept a significant collection in his library. Its pages were a showcase for trends in interior decoration, new materials, household furniture design, textile prints, examples of the most recent international architecture supplemented with both outdoor and indoor landscaping, and modern ceramics, which had a specific section; in 1957, the XI Milan Triennial devoted five permanent stands to the subject... It was indisputably a major reference for anyone interested in applied arts at the time and the stylistic modernization of objects used in everyday life. In this formative stage in the integration of creative practice, César Manrique relied on four basic sources of information: exchange of experience and conversations with architects and artists, periodicals, cinema and travel. He became an apostle of modern life very early on when times were still hard, a fact that was to determine his attitude as an artist. Everything around him was conditioned by a link that he himself made indivisible, grafting art on life and life on art. To put it another way, he aestheticized life and functionalized art. Diffuse aestheticization ultimately became a distinguishing mark in his endeavours, both in his immediate surroundings and in the actions he authored in natural and urban outdoor domains. The determination to make art functional, in turn, and geared to enhancing collective happiness, would later pervade his devotion to public art and environmental creations.

Covarrubias became a reference point for social and cultural life in nineteen fifties Madrid. Frequented by high culture and society, it operated like a standing venue for meetings and encounters. The flat received a constant stream of aristocrats, bourgeois, writers, architects, artists and all manner of creative spirits, from Nicholas Ray to Óscar de la Renta. He organized small exhibitions in his studio from time to time. In addition to a staging of Alejandro Reino's figurines, others included a Christmas show in 1959 titled *New Christmas Objects* that featured tiny necklaces and medals authored by Pablo Serrano, Christmas cards with drawings by Fernando Mignoni, Christmas mobiles by César Manrique and Maud Westerdahl's enamels. And the exhibition was announced in a leaflet with a text by Manuel Conde. According to contemporary press articles, the showing gathered

"everybody who was anybody" in Madrid – aristocracy, culture, art, cinema ...<sup>65</sup>.

In another event, Gabriela Ortega and Fosforito gave a joint concert for a selected audience, and Manrique, assuming the role of cultural ambassador, often threw parties for celebrities visiting Madrid, such as Ms Joseph Nicolosi, President of Art Patrons of America. The party in honour of Ms Nicolosi, who was touring Europe, "like an ambassador of peace bearing the flag of culture and art" drew a considerable gathering: "[...] the door kept opening to the most prominent celebrities of art, diplomacy and Madrilénian high society. We identified Mr John T. Raid, cultural attaché with the U.S. Embassy, Mr and Ms Lifchus; the consul general of Greece in Spain; the Countess of San Esteban de Cañoso; the Marquise of Cortina; the Count of Carpeña; the Minister of Switzerland with his wife; the famous artist Jorge Oteiza; Ortega Muñoz, recently awarded the international grand prize at the São Paulo Biennial; Fernando Mignoni; Paredes Jardiel; Vento; Farreras; Cristino de Vera from Tenerife; Oscar [de la] Renta; Ribera and many others we would gladly mention but have forgotten"<sup>66</sup>.

Years later, Manrique would recall the vitality of those years of wine and roses in the shelter of his home, a kind of shell sealed off from the harsh and rusty Francoist Spain: "We always had guests, friends from the Canary Islands visiting Madrid, or friends in Madrid, Mignoni, Manolo Conde... a group of young people, interesting people. We

<sup>65</sup> The opening was described in the following terms in a contemporary article: "When one sits down to a typewriter with the intention of citing the names of all those who shared César's resounding success, it's hard to make a full list of even the most famous. One would like to name them all, not to write a social chronicle, but to describe the environment that surrounds this volcanic island and his painting. But in any event, we'll list all the ones we can remember... The Prince and Princess of Sturza, Duke and Duchess of Tobar, Count and Countess of Yeges, Count and Countess of Quintanilla, Countess of Campo Alange, Marquis and Marquise of Llansol... Chief Officer of International Exhibitions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador of Uruguay and wife, and the Uruguayan Minister of Finance, Cultural Attachés with the Embassies of the United States, Holland and other countries.

"From the world of finance, the March, Fierro, Huarte, and Echevarría families were represented, along with art and literature critics such as Lafuente Ferrari, Gaya Nuño, Sánchez Camargo, Manuel Conde, Cirilo Popovici, Julio Trenas, Ramírez de Lucas, Juan Antonio Cabezas and many an editor-in-chief of all manner of magazines. And the 'movies'? That world also sent a large and very significant delegation. As far as we recall, Analía Gadé, Silvia Morgan, Carmen Sevilla, Mercedes Vecino, Mariluz Galicia, Susana Canales, Ana Esmeralda, Alberto Closas, Jorge Rigaud, Rubén Rojo, José Suárez, Julio Peña and others were there, as well as directors of renown such as Sáenz de Heredia, Edgar Neville, Miguel Herrero; Vicente Escudero, the great Spanish dancer also attended, along with the most prestigious Madrilénian journalists: Tico Medina for 'Pueblo', Alfonso Sánchez for 'Informaciones', the 'Paris Match' and 'Life' correspondents. And now that we're on the subject of foreign propaganda, we can hardly ignore the great American movie director Nicholas Ray, author of 'Johnny Guitar', 'Rebel without a cause' and 'Party girl', among others. Ray, in conjunction with cameraman Corina, directed the shots of the Christmas mobiles designed by César Manrique for this exhibition, that will be the object of television broadcasts in New York, Rio de Janeiro, London, Paris and Rome. The American director, by the way, was so captivated by the exhibit that he bought works by all the artists.

"Spanish TV also showed up and filmed an interesting documentary that will be shown on the national network. In short, a brilliant day for the Madrilénian artistic and cultural world, and a huge success for the Canary Islands – Maud Westerdahl, married to art critic Eduardo Westerdahl, can also be regarded to be an islander – in the increasingly interesting person of César Manrique. An artist who customarily opens the doors of his studio to 'everyone who's anyone in Madrid', he has that world at his feet and has sincerely moved this reporter who, while Madrilénian, feels himself an islander at heart", Ignacio H. de la Mota, "César Manrique renueva sus triunfos en Madrid", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 23 December 1959. See also Alfonso Sánchez, "Un 'party' abstracto con invitaciones en cinemascopo", *Informaciones*, Madrid, 16 March 1957; and Alfonso Sánchez, "Melée para visitar la exposición *Objetos nuevos de Navidad*", *Informaciones*, Madrid, December 1959.

<sup>64</sup> Isabel Cajide, "Gabriela Ortega, César Manrique y Fosforito", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 13 July 1958.

<sup>66</sup> Ignacio H. de la Mota, "Reunión de arte en la Casa-Museo de César Manrique", *Hoja del lunes*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 9 December 1957.

stayed at home a lot. My home was the cultural centre with the largest [number of] intellectual encounters of artists, poets and architects in Madrid. So much so that when Pepi died and I went to New York, many critics and friends told me: 'César, you've left an enormous void in Madrid, because you were the only one who could gather nearly all Spanish artists.' We used to talk about art, poetry, architecture. We also danced a lot, and held parties, especially on December thirty first. It was possibly the most amusing party with the most European flavour in Madrid, where everybody came in a disguise, the most original and beautiful costumes in the city. Everyone remembers my parties because they were truly extraordinary"<sup>67</sup>.

He developed an intense cultural atmosphere around his home, favoured by his social habits; he played the role of mediator, an approach he would put into practice in Lanzarote in the nineteen seventies. In addition to an unsuccessful attempt to create an "artists' residence" – perhaps following in the wake of the artists' colonies created by young architects in the nineteen fifties – he first promoted and then sponsored the El Almacén Multidimensional Cultural Centre (1974), founded the International Museum of Contemporary Art (1976) and built up its collection, erected the Jameos del Agua Auditorium (1976-1987), drew many artists to his home at Taro de Tahiche and, toward the end of his life, instituted the Fundación César Manrique (1993). His belief in education and culture as agents for changing mentalities and reality guided the side of his personality that sought to invigorate art and culture, banking on the cultivation of sensitivity and the freedom of creation.

The home and its use reflected not only his personality, but the artist's success after his solo exhibition at the Clan Gallery, which brought numerous commissions for murals in particular, as well as for applied art and interior decorating designs such as in the Fénix Hotel. His painting began to sell very soon and his wide circle of influential connections in Madrid, favoured in part by his partner Pepi Gómez, had a positive impact on his career. Manrique reflected his own astonishment and enthusiasm with these developments in an unpublished letter written in January 1956 to Sixto Fernández del Castillo, a friend in Tenerife and classmate at the San Fernando School of Fine Arts. The letter is dated in San Sebastián, where he was staying while he painted a mural for the nearby Tolosa branch of the Banco Guipuzcoano. In it, the artist summarizes his success – listing commissions and sales –, describes his "activist and dynamic" artistic life, the many projects he has underway and his work as a muralist, and highlights the value of his comprehensive contribution to the Fénix Hotel bar and grille interiors, indisputably his most relevant work in that ten-year period. He also refers to the recent purchase of his flat on Covarrubias Street and all in all appears to exult in his buoyant and, for him, unprecedented situation <sup>68</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> *Confesiones de César Manrique*, [Transcription of conversations between César Manrique and Antonio Guerra], c. 1976, Fundación César Manrique Archives, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> The letter, a highly valuable documentary source of information, is reproduced below: "I'm attaching a picture of the iron sculpture for the Fénix Hotel grille. It's been very successful. 12 January 56

"My very dear 'art dropout', "Although a dropout who's joined the ranks of rancid bourgeois mentality, I'm still very found of you.

"I received your letter with joy the day after I arrived in this most stately of cities, when I'd resigned myself to not receiving an answer.

"Since I see that you're curious about all you don't know about my presently very active and dynamic artistic life, I'll bring you up to date on some of the latest events.

But Manrique's social and professional success and the cultivation of his decorative vein in the framework of cooperation with architects and artists roused mistrust and cooled friendships, often conclusively. In an article published in *Informaciones* in March 1957 on the occasion of an exhibition at the

"First and foremost, I should say that my exhibition at 'Clan' got excellent reviews and sold well, and ever since I've had so many important commissions that I've been working harder than ever, even all night long sometimes. But I couldn't do otherwise to meet my deadlines with architects and such.

"In addition to countless lesser commissions, I've received a number of sizeable ones, which I'll list.

"After the exhibition, Pradillo, an architect, first commissioned a huge ceramic mural, which turned out quite well, and then another one measuring 11 m x 3 m for the Princesa movie theatre, one of the most modern in Madrid. Julio Cano (architect) ordered 40 paintings (monotypes) for the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, reputed to be one of the most luxurious hotels in the world, and paid me 3,000 per unframed monotype. Then José María Anasagasti (an AGROMAN architect) entrusted me with the most important job I've ever done, to work with him on the Fénix Hotel bar and grille. My work consisted in the following: first, 3 large murals, one completely abstract and the other two nearly abstract, resolved with a very attractive technique. I used acrylic paint (a painting miracle) in the first two and acid to burn carved incisions into off-white wood in the third. Although the grille still hasn't opened to the public, these 3 murals are generating a lot of expectation and I'm sure that the day it does, I'm going to find myself in the limelight (no conceit meant), for everyone's been saying that this grille is the most modern and interesting thing that's happened in Europe. The architect and AGROMAN plan to do a colour photographic reportage to send to Gio Ponti in Italy for publication in DOMUS. In addition to the 3 murals, they commissioned an iron sculpture for the staircase, a mobile that I installed in the draught from an air conditioning vent, with the wall behind and the ceiling above painted black and illuminated with black light. The effect is fantastic: all you see is a series of pure-coloured forms floating freely in the air.

"They also wanted special designs for the lamps that stand on top of a number of columns, so I did some very abstract and original drawings, and finally they also told me to do the ceramic groups for a yellow frieze. Under indirect lighting, it turned out to be frankly effective. All the colour combinations are mine, as is the design for table linens and ware, etc. In a nutshell, I did nearly the whole area by myself. Even the upholstery, for which I ordered special fabric.

"It still hasn't opened because they have to import the stoves from Sweden, but my work is done, and the overall effect is incredible. After all the effort – I worked all summer – even the AGROMAN director was so impressed that he told the architects not to let me get away, and that they should bear me in mind for all the company's works. Do you have any idea what that means? So I'm up to my ears, but in addition to that I have other terrific commissions for Huarte and Company, the second largest builder in Spain. I've just finished an abstract mural in black and grey tones for their executive offices, where there's also an abstract frieze that Oteiza did and a desk designed by Ferreira: the result is really modern and vivid.

"And well, after that here I am, working on 3 banks that AGROMAN is building, branches for the Guipuzcoano. First I finished the one for the Madrid office, an acrylic abstract mural done in black, green and violet tones. Then I painted the one in San Sebastián, a triptych on wood abstractly representing the sea, industry and farming, the 3 sources of wealth. And lately, actually right now, I'm writing from the Tolosa branch office while I wait for the masons to come back. They're out buying clay to make the moulds for a very original mural that I'm going to do in bas relief with deep incisions, after which I'll colour and scrape the plates. Here I'm working alongside Chillida, who after winning first prize in the last Milan Triennial, is often on the cover of foreign art journals – one of the world's most important sculptors. So, as you see, I'm rubbing elbows with the crème de la crème and can hardly believe the success I've been having. For that very important reason I'm going to move to 19 Covarrubias Street, where I've bought a flat (the penthouse): a veritable wonder, with a 15-m balcony and a splendid studio. It's put me back 800,000 pesetas, but that doesn't matter, since I have such terrific long-term commissions that I'm not going to bore you with.

"Your letter, although I still haven't moved, reached me because I asked Pepi to take over the remodelling they're doing in the new flat and to fetch my mail. So she's the one who sent it on to S. Sebastián. And since I had a minute with nothing to do I thought I'd answer yours and quench your thirst for news about what I'm up to.

"When I go back to Madrid, I'll talk to Merche about what you've told me, because I also sold some paintings for those ships and I think she did, too. Well, Sixto, as you see I haven't kept anything back, so I suppose that your next letter will be a little more intense.

"You'll be seeing some of my work in Santa Cruz, because Félix Marrero, the architect, was in Madrid and ordered 6 ceramic murals that I'll do in my studio there for the balconies on a 7-storey building in Santa Cruz. But I don't know on what street.

"Well, Sixto, as you see, I still remember you and though you've falseheartedly switched sympathies, I still have faith in you."

[The letter contains one more page with personal comments, which is not accessible.] Letter from César Manrique to Sixto Fernández del Castillo, dated in San Sebastián, 12 January 1956. Five handwritten pages, on two sides: Sixto Fernández del Castillo archives.

artist's home, the reporter mentioned such aversion in passing: "Manrique, whose good money as a decorator is criticized by certain colleagues, has designed his house along ultra-modern lines, not incompatible with comfort". The critical interpretation of Manrique's endeavour that began to circulate at about this time has hampered a serene analysis of his *oeuvre*, grounded in the integration of the arts, dialogue with nature and the inclusion of public art in the fabric of the industry of experience.

These were also the years of the dawning of personality traits unusual for the Spanish cultural mindset, which would develop more fully in the nineteen sixties and seventies during his stay in New York (1964-66) and definitive return to Lanzarote after 1966. In the United States he donned the attire of nineteen sixties urban industrial pop culture – discernible, paradoxically, in the constraints of nineteen fifties Madrid. After returning to the island of his birth, he embraced the land, intensely engaging in landscape architecture and popular public art, in the framework of the economics of leisure and an incipient ecological awareness. Fiction is one of the categories that runs through Manriquean aesthetics and fills it with meaning. Even in nature-related works where ostensible feats of dominion are sensitively eluded, the cult to artifice filters through his creative system as a whole, so prone to associating art and life and therefore to stressing the role of the applied arts and functional objects. He would reinforce these lessons, learnt in mid-nineteen fifties Madrid via cooperation with architects, throughout the following decade. His fiction was, then, grounded in beauty and in a sense of things practical, able to generate collective well-being and civic habits.

### Merger and application of the arts: the desire to renovate taste

With the perspective of hindsight, one of the most renovating and contemporary dimensions of the nineteen fifties – which have yet to be suitably evaluated in terms of the multiple modern sensitivities that characterized the decade – was the integration of artistic expression. These dynamics gave rise to the utopian horizon of the total work of art and anticipated behaviour that became frequent in the nineteen eighties.

In Spain, the merger between plastic and applied arts in the modulating context of architecture took place under the umbrella of a contemporary movement that modestly introduced good taste and modernity in an atmosphere of pre-industrial culture afflicted by paucity and squalor. New buildings erected by young architects keen on regeneration lacked the facilities commensurate with the desire for change in those years of Spanish isolation. A need was felt to wed art with functionality in an attempt to revive taste in the suffocating atmosphere of everyday life by piping fresh air through industrial design and environmental and interior architecture, including the installation of new style painting and sculpture in public works and tourist infrastructure. In its vigour, architecture was a driving force that protected the plastic arts. José Luis Fernández del Amo, from his position in government, as well as young architects such as Javier Sáenz de Oiza, Fernando Higueras and Antonio Miró, José Antonio Coderch<sup>69</sup>, José Antonio Corrales and Ramón Vázquez Molezún, Curro Inza,

Miguel Fisac or Juan Daniel Fullaondo, to name a few, commissioned murals, sculptures, paintings, stained glass or furniture from artists, while they themselves designed facilities built into their structures. Luis Feduchi and his son Javier conducted meritorious decorative and design work, intended for a non-existent modern furnishings industry that the latter attempted to galvanize from the presidency of Rolaco. Their interior decoration and furnishings for the Hotel Castellana Hilton, which purchased five of César Manrique's paintings in 1953, initiated a significant trend<sup>70</sup>. From 1952 onward the Grupo R architects in Barcelona had also drawn attention to the need to recover modern object culture, which had been suffocated by the Civil War, and to enlist artists' cooperation in that endeavour. "We seek the cooperation of young painters and sculptors agreeable to the line we're pursuing, who represent the genuine, the living spirit of our times."<sup>71</sup>

Architects such as Miguel Fisac – one of the champions of the need for industrial design and the creation of environments – along with José Antonio Corrales and Ramón Molezún, Javier Carvajal, Rafael Moneo, and Curro Inza, designed prototypes for chairs and certain other furnishings, suggesting construction solutions that could establish a dialogue with their architecture. Other colleagues, such as Fernando Alós, Carlos Picardo, Fernando Ramón and Francisco Muñoz, also joined the ranks of design<sup>72</sup>. Latent in these endeavours that combined art, design and architecture was the idea that art had a certain "social function", understood to be the aesthetic modernization of everyday objects. Manrique absorbed this aesthetic functionalism, the conviction that artists are "obligated" to attempt to be useful by improving the lives of their fellows, creating beauty everywhere around them, engaging in any *genre*, discipline or medium to do so. When he headed the Museum of Contemporary Art, Fernández del Amo sustained that the museum was concerned with all the arts, from cinema to the educational role of architecture, and naturally including painting and sculpture, photography and the applied arts – a genuinely innovative programme that heralded the approach adopted by museums and art centres in the nineteen nineties. This stream of cooperation, which contributed to consolidating avant-garde art, did not go unnoticed by contemporary critics: "Ours is unquestionably a period of crystallization of abstract art, not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a part of a common creative endeavour involving the same tendency in architecture and sculpture. We now have several buildings where the influence of this new aesthetic complex is visible, where the three arts cooperate to formulate new and revolutionary aesthetics"<sup>73</sup>.

Carrying this off was nothing short of heroic in the absence of both the means of production and the market needed for that modernizing exercise, intent upon alignment with Europe, to bear fruit. There was an explicit determination to confront the decadence of the surroundings and find avenues for regeneration as

<sup>70</sup> Vid. Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero, "Silencios y conversaciones. La arquitectura y el arte de los años cincuenta en Madrid", in *L'arquitectura i l'art dels anys 50 a Madrid*, [eds: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero and Patricia Molins], Barcelona, Fundació "la Caixa", 1996, p. 53.

<sup>71</sup> Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera, "Arquitectura de Arte", *Revista*, 11 December 1952. In: *Grup R, op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> Vicente Aguilera Cerní, *Iniciación al arte español de la postguerra*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1970, p. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Juan Antonio Cabezas, "La pintura abstracta como decoración mural. César Manrique y sus fondos geológicos", *España*, Tangiers, December 1954.

<sup>69</sup> In 1951, José Antonio Coderch built the Spanish pavilion for the IX Milan Triennial, devoted to the decorative arts.

expressed, for instance, with symbolic scope during the Session on Architectural Critique held in parallel with the First Industrial Design Competition. That encounter, attended by architects and businessmen such as Carlos de Miguel – instrumental in the promotion of architecture-related applied arts – and Miguel Fisac, launched the “crusade against poor taste”<sup>74</sup>. Organized by the Chartered Institute of Architects of Madrid in 1956 to further design and its production channels, the Competition itself was a landmark in the definition of the new impact that this discipline could have on everyday life. It was no easy task to persuade Spanish industry, still labouring under very precarious conditions, to share such concerns. Nonetheless, isolated pockets of opportunity for industrial design began to appear that supported and furthered aesthetic modernization, through companies such as Tapicerías Gancedo, Plata Meneses, Gastón y Daniela, H Muebles, Huarte and Rolaco. H Muebles, a subsidiary of Huarte – veritable patron of avant-garde artists and architects – commissioned work from Sáenz de Oiza, Corrales and Molezún, Moneo and Fullaondo. Gastón y Daniela organized competitions for textile designs in 1955 and 1957 – following the example of Tapicerías Gancedo –, which were eventually printed and exhibited in a colourful and artistically staged showing. That call for ideas was answered by a long list of architects and artists, including Álvarez Ortega, Barrenechea, Berrocal, Canogar, Cárdenas, María Antonia Dans, De la Sota, Feduchi, Feito, Amadeo Gabino, Ibarrola, Manrique, Mignoni, Millares, Molezún, Molina Sánchez, Paredes Jardiel and Stubbing.

Ybarra also organized two competitions to decorate its new trans-Atlantic liners, *Cabo San Roque* and *Cabo San Vicente*, covering the route between Spain and South America. One sought the best ideas for the vessels’ salon interiors, tapestries and rugs. First prize went to Manuel López Villaseñor, while Carlos Pascual de Lara – an accomplished muralist who had won the competition to decorate Madrid’s Royal Theatre in 1955 – and Manuel Mamposo – were awarded the two second prizes. The purpose of the other competition was to purchase “paintings, drawings, watercolours, black and white or colour prints, for the salons in the new trans-Atlantic liners”, according to the catalogue of the winning and selected art works. Works were bought from, among others, María Antonia Dans, Menchu Gal, Amadeo Gabino, Carlos Pascual de Lara, Cirilo Martínez Novillo, José Paredes-Jardiel, Agustín Redondela and César Manrique. In the text that introduced the catalogue, Lafuente Ferrari stressed the sponsor’s sound criterion “because it has recognized, with an obvious yet uncommon criterion, that in the loftiest sense of the word, decoration is not an ancillary or subsidiary activity, but involves adaptive harmony, the ability to merge the spirit of an architectural setting with the style that should be adapted to, not imposed upon it”<sup>75</sup>. This constant flow of artists toward the applied arts was, in short, encouraged by the spirit of the age.

While the regime favoured monumental buildings that furthered its imperial model, innovative artists and architects adopted a shared approach to and reflected on their joint modern task and the aesthetic revitalization that the country was pleading for.

<sup>74</sup> Vid. Patricia Molins, “Misterio y geometría. La década de la abstracción”, in *L’arquitectura i l’art dels anys 50 a Madrid*, [eds: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero and Patricia Molins], p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> *Catálogo de las obras de arte premiadas y seleccionadas. Concursos para la decoración de los nuevos trasatlánticos Cabo San Roque y Cabo San Vicente, Ybarra y Cia., S.A., 1955.*

Their mutual reinforcement generated synergies. Sáenz de Oiza and Laorga enlisted the cooperation of Jorge Oteiza, Eduardo Chillida, Néstor Basterrechea and Lucio Muñoz in the emblematic Aranzázu Basilica. Under commission by architects such as Miguel Fisac, José Luis Fernández del Amo, Fernando Higuera, José María Anasagasti, Julio Cano Lasso or Javier Sáenz de Oiza himself, many an artist authored sculptures, gratings, murals, liturgical accessories and stained glass: Amadeo Gabino, José Luis Sánchez, Pablo Serrano, César Manrique, Hernández Mompó, Lucio Muñoz, Manuel Millares, Eduardo Chillida, Carlos Pascual de Lara, José María de Labra or Antonio Valdivielso. Pablo Palazuelo designed tables for Juan Huarte, Millares did ceramics, Miguel Fisac designed furniture, objects, lamps, luminaires... – initially, he supervised the comprehensive design of his buildings –, Luis and Javier Feduchi, countless painters, sculptors and architects drew sketches for fabric prints, tapestries, murals...<sup>76</sup>. From its constructivist poetics, Equipo 57, whose membership included architects and artists – Francisco Aguilera Amate, Luis Aguilera Bernier, Agustín Ibarrola, Juan Cuenca, Juan Serrano, José Duarte y Ángel Duarte – advocated integration of the arts and their application to and impact on everyday life. By the end of the period, some of the furnishings they proposed were being manufactured by Darro. The members of Equipo 57, who defended “the social mission of art as the humble companion of the man in the street’s daily chores” sustained that “only everyday elements with relevance in everyday life constitute genuine culture”<sup>77</sup>. All these concerns, along with the climate in which they were generated and encouraged, gave rise in 1957 to the creation of the Spanish Society of Industrial Design, furthered by Carlos de Miguel, José Luis Sánchez, Javier Carvajal and Javier Feduchi, among others.

In the same period, which concurred with the initiation of industrial modernization in Mexico, a series of architects, painters and sculptors founded a movement that pursued the integration of the arts. Interdisciplinary work was fostered, as it was in Spain, to modernize creation and bestow emotional value on architecture. David Alfaro Siqueiros advanced his sculpture painting, which was to reach its maximum expression in the Siqueiros Cultural Polyforum in 1972. Carlos Mérida explored his “functional painting” proposal, public art designed for the enjoyment of the viewer, while Rufino Tamayo ventured into new geometric-constructivist languages that eluded narration. Mathias Goeritz, fondly remembered in our country and a resident of Mexico since the late nineteen forties, deserves special mention in this regard. His role as a driving force behind the Altamira School in 1949 is well known, as is his relationship with Eduardo Westerdahl. The school, created in Santillana del Mar, defended the removal of the barriers between the different plastic disciplines and strongly advised strengthening the relationship between art and architecture, as Westerdahl explained after the 1949 meeting: “Art, we concluded, aspires to an equilibrium between different forces and the unity of the various arts should be integrated in architecture”<sup>78</sup>. With the support of sound aesthetic thinking, Goeritz became thoroughly committed to the renovation of Mexican plastic art in the

<sup>76</sup> Vid. the catalogues cited above *L’arquitectura i l’art dels anys 50 a Madrid*, [eds: Gabriel Ruiz Cabrero and Patricia Molins], and *España años 50. Una década de creación* [eds: Juan Manuel Bonet and Carlos Pérez], which contain very valuable descriptions of the age from the perspective of artistic integration. See, in particular, the texts by Patricia Molins.

<sup>77</sup> Carlos Areán, *Treinta años de arte español*, Madrid, Guadarrama, 1972, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> Eduardo Westerdahl, “Conclusiones de la Primera Semana de Arte Abstracto de la Escuela de Altamira”, *Ínsula*, No. 47, 15 November 1949.

nineteen fifties with his “emotional architecture”, his abstract revision of anti-monumental public sculpture and his defence of the practice of convergent and integrated art in the total work of art – *Gesamtkunstwerk* – that he endeavoured to produce in *El Museo Experimental El Eco* (1953). When Goeritz praised the *Centro Urbano President Juárez* (1952) in one of his articles, true to his poetics, he drew attention to the value of the work, stressing the “coordination between architecture and plastic art, and even literature and music; i.e., of all the contemporary artistic values in a single work.” This commentary is reminiscent of the defence of the museum as the home of all the many expressions of creativity advanced that same year by Fernández del Amo, head of the recently created National Museum of Contemporary Art in Madrid<sup>79</sup>. From a single common trunk rooted in the Altamira School, Mexico and Spain shared a keen desire to encourage integrated artistic practice, very likely instituting a dialogue whose depth, currents and scope have yet to be fully understood.

César Manrique embraced this avidity for modernization, consistent with a personality prone to aesthetic passion and identification with the strategies of modern life, and foreign to the circumstances prevailing in Spain at the time. In this context, the impact that first Paris and later New York made on him is entirely understandable. In June 1957 he replied pithily but symptomatically to a question posed by a journalist about “[his] personal, clear conviction”: “For me, life is aesthetics, I love beauty above all else”. Very early on, certain critics well acquainted with the painter drew attention to the variety of his creative interests, prefiguring his future profile as an artist in pursuit of the utopian goal of a community of the arts: “César Manrique feels art in its entirety; none of his specialities is indifferent to him: he cultivates ceramics at the same time as painting, iron sculpture, fabric printing. He would surely have been a great architect, judging by his feel for volume, colour and proportion, which is in keeping with the most demanding and daring of norms”<sup>80</sup>. Indeed, during those years, in addition to painting, he was already branching out to embrace sculpture, mobiles, murals, fabric design and household items, covers for tourist brochures, lighting, interior decorating and the creation of environments. And he was also planning incipient incursions into public art in Arrecife both in the early (Las Palmas Square) and late (La Marina playgrounds) nineteen fifties, advancing, albeit in an urban setting, toward the broader landscape architectural endeavours he would begin to undertake on the island in the nineteen sixties.

He completed his most ambitious applied arts project in 1955, one year before he participated in the Venice Biennial for the first time: the interior decoration for the Fénix Hotel bar and grille (“La Parrilla”), which opened in 1956<sup>81</sup>. In his own

words, the work was “the most important commission in my life” (to date). The scale of his participation in the Fénix Hotel project allowed him to draw from all his talents. The building was designed by José María Anasagasti, an architect in the employ of the Agromán construction company who would commission several works from Manrique thereafter, such as the three murals for the Banco Guipuzcoano branch office.

César Manrique designed the interiors for the hotel restaurant and bar. He painted three large murals, “one completely abstract and the other two nearly abstract, resolved with a very attractive technique. I used acrylic paint (a painting miracle) in the first two and acid to burn carved incisions into off-white wood in the third”<sup>82</sup>. The composition itself employs highly schematic linear language, with a brush reminiscent of the palaeolithic drawings of southern Spain, where linear nudity and the relative dynamism stemming from curves are the vehicles of expression. The incisive white outlines of arcane signs and figures – primarily human and animal – stand out against the black background where they huddle, devoid of any narrative intention, to create a meticulously luminous graphic composition. This mural is a further example of his fascination with the signs and symbols of primitive cultural language.

The second mural is rooted in constructivist figuration, built over a network of coloured curvilinear planes arranged around a cubistically decomposed figurative scene. Painted on a slightly warped partition wall, its chromatic exuberance is clearly enhanced by its black background reverberating with lively forms – the slick acrylic paint helps highlight the intensity of the colours – that seem to anticipate certain features of pop art. After 1958 and in the early nineteen sixties, however, his matter informalist painting, focusing on volcanic metaphor, receded into a certain naturalist asceticism, as the artist himself admitted: “In the beginning, I was an enthusiastic ‘colourist’, with a keen sense of chromatic range; colour was always exalted in everything I did. Later, looking long and hard at “my” island’s soil, I had to acknowledge the wisdom in nature’s choice of colour combinations, a sobriety and elegance that were absent from my earliest paintings. From then on I undertook the quest to find the type of painting I’m doing now”<sup>83</sup>. The intersections and scumbles characteristic of his plastic vocabulary are clearly visible in the inter-plane crossovers in this mural. The impressive power of the composition is wrapped in skilfully resolved rhythmic solutions. Particularly visible is the Picassian influence, a cross between the scene in his *Mademoiselles d’Avignon* and the compositional architecture of *Guernica*, although the world depicted here is kindly and festive. It was no coincidence that, with distinctly Parisian irony and in keeping with his own humorous and uninhibited attitude, he considered titling this mural *Toilette en el campo* (*Toilette in the country*). The simultaneity, fragmentation of bodies, dynamic composition and saturation of planes are deeply reminiscent of the cubist world of the older Spanish painter, who held seductive sway over Manrique for as long as he lived. This work – a sketch for which was included in the Clan Gallery exhibition – largely culminated his figurative cubist manner or figurative abstraction, a modern exercise in which he problemized the

<sup>79</sup> Vid. Alejandrina Escudero, “Mathias Goeritz y la poética del Eco”, *www.Architectum.edu.mx*; Escudero, A. and Pedroiza, R., “La integración plástica: un arte de mitad de siglo”, en *Escultura mexicana. De la Academia a la Instalación*, México, INBA-Landuci Eds., 2000; Kassner, Lily, *Mathias Goeritz, 1915-1990*, México, INBA-Conculta, 1998; and Anad Alanis, E. X. de, “Arquitectura emocional”, in sev. auth. *Los Ecos de Mathias Goeritz, Ensayos y Testimonios*, México, IIE-UNAM, 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Juan Ramírez de Lucas, “El arte moderno y la nueva arquitectura. Los murales de César Manrique, serenidad de la gracia en equilibrio”, *La Hora*, Madrid, 1956.

<sup>81</sup> Also in 1955 – with Manrique now well established – Manuel Millares, Martín Chirino, Manuel Padorno, Alejandro Reino and Elvireta Escobio relocated from the Canary Islands to Madrid, a trip steeped in symbolism and modern transcendence that was to leave a mark on island cultural coordinates.

<sup>82</sup> Letter cited above from César Manrique to Fernández del Castillo.

<sup>83</sup> “César Manrique entrevistado en radio Nacional de España en vísperas de su exposición pictórica de París”, *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 November 1961.



representation of reality, dissociating himself from historicist realism and carrying pictorial expression to more autonomous creative domains.

In the third mural, located on the wall behind the bar, he laid aside any pretension to allude to the recognizable world. Geometric forms – colourful curvilinear planes taken from the universe of his built figures – turn abstract, floating over a black background. Like in some of his paintings, the stains, mostly organic but in some cases geometric or even mixed, exhibit highly spatial and flexible constructivist rationalism. The reference to certain features of Miró's poetic cartographies, likewise present in his paintings, is updated, particularly as regards the nature of the forms of conscience used, the intersection of coloured planes and the combination of mass with linear features. In Manrique's case, these brush strokes stem from geometric impetus, sometimes connecting the forms themselves and at others weaving webs across the background. Indirect lighting from lamps embedded in a suspended ceiling illuminates the work as a whole, softening the effect and creating a relaxing environment.

While the three murals constituted a substantial contribution to the grille's interiors, Manrique participated on a much broader scale, purposing to create a harmonious environment by integrating materials and execution. For the staircase, he proposed an ethereal iron sculpture along the same lines as contemporary works by Eduardo Chillida and Pablo Serrano: striking for its essentially tree-like design, this piece features branches with lyrical symbols of Mironian lineage that describe a kind of aerial script. He also installed an iron mobile "in the draught from an air conditioning vent, with the wall behind and the ceiling above painted black and illuminated with black light. The effect is fantastic: all you see is a series of pure-coloured forms floating freely in the air"<sup>84</sup>. In this airy piece, he again resorted to his characteristic oval planes, pure geometric figures engendered by the intersection of two circumferences. The ten plates he generated with this procedure are impregnated with different shades of acrylic paint and arranged to appear to hover in mid air.

He also installed a number of spindle-shaped columns, coated with acrylic paint in pure shades of green, red and orange. Here again the treatment is playful and colourist, closer to the industrial culture of the nineteen sixties and the urban irony of pop art than the austerity and rigorous convention that characterized Spain in the fifties. Jovial and modern, lacking in any dramatic intent, the artist established the colour scheme for the entire grille area, with a liberal use of black on ceilings and walls; he chose both the furnishings, in line with ultra-modern taste and materials, and the upholstery, for which he commissioned special fabrics; and he illuminated the area with indirect, low intensity lighting, a preference that would later play a relevant role in his public art and environmental creations. He also designed the lamps for the column tops, the table linens and tableware; he gave the area as a whole an air of fresh vitality with a parterre containing natural plants; he created families of ceramics for a yellow frieze; and he hung a number of his own paintings whose specific language was well suited to the environment. Like other artists of his generation – Millares, for instance, sporadically, Feito or Arcadio Blasco –, he cultivated ceramic work, harmonizing it with his other modes of expression, thereby

<sup>84</sup> Letter cited above from César Manrique to Fernández del Castillo.

practising a traditional discipline with new, modernized language. This was obviously not the first time he had resorted to this technique, having included ceramic tiles in a number of his previous murals, nor would it be the last.

The entire setting exudes innovation. Manrique centred this, his most ambitious proposal to date, around the community of the arts. Neither his satisfaction with the results, whose modernity he emphasized, nor the fact that he regarded the bar and grille to be his own private museum, should come as any surprise: "It's like a tiny museum, with a sampling of everything I do"<sup>85</sup>. The work, intended from the outset for a tourist facility, is a fine example of his aspiration to explore and build refined and comfortable interiors with artistic overtones, designed for relaxation and sheer enjoyment. This convergence of plastic and applied arts anticipated the paradigm that would guide his nineteen sixties and seventies public art projects for artistic, cultural and tourist centres on Lanzarote. In short, he formulated an aesthetic framework that expressed the endeavour of an age to seize modernity, further dialogue among the arts and explore their functional value, all under the umbrella of architecture.

His cooperation with architects continued to grow. Two years later, in 1957, he worked with Luis Cabrera to create the environment for the Tenerife Clubhouse terrace, for which he did a ceramic mural, and in 1959 he built another, which has since disappeared, for the night club in the new Las Vegas Hotel at Puerto de la Cruz that he had agreed to decorate. At the same time he oversaw the set-up in the Nebli Gallery of *Lanzarote*, an ethnographic exhibition featuring his volcanic island shown from 18 to 24 May on the occasion of Canary Island Week in Madrid. The showing included traditional La Graciosa island dress, caps, openwork, embroidery, rosettes, agricultural and industrial products, pictures, documentaries, large photographs by Pablo Barceló, the painter's own abstract paintings... He was quick to express his desire to visually arrange such picturesque materials in a context in which their content could be contrasted with designer staging and showcasing: "I'll try to do something wholly new in style and environment to show Lanzarote in the light it deserves", he said<sup>86</sup>. The results were in keeping with the initial intention. His proposal brought a gust of fresh air. In a period of transition that laboured under the predominance of local traditionalism and historicism, it was relatively common practice to combine formal images and modern devices with popular themes to re-educate sensitivities. Manrique followed this approach throughout his career, reconciling opposites and attempting to see the "same old things" from new angles. This side of his personality showed through in the Nebli Gallery exhibition<sup>87</sup>. The

<sup>85</sup> Julio Trenchas, "La pintura abstracta que estoy haciendo responde al paisaje de mi isla, dice C. Manrique", *Pueblo*, Madrid, April 1956.

<sup>86</sup> Guillermo Topham, "César Manrique decorará la sala de Lanzarote en la Semana Canaria de Madrid", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 10 April 1959.

<sup>87</sup> The newspapers put it thus: "Light, colour and joy in the typical dress of La Graciosa island fisherman: a gleeful blare of colour that fills the heart with life and pleasure. Soul, light and colour, in short, in Tegui's guitars, Haría's saddlebags, La Graciosa's boats, Tamia's baskets, Tinajo's embroidery, Timanfaya's lava, La Geria's ashes; in the splendid plastic abstract themes painted by the very concrete César Manrique; in young Arrecife photographer Gabriel Fernández' magnificent exhibitions. Strong and distinctive personality of an exhibition held in the capital of Spain under the archipelago's very high flying flag". Guillermo Topham, "Exposición sobre aspectos de la vida lanzaroteña en la Sala Nebli, de Madrid", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 9 June 1959.



opening was, naturally, preceded by a generous party organized by the artist who not only acted as ambassador for his island, but hosted the local authorities. Friends from Lanzarote and members of Madrid's cultural circles and high society gathered in his home<sup>88</sup>.

César Manrique was becoming a unique, independent artist, occupying zones of creative miscegenation that lay far outside the bounds of the conventional definition of painting. His protean personality – rooted, as seen in the foregoing discussion, in the dynamics of his age –, led him to develop his talent in a spacious territory of aesthetic tension modulated by good taste, modern sensitivity and convergence through architecture. While in the nineteen sixties – and more widely in the seventies – he adapted natural settings for use by establishing a dialogue among several creative disciplines, by the fifties he had already begun to combine the arts in interiors, circumstantially embellished with plants, in atmospheres designed for enjoyment and pleasurable relaxation.

### The muralist dimension, friendship and architecture

Mural painting was one of the areas where the cooperation between architecture and art crystallized most fruitfully. Architects' commissions, a cross between patronage and public art, provided protection and acted as a stimulus for emerging art forms. Here and there, on the occasion of the erection of new buildings – churches, hotels, airports, factories – painters produced murals in close correlation with young professionals. In 1954 Juan Ramírez de Lucas wrote in this regard: "In the last few years we've been seeing an unmistakable rise in the use of mural painting in a wide variety of places, but always in connection with modern architectural environments; while they vary in their degree of abstraction, they are generally characterized by an optimism that brightens and invigorates the surfaces they enhance"<sup>89</sup>. This practice proved to be an effective vehicle for integrating the arts, one of the artistic aims of the period.

César Manrique became an intensively active muralist, pouring his stylistic vigour into the twenty-some pieces he painted during that decade. Modern figuration rooted in classicism, synthetic figuration and constructivism, and the co-existence of the two languages and decorative approaches were all present in his creations. Taken as a whole, they can be seen to constitute a genuine repertoire of his plastic interests, which in the last two years of the decade would also embrace informalist abstract works.

Barely midway into the century, he undertook to paint the murals for the Arrecife "Parador" referred to above, presently conserved in the very rooms where they were originally painted. He also sold the "Parador" several smaller paintings

depicting local flora that now hang in the "Parador" at La Palma. After the 1951 unveiling, the larger of the two murals – measuring approximately 220 by 547 centimetres – titled *Alegoría de la Isla* (Island allegory) was censored by the Directorate General of Tourism, which obliged the painter to clothe the originally nude female figures<sup>90</sup>. The scene, painted with a distinctly academic treatment of composition and volumetric balance, contains the iconography that was to become recurrent in Manrique's earliest phase – camels, local architecture, century plant, palm tree, volcanoes, prickly pear, farm woman, ceramics ... – as well as two monumental figures of native women standing beside a rock carving. In a coloured sketch for a fragment of the mural that has been conserved, a female nude with exotic African features stands face to face with a clothed farm woman – a vision of ingenuous Canary Island primitivism. With a plainly narrative-allegorical tone – permeated by mythologizing idealism – and in a spirit still imbued with conventional figuration, the mural contains glimpses of formal resources that draw both from island indigenism and Picasso's return to order phase. The latter influence, however, is more visible in the three pieces in the dining room, *El viento, la pesca y la vendimia* [The wind, fishing and the grape harvest] – each measuring approximately 180 by 250 centimetres – that spawn a symbolic sequence designed to reflect Lanzarote's essential personality. Here Manrique resorted to the representation of archetypes relating to island nature and ethnographic culture: farm woman, fisherman (very likely a self-

<sup>90</sup> For Manrique, the Directorate General of Tourism's displeasure meant having to struggle for the payment of part of his fees. José Enrique Marrero Regalado, who erected the building, retained part of the sum owed to the artist, 4,000 pesetas, for the architect feared that he would be penalized by the government for failing to submit the sketches for prior approval. Marrero Regalado himself advised the artist to seek a solution by covering the nudes with "a lovely goatskin with its whimsical forms, to veil the pelvis of your immodest cave lady", advice that the artist subsequently followed.

The full letter reads as follows:

"José Enrique Marrero

Architect

3 July 1951

Mi César Manrique:

"My dear friend, I'm in receipt of your disheartened letter in which you very tactfully accuse me of being responsible for the fact that you haven't been paid in full for the murals.

"You have reason to know me and I'm certain that deep down you don't believe that. If it were up to me I would have paid you the day you finished painting, but remember the reprimand I got from the Directorate General for not submitting the sketches before authorizing the paintings. I admit that I retained the four thousand pesetas thinking that if they made me pay for the paintings, as the person accountable, at least you could help me out and I wouldn't have to shoulder all the damages alone, which it was such a relief to me when they told me they could pay you if you did a little something about the nudes, and that's where we are now. I don't think it would be asking too much of you to resort to a lovely Canary Island goatskin with its whimsical forms to veil the pelvis of your immodest cave lady, although to tell you the truth, I personally think that the face is the worst part of the figure. In any event, I can assure you that I like it as is and if it were up to me I'd wire you the 4,000 right now. But since you'll be coming in September we can talk about it then and you'll see that it won't take much to come out on top, for in these cases we have to yield, even if just a little, so as not to injure the other party's pride. And with your intelligence and my support as a person of experience and not entirely stupid, we're sure to come through this unscathed.

"I've told Elejabertía to wire the 2,400 for the small paintings and, bear with me, when you come in September you'll get the 4,000 for the murals.

"Don't forget to let me know two weeks to a month in advance when you'll be coming, for I'm as keen as you are on being here to talk about the final details, since I imagine you'll bring a few items to talk over.

"I'm leaving for Agaete on Sunday and will be back in Tenerife the following week, on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and stay here through the end of the month or more. Write to me there if you like.

"I just realized that I've ripped up the envelope with your address so I'll have to cable Arrecife to ask for it. That'll mean another 24 hours before I can post this letter.

"Very fondly yours, José Enrique Marrero Regalado". Letter from José Enrique Marrero Regalado to César Manrique, dated at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 3 July 1951. One page written on both sides, César Manrique Archives, Fundación César Manrique.

<sup>88</sup> The press described it as follows: "The Lanzarote exhibit, sponsored by the Island Council, will open this week in the prestigious Nebli Gallery on Serrano Street, whose rooms will be decorated by painter César Manrique. Manrique held cocktails in his magnificent home in Madrid to celebrate the occasion, which was attended by some of the city's most famous novelists, journalists and radio and cinema celebrities". "Magna exposición sobre Lanzarote en la Sala Nebli", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. 21 May 1959.

<sup>89</sup> Juan Ramírez de Lucas, *op. cit.*

portrait of the artist seen from behind), boats, fish, prickly pear, ash, "socos"\*\*\*\* typical of La Geria, palm tree, hats, volcano, grape leaves, architecture ... Rife with colour and figurative energy that connected with a certain modern classicism, the chromatically contrasted murals are bounded by irregular frames and geometric planes; they allude in their tale to fishing and agricultural activities – they pre-date tourism – and echo certain formal resources present in the earlier work for the Arrecife Clubhouse. These include the slightly rationalist settings, the motifs selected and the extension of fragments of the scene beyond the bounds of the mural and onto the wall. And yet there is more constraint and academicism in these works, more sobriety reinforced by the monumentalism of the human figures; in short, they reveal a more explicit retreat from avant-garde exploration and risk.

Two years later, in 1952, he painted a piece – since destroyed – on one of the walls of his Madrilenian home at Rufino Blanco Street. Decorative in intention, it depicted a humorous scene from the Lanzarote countryside: a camel in heat pursuing a terrified female, and each of the animals, one in an erotic frenzy and the other in frantic flight, dragging a traditionally attired farm woman behind, with all her trappings. The setting was the island landscape with its local flora of which the painter was so fond: century plant, prickly pear, palm tree, cactus... There was also a volcano and boats beached on the shore. Here again the central figures were monumentalized and the women's hefty builds – plainly inferred by their Herculean legs – were accentuated. The scene, tinged with cinematographic dynamism as in a cartoon, was characterized by orthogonal lines and schematic plastic images, in which the autonomy of pictorial objects was reinforced and, in the case of the flowers, enhanced by the white background against which they were drawn. All in all, the work was seeped in playful exuberance, converting a picturesque fragment into anecdote, with no other aspiration than to entertain and amuse in an everyday domestic context. It might be interpreted as yet another example of the plastic functionalism that the artist practised at the time, in the growing conviction that art should be useful a useful instrument of everyday life, part of a project for human well-being and happiness.

Once the forceful mural for Guacimeta Airport was completed in 1953, the artist, immersed in the stylistic rupture on which he embarked after returning from Paris, in 1954 accepted three new challenges to embellish walls with his paintings, two for Panchito Bar at Palma de Majorca and one for a construction materials plant in Madrid, the latter commissioned by Huarte, a veritable patron of the arts at the time. Manrique tackled the wall's spatiality along with the architectural setting to deftly develop the compositional potential that comes with large scale.

For the two surfaces – one vertical and the other very large and horizontal – at Palma de Majorca he adopted an extensive and eclectic approach with a modern twist, in style, organization and spirit. He combined ingenuous – particularly in the longitudinal piece – schematic figuration, based on harsh borders and orthogonal lines, with stylized images – two female silhouettes on either side of a large palm tree against a black background –, supported both by the drawing

and an internal architecture that interconnects the organic planes with linear strokes or the simplicity of juxtaposition. Here again the focus is on decorative, anecdotal and amusing themes. By that time the artist was using soft, flat, Miró-inspired forms that he would deploy in the paintings exhibited at the Clan Gallery later that year, sometimes floating alongside synthetic representations – ceramics, flowers, century plants – and at others criss-crossing to give rise to new masses of colour, his characteristic scumbles. In the wider mural, organized around three separate parts, the landscapist understructure is also executed by means of softly geometrical, overlaid planes of colour. The two chromatically denser outer sections contain scenes from nature, while the central panel depicts dismembered human figuration with a predominance of oval and lanceolate forms. Typical Lanzarote plant life – century plants, cactus in bloom, palm tree – coexists with abstractions, exotic birds, deer, reptiles, a monkey, a giraffe, a banana tree, reptiles and puppets, constituting a utopian, strictly plastic landscape reminiscent of tropical Arcadian aesthetics where festive merriment and good humour reign. Largely a reflection of the painting in which he engaged at the time, this project, which exalts colour and energy, matched the artist's jovial personality and his inclination to celebrate life and good taste.

Immersed in a process of formal exploration and plastic resources and accepting a commission formulated by an architect named Pradillo, he devised a ceramic mural for Huarte's construction materials plant in Madrid. This was to be the first of such murals, but not the last, for he used the same technique in other pieces created both in that decade and later in life. The mural is built into the building facade where it occupies two sides of the exterior wall, forming a ninety-degree angle. It lacks any chromatic variety, with only two flat shades of brown and white on a black background. This sobriety is intensified by the mural's orthogonal neo-figuration in which deeply silhouetted forms are softened by geometric graphic supports and the play-off between positive and negative, generating what appear to be pockets of light around the artist's characteristic organic shapes. The motifs for this work were drawn from the world of construction: masons with their tools and machinery doing the work characteristic of the trade. Narrated with a fragmentary, modern and uninhibited syntax that diverged widely from the conventional discourse and imperial rhetoric of the time, this realist scene is still in place.

Prior to painting the Fénix Hotel murals in 1955, he painted another large piece (300 centimetres high by 1,100 centimetres long), which has since disappeared, for the Princesa cinema in Madrid, built by architect José Luis Sanz Magallón. The plastic logic and style concurred with the formula used in the Fénix: figuration decomposed into planes, generating soft, post-cubist and richly coloured and structured geometrization. He delved deeper into the analysis of form, pursuing the line of research initiated with his monotypes and paintings, from still lifes and constructivist articulations to autonomous Mironian splashes of colour. That is to say, reality was interpreted in a formal tone. He very likely used acrylic paint. While the syntax was abstract, very sketchy human, animal and plant forms could be identified alongside juxtaposed, non-objective structures in a successive sequence in which a country tale, a military scene and a more abstract depiction, that might be sea and beach, were seamlessly blended. The mural owed its elegance to Manrique's use of a dual plane of light. This technical resource

\*\*\*\*/N. del T./Low walls built around plants to protect them from the wind.

enabled him to overlay a three part geometric composition consisting in cinema-like projected beams of light on a dark background. The pictorial volume was symmetrically arranged, as was often the case in these large pieces. The two outer portions were like parallelograms, while the centre contained two triangular beams that intersected towards the top in a sort of rationalist coccyx. Here the painter reiterated a constructivist strategy: on both sides of the mural, light is projected from two opposite points to form a rhomboid figure, while in the centre, the light is cross-wise, but from the top, glimmering at the bottom. Simulating cinema projection, narrations with people, animals and objects, some identifiable, some abstract, arise from inside the beam. The balanced distribution of light, figures and volumes in three units consisting in uniform triangular modules generates a harmonious whole with a wealth of classical compositional symmetries. Manrique frequently used this strategy in both his murals and his canvas paintings.

Midway through the decade, Juan Huarte asked the artist to participate in the interior decorating for the construction company's Madrid headquarters, particularly the chief executive's office. He painted a small – 160-centimetre square – abstract composition on wood, in black and grey tones and tempered rationalist style. The highly textured background, scraped width-wise, houses a constellation of starkly contrasting, vertical, mixed line geometric forms, inter-related by means of clean linear flourishes. At the time, Manrique referred to this work as a mural. Its size, certainly, was larger than his habitually small canvases, but today it would be considered to be a medium-sized piece, at most. It shared its original placement with an abstract frieze by Oteiza and a desk designed by Ferreira. The combination gave the office a “thoroughly modern and vivid air”, in the artist's own words<sup>91</sup>.

In the mid nineteen fifties, Agromán built three branch offices for Banco Guipuzcoano, in Madrid, San Sebastián and Tolosa. The company, which had already enlisted the artist's services to decorate the Fénix Hotel grille, commissioned three murals from him, one for each new bank branch. The one painted first, which has been conserved, was painted directly on the wall of the Madrid office in an abstract language based on assembling and intersecting planes of colour. As in his canvases, he deployed constructivist art with a predominance of formal and chromatic values. The work dismisses reality, expressing a purely visual experience whose origin is to be found in the analytical process consisting in the decomposition of form. Manrique resorted to acrylic paint, a use unprecedented at the time. He achieved extraordinary results for the precision and flexibility with which he could paint his geometric meshes and, naturally, for the chromatic vibration and expressive finish attained. His penchant for technical experiment and for researching the potential of unknown materials was ongoing: monotypes, scratch work, ceramics, acrylic paint, pyrography, mobiles... The tones prevailing in his characteristic Mironian and post-cubist organic matrices for the mural at the Banco Guipuzcoano's Madrid branch are green, violet and black. The composition is structured around

symmetrical formulas, with concomitantly balanced results. As in his paintings, clear straight lines are sometimes overlaid on the planes of colour to connect structures or generate an intricate geometric web.

The triptych titled *La pesca, la industria y la agricultura* (Fishing, industry and agriculture) – which is presently in very good condition after a recent restoration – was also completed in 1955, in this case for the bank's office in San Sebastián. Here the artist experimented with a realist theme revolving around the three basic productive sectors announced in the title, but expressed with a geometric vocabulary tending towards abstraction, which also included some of his icons: bird, fishing basket, boat, sea urchin, very schematic fish, tree... The artist himself noted, in a letter in which he used the ambiguous language that characterized the times, “that it's a triptych on wood, an abstract representation of the sea, industry and farming”. Here again he deployed his typical play on planes and lobe- and oive-shaped forms, using a gently rationalist brush except on the panel devoted to industry, which is harsher in its neo-plasticism. The character of the three modules on wood is the result of a constructivist, chromatically harmonized exercise: one – *La pesca* (Fishing) – in shades of blue; the second – *La industria* (Industry) – in black, ochre greys and red; and the third – *La agricultura* (Agriculture) – in green, i.e., along very conventional lines. As usual during this period, energy and formal agility prevail, reinforced by the play on colour – all-encompassing and softened – creating serene visual rhythms. Manrique's approach reverberates with the paradoxes characteristic of this stage of transition to abstraction, which he, like other artists of his generation, broached from the vantage of modern figuration, in a process involving decomposition of the painted figure. While the overall construction envelops the discourse in abstract poetics, there are still traces in this piece that link the language to tangible reality, whereas in contemporary works such as discussed above, he had moved into pure abstraction. It is, in short, a delicately executed triptych, subject to a brilliant compositional norm in keeping both with the spirit of the times – “a time for rediscovery of possibilities” as Moreno Galván wrote –, and the artist's flexible rationalism.

In January of the following year he adopted a modern architectural stance in the free-standing bas-relief piece he did for the Banco Guipuzcoano branch at Tolosa designed by Fernando Barandiarán, an architect in the employ of Agromán. Here also he chose the primary sector activities as his theme – farming, livestock raising and fishing. The edge was orthogonal: he outlined the outer edge and divided the work into three independent but matching units related through their specific geometric forms, a device that reinforced their constructivist nature. At the time, the artist found the result to be “very original”. Here he combined essentially schematic, flat figuration with an emphatically rational brush in an allusion to the distribution of farm land into plots. Organized around a tri-member structure, the central panel of the mural contains a highly elaborated monumental Basque home – differentially treated in shades of white and painted from a constructivist perspective – against a synthetic marine scene – boat, water, fish –, while the visual hubs in the two remaining plates are a wheel and a cow on the left and right, respectively. Several plastic symbols reminiscent of leaves, trees, plants and fish are combined with planes of colour and their organic matrices, whose spirit runs through the piece. In this mural,

<sup>91</sup> Letter César Manrique to Fernández del Castillo, San Sebastián, 12 January 1956. *Vid.* also Juan Ramírez de Lucas, “Arquitectura, la gracia en equilibrio”, *La Hora*, Madrid, 1956. The piece was removed from its original setting and is conserved in a private collection as a painting.

painted over plaster, the objectification characteristic of Manrique's painting is underscored by the use of synthesis and divestment of line. The plastic surface is organized around a grid drawn with deep, lightly hued incisions that stand out against the chromatically predominant shades of green and sienna. He scraped the upper side of the plates to soften the colour. The premises where this visually pleasing work of high graphic quality was hung also housed a sculpture by Eduardo Chillida and a wall clock designed by the Lanzarote islander, inspired in an abstract design to which he often resorted, namely two intersecting lines. It has fortunately been restored and is presently in good condition.

His muralist activity consolidated into one of the most intense of the nineteen fifties, adding depth to his contribution. Eduardo Westerdahl acknowledged as much in 1957 in a brief but pithy text, in which he highlighted the execution of the works and the artist's refined vocabulary, sometimes lyrical, sometimes rationalist and narrative: [...] Hence his art became prominent on the Spanish arena and, wedded with architecture, his work on significant murals – couched in sensationalist terms – yielded results that our new art had yet to achieve in Spain. [...] And here comes this painter, this artist from an austere island, who has taken it upon himself to trumpet modern man's position toward the phenomenon of art, from hotels, factories and banks. Laden with poetic volume, with a plastic language rooted in technical expertise, he runs from monotype to the calculation and logical narration of an essentially plastic story with such self-assurance and success that its sincerity, i.e., the transparency of his *oeuvre*, is immediately visible"<sup>92</sup>. César Manrique gradually added nuance to his artistic personality. His eclectic, flexible language accommodated situations without forgoing the contemporary penchant for exploration from which he would advance his proposals, immersed in the sign and tensions of his times, interpreted in his art from their most renovating and modern vertex.

He worked on as many murals in the second half of the decade as he had in the preceding five years. In 1956, in addition to the design he prepared for the main lobby in the building where he lived, he apparently did several pieces for Agromán's Kino factory at Villaverde, Madrid, which have unfortunately been destroyed without a trace. That same year he was commissioned to do a large-scale mural – three and a half metres high by six long – for the lobby in the Pantano de Cijara building (Puerto Peña Hydroelectric Plant) at Talarrubias in the Spanish province of Badajoz. The final result was a circumstantial work based on the accumulation of realist symbols – allusions to varied architectures, high voltage towers and power lines, trees, animals, impounded water, mountains, factory complexes... – interspersed with certain abstract forms. The world depicted corresponds to the activity conducted at the hydroelectric plant and its surroundings, guided by an objectifying, colourist and anecdotal attitude and a disaggregated distribution of the components, which are lacking in any hierarchy.

The following year he did another huge mural for the same principal, a large polygonal tympanum located over the entrance to the machine room at the

Puerto Peña Hydroelectric Plant (Cijara Reservoir). Here he used marble tesserae to narrate the tasks involved in generating electric power. At top centre, a huge ray of light flows from a light bulb, symbolizing the culmination the process of creating energy. On this occasion Manrique returned to the symmetrical composition and orthogonal synthetic figuration he deployed in the programme for the mural built in the Huarte construction materials plant in 1954.

In 1957 he did yet another fairly large work – one metre high by five long – for the Tenerife Clubhouse, using bits of ceramics in the embodiment of an abstract longitudinal proposal, designed around three main axes whose curvilinear planes generate a tempered geometry. The colouring is austere, with ochre tones prevailing in the background and shades of black and white in the forms. The artist consolidated his evolution toward abstraction in this piece, despite the subsistence of certain post-cubist echoes. Two years later, he built a monumental mural in the Sical factory at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, which he designed in conjunction with Manuel de la Peña. On a surface measuring five metres high by fourteen long, located towards the top of the facade of an industrial building, he created a work – that can still be seen today – with rationalist leanings, primarily using shades of white (a huge central acrylic stain), greys (pebbles), and red, blue and yellow streaks (pieces of ceramic tile). Once again, the variety of materials enabled him to exploit textural differences. The simplicity of this aseptic and restrained design does not detract from the visual effectiveness or the constructivist elegance of this work, which hints of concrete painting. Apparently, that same year he did a scantily documented painting on one of the walls in his Covarrubias Street home in which he juxtaposed thick rope-like strokes encircling planes of colour to other planes with a more subtle morphology.

In 1959, he painted two splendid abstractions – both since destroyed – for the Barajas Airport passenger terminal, sketches for which were shown in his solo exhibition at the Madrid Ateneo in 1958. One exploited rational planes, reminiscent of the agrarian or geological cover of his orderly lands, and the other gestural pictorial language – with traces of dripping, under the influence of the U.S. painting that he began to see at the time – a formula that the artist would continue to develop in the nineteen eighties and nineties. In the mural he did that same year for the wall in a storefront on Covarrubias Street – owned by Vicente Calderón, who had built the complex housing Manrique's recently purchased flat –, he experimented with the same language that he used in the paintings exhibited the year before in the Ateneo. On this occasion he painted a thick, orographically inspired net-like structure over a very rational grid, largely muffled by colour vibrations and a broad central disruption which, like an earthquake, introduces informalist and matter painting traits in a context of chromatic sobriety – white, blacks and ochres.

The experience acquired by working on the walls of buildings intended to serve different purposes accentuated his spatial sensitivity and afforded him training in constructivist procedures and solutions applied to the distribution of planes, figures and colours on large surfaces. The monumental scale of murals and their relationship with their surroundings strengthened the artist's expressive resources, while consolidating the sense of space he would later apply to his public art. His inclination toward architecture and the territorial dimension may,

<sup>92</sup> Eduardo Westerdahl, [Text in the diptych for the exhibition], *Manrique*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Casino de Tenerife, 1957 and also published under the title "Ante la exposición de César Manrique", *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 24 May 1957.

however, have also been stimulated by his early training as a quantities surveyor initiated in the early nineteen forties at his father's insistence, and forsaken only one year later for his fine arts studies in Madrid.

Throughout his career, Manrique remained loyal to the modern languages he used in the nineteen fifties. He consistently drew from them at different times in his life to do logos, graphic designs, silk screening, masks or sundry designs, i.e., miscellaneous expressions of his devotion to the applied arts, which he never ceased to practise. On the contrary, he reasserted his cultivation of these activities from the nineteen sixties onward, when he intensified public art work and his art-nature/nature-art aesthetic code: in other words, the romantic zeal with which he broached total art in the context of architecture and natural spaces viewed as machines able to produce collective happiness. This, ultimately, constituted the culmination of the forward-looking research and integrated creative practice that he deployed in the nineteen fifties, a period as fertile and seminal as they come, in whose factory of sensitivity and avant-garde restlessness the artist forged his unique personality.

In that regard, his devotion to mural art was no minor venture, as critics from Eduardo Westgerdahl or Juan Ramírez de Lucas to José de Castro Arines acknowledged: "In Manrique, more than an easel artist, we have a mural painter. His mural work signifies the true intention of all his painting". If his mural work is viewed as the seed of his determination to undertake the treatment of large spaces, that would in fact be true. Nonetheless, over the years, Manrique continued to add to his extensive muralist production. He employed different techniques, from *assemblage* to bas-relief, including ceramics or acrylic paint. Neither experimental zeal nor renovating energy were wanting in this artist, forged on the hearth of Spanish modernity. It is hardly surprising then that when in 1957 a local journalist asked him for his "medicine to stave off artistic ageing", he replied: "To stay young you have first to remain enormously curious about everything new, and know how to pick and choose from tradition only that which is good and healthy. You have to be consistent with the age you live in..."<sup>93</sup>. The gaze on that horizon was to become central to his behaviour.

### Integration of the arts on island scale: territorial architecture

Although César Manrique would not materially link his discourse to the landscapist, environmental and tourist dimensions of Lanzarote until the following decade, certain preliminary attitudes and action reflecting his interest in renovating island aesthetics and engaging in public projects began to appear in the latter half of the nineteen fifties. His territorial awareness emerged. From the earliest stages, he framed his work in the island cosmos, his professed creative womb. Lanzarote provided him with a substantial portion of his plastic arguments, the sensitivity of his imaginative world, while he drew from the tradition of modern aesthetics for his linguistic resources. From very early on, in fact, he related his abstractions with his native island's orography and skin, first

through experiment with textures and microscopic allusions to nature, and after 1959, explicitly enlisting lava as trope or synecdoche. Whereas his neofigurative paintings depicting local manners give life to a personal iconography stemming from the culture of his autochthonous landscape that crystallized into archetypes and the artist's own private visual mythology and poetics, his material concern for the territorial issue and public space began to take shape in the second half of the nineteen fifties and to be vocalized in the media from about 1957.

By then, a significant part of his work had been conducted in contact with architecture and professionals in that field, an environment that impacted his personality and impregnated his art with a spatial sense. With architects he shared information, perspectives and convictions revolving around formal and aesthetic questions as well as the scale of urban development, areas to which he would turn when working on his native island. Urban questions acquired considerable relevance in mid-century architectural discussions, as exemplified in Madrid's "Poblados Dirigidos" – Entrevías, Cañillas, Manoteras, San Blás, Elipa, Fuencarral, Orcasitas... –, architectural experiences that had a powerful impact on the construction of the capital city and enlisted the involvement of professionals such as Sáenz de Oiza, Carvajal, Corrales and Molezún and García de Paredes. Manrique lived in a context of a fluent exchange among the various disciplines, of permeable dialogue. Lanzarote, in turn, was immersed in overall underdevelopment, consumed by post-war misery and generally neglected. Nonetheless, there was an incipient awareness of the opportunities that tourism could afford the island, if it was capable of adapting and exploiting its natural attractions, essentially the Montañas del Fuego, Jameos del Agua, Los Verdes Cave and the El Río Lookout, opposite La Graciosa Island. All these were places marked by local tradition as centres of interest for their unique beauty. In this regard, the attempt of the local weekly *Antena* and its editor-in-chief Guillermo Topham to heighten awareness was particularly meritorious, for it combined geographic exaltation with demands for basic infrastructure and facilities that would further the incipient tourist trade, a position soon defended by César Manrique<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> For insight into Guillermo Topham's endeavour to promote tourism and his constant demands for infrastructure, see the following articles published in *Antena* in the period in question: J.D.S. "Lanzarote, vista en otras Islas. ¡Qué grande es Dios!", *Antena*, Arrecife, 15 September 1953; "Sol de primavera", [Editorial], *Antena*, Arrecife, 25 January 1955; Guito [Guillermo Topham], "Necesidad de un Parador en las Montañas del Fuego", *Antena*, Arrecife, 10 May 1955; Guito, "Cuidemos el Jameo del Agua", *Antena*, Arrecife, 18 October 1955; Guito, "Algo sobre el Jameo del Agua", *Antena*, Arrecife, 28 February 1956; Gahera, "Chispi-chispi de la semana", *Antena*, Arrecife, 15 May 1956; "Siete bombillas eléctricas alumbraron en la noche del domingo el islote de Hilario", *Antena*, Arrecife, 5 June 1956; Guito, "Mejoras en la Montaña del Fuego", *Antena*, Arrecife, 3 July 1956; Guito, "Así están nuestras carreteras", *Antena*, Arrecife, 23 October 1956; "César Manrique celebrará próximamente exposiciones en Norteamérica y Suiza", *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 April 1957; Guillermo Topham "Antes de su regreso a Madrid, César Manrique nos habla de Pintura, Arquitectura y Turismo", *Antena*, Arrecife, 2 July 1957; "Playas y caminos", *Antena*, Arrecife, 30 July 1957; Francisco García, "Lanzarote, tierra quemada y sedienta, Meca del turismo", *Antena*, Arrecife, 12 November 1957; Guillermo Topham, "Preguntas sin respuestas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 February 1958; Guillermo Topham, "Preguntas sin respuestas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 18 February 1958; Guillermo Topham, "Preguntas sin respuestas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 8 April 1958; "El hombre de superficie del islote de Hilario", *Antena*, Arrecife, 9 September 1958; Topham [Guillermo Topham], "Preguntas sin respuestas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 14 October 1958; "El Cabildo Insular proyecta construir un hotel de turismo con capacidad para 100 camas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 November 1958; "El hotel turístico del Cabildo", *Antena*, Arrecife, 25 November 1958; Guillermo Topham, "Camino de Ye", *Antena*, Arrecife, 30 June 1959; "Preguntas sin respuesta", *Antena*, Arrecife, 15 September 1959; and Guillermo Topham, "Preguntas sin respuestas", *Antena*, Arrecife, 20 October 1959.

<sup>93</sup> Agustín de la Hoz, "El sólo hecho de nacer en esta isla es un privilegio para cualquier artista, dice César Manrique", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 June 1957.



It would not be long before this media-conscious artist was to sound his opinions on contemporary island architecture, which he openly censured for, in his view "it does not by any means blend with the climate or the natural beauty of [island] orography or the mildness of its incomparable and unique climate. All they do is build the most unsightly things they can think of"; but at the same time he rejected traditionalism and sided with young architects: "our hope lies in the new generation of architects, who have been struggling to educate ignorant clients with typically *nouveau riche* taste unable to see beyond golden cornucopias, chandeliers and velvet curtains"<sup>95</sup>. Such criticism went hand-in-hand with a discourse advocating both modernity and the use of new materials, and the merger between construction and nature, an idea that would be central to his future interventions: "Canary Island architecture is devastating: precisely because of the region's privileged climate, architecture should be conceived to form a whole with Nature, using noble materials such as concrete, iron, glass and plastic, rather than deploying what they call 'typical Canary' construction, an artifice, an invention that under no circumstances suits the characteristics of our islands"<sup>96</sup>. Manrique's defence, several years later, of anonymous architecture – Gillo Dorfles addressed this same question in the February, 1958 (No. 339) issue of *Domus* and in 1964 Bernard Rudofsky drew attention to "architecture without architects" in his exhibition at the MoMA –, was more a question of behaviour inherited from the premises prevailing in the nineteen fifties than a paradox, a vindication of popular architecture closely related to the formal images of modernity, interlinking revision with tradition. The asceticism and simple, rationalist morphology of island construction blended seamlessly with the artist's aspiration for renovation, although he never renounced functional revision or the updating of vernacular typologies. His home at Taro de Tahiche, which echoes the organicism of the nineteen sixties, stands as a clear example of this attitude. In the abstraction of popular architecture reduced to pure, white rationalist volumes contrasted against the brutality of the volcano, he discovered an essentialist, modern rationale that he related to the most progressive experiences he shared in Madrid. Nonetheless, on occasion he was also known to champion the conservation of island heritage, moved by an eagerness to maintain the singularity of local culture and, from the tourist perspective, to protect the island from banal standardization and the loss of its roots; but in general he broached this task from the perspective of habitability and the serviceability of resources<sup>97</sup>.

The situation in the capital city, Arrecife, prompted his first public remarks on island urban planning. Now and again, his observations on the occasion of his constant trips to the island would prompt him to comment in the local or regional press on specific issues. At the time, he also shared his views with the mayor of

the city, his friend José Ramírez Cerdá<sup>98</sup>, particularly about the works for the new municipal park under construction along the shore (1957-1959) in an area that the city had begun to backfill in 1953<sup>99</sup>. In contemporary interviews, Manrique denied any influence in certain changes – plants, soil and so on. But his fluent dialogue with local authorities very likely had something to do with the inclusion of certain specific details respecting the use of pebbles and volcanic materials in sections of pavement located under the masonry pergolas in the park<sup>100</sup>.

In 1959, however, he became directly involved in the final stage of the design authored by Gregorio Prats, in which he was entrusted with a small, modern architectural structure intended for the sale of local craftwork<sup>101</sup>, a nearby conic monolith and the design for a playground on the east end of the park. There, in addition to a new sculptural landmark consisting in an enormous sphere made out of reddish volcanic rock set on a likewise volcanic, but black, plinth<sup>102</sup>, he designed a trapezoid pond and did the landscaping for the surrounding area, using pebbles, cacti and bushes for the planters. He also built a fountain and brought in a wealth of plant life, including a few palm trees; he laid pavements with tiny pebbles, volcanic stone and grass to create a web of different textures; and he dressed the enclosing walls around the playground by whitewashing the cement in between the volcanic stones in the traditional style, as in the rest of the outer walls and parterres around the park as a whole. This gave the playground the air of a secluded garden, picturesque both for its geological components and plants and the use of local materials. At the same time, Manrique included an element that would become a constant in all his public spaces: water as a metaphor for the Garden of Eden and fertility.

<sup>98</sup> José Ramírez Cerdá (Arrecife, 1919-1987) and César Manrique were close friends throughout their lives. Ramírez Cerdá was mayor of Arrecife from September 1955 to February 1960. He was later appointed President of the Lanzarote Island Council, a position he held from 1960 to 1974. Lanzarote owes the take-off and development of its tourist economy to his initiative and management, and the trust he wisely placed in the artist. Capable of forming a team of politicians and technicians – Antonio Álvarez, Jesús Soto and Luis Morales were among the most prominent – under the aegis of the island's maximum authority in the nineteen sixties and seventies, he created the necessary conditions, practically from scratch, to implement the extensive public infrastructure programme needed to develop the tourist industry. The art, cultural and tourist centres created by César Manrique were built during his term, under his protection and political drive. He is remembered in Lanzarote with respect and affection.

<sup>99</sup> See the following articles in the local press on the construction of the municipal park: "El Excmo. Sr. Gobernador Civil en Lanzarote. Ayuda para las obras de relleno del Parque Municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 21 April 1953; "Relleno del Parque Municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 28 July 1953; "También se estudiará un nuevo proyecto para el parque municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 24 November 1953; Guito, "La maqueta del Parque Municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 September 1954; "Iniciación de las obras del nuevo parque municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 29 January 1957; "El nuevo parque municipal de Arrecife", *Antena*, Arrecife, 4 June 1957; "Segunda etapa en la construcción del Parque Municipal: aljibes, aceras, fuentes, árboles y alumbrado", *Antena*, Arrecife, 15 April 1958; Antonio López Suárez, "Un milagro de la voluntad. El nuevo Parque Municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 17 February 1959; Guillermo Topham, "Iluminación del Parque", *Antena*, Arrecife, 21 July 1959; "El nuevo Parque Municipal de Arrecife", *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 August 1959; "El bar-balneario del Parque Municipal", *Antena*, Arrecife, 24 November 1959.

<sup>100</sup> It consists in a whitewashed cement roof, glass walls from floor to ceiling and red volcanic stone cladding on the facade. *Vid.* Guillermo Topham, "César Manrique celebrará próximamente exposiciones en Norteamérica y Suiza", *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 April 1959.

<sup>101</sup> Architect Manuel de la Peña worked with César Manrique in this public space. They were friendly at the time and De la Peña visited the park works with the artist on several occasions, when they shared ideas and jointly designed the most modern of the elements in the project, such as the box for the curio shop, the pavements and the conic monolith.

<sup>102</sup> Manrique took the volcanic monoliths in the Cactus Garden, at the time an abandoned aggregate quarry-cum-junkyard, as a model for this sculpture.

<sup>95</sup> "Para César Manrique la pintura canaria no existe...", *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 21 April 1957.

<sup>96</sup> Gilberto Alemán, "César Manrique habla para los pintores canarios", *El Día*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, April 1957.

<sup>97</sup> In the second half of the nineteen sixties, he started work on a project to visually document popular architectural typology on Lanzarote, with a view to establishing a formal repertoire for future island architecture within the context of tourism. He conducted this work, in which he was encouraged by Manuel Millares and Juan Ramírez de Lucas, in conjunction with photographer Francisco Rojas Fariña. It culminated in 1973 with the artist's self-publication of the book *Lanzarote, arquitectura inédita*.



He imbued the fountain built in the pond with a sculptural personality. Made out of three large stones with hollows, it affords visual continuity with the other stone elements used outside the pond, such as the planters where cacti grow. One of the stones, which has two holes, is laid on the bottom of the pond, while the other two, one of which is also perforated, form a single unit: the smaller stone, a sort of stylized cone similar to the organic forms of the artist's paintings, stands on its tip on the larger one in apparently precarious, unstable equilibrium. The construction of the sculpture is reminiscent of the earthy surrealism of certain works authored by the Vallecas School, as if Manrique wished to pay discreet tribute to his youthful friendship with Pancho Lasso. During his teenage years, in post-war, secluded and needy Arrecife, Lasso and the Millares siblings<sup>103</sup> were the artist's only contacts with culture and a certain cultivated sensitivity<sup>104</sup>.

*Antena*, the local paper, reported on Manrique's contribution on several occasions and, more or less incidentally, on the mistreatment to which the tiny park was subjected under everyday use, suggesting it should be protected for its artistic value: "Everyone knows that the initial design for the park called for a playground opposite the Iberia office. But happily, soon after the work was begun, César Manrique arrived on the scene and turned the area into a lovely spot, with its green, carefully tended lawn, cacti, palm trees and fountains, an eye catcher for locals and visitors: an exuberance of originality and exquisite taste. But with children in the area, much of the beauty has now been devastated. The lawn is dry and trampled, the pond full of paper and other waste, and even some of the bushes are uprooted. The present playground could, then, be closed off with chains (and not a picket fence, please!) while the children could play, run about and amuse themselves in the ample space available in other sections of the park"<sup>105</sup>.

He built another sculpture with the same materials and linguistic tone nearby, on the other side of the entrance to the wharf – close to a bank of former public toilets on the maritime promenade. Neither of these pieces has been conserved, although the playground is still standing, the victim of the passing of time and municipal neglect. These were not, however, his first public works in the island capital. In 1950, in addition to painting the murals, he also participated in the decoration for certain areas of the Arrecife "Parador". He designed a stand for

the tourist bureau, for instance, that included a panel containing photographs with the island's tourist attractions – the future Cactus Garden, El Río Lookout, Jameos del Agua, Los Verdes Cave, Timanfaya... were all displayed – alongside a small Manrique painting around a local theme. The first year of the decade was a fertile one for the young painter: on the occasion of Franco's visit to the island he also rehabilitated Las Palmas Square, opposite San Ginés Church, designing benches and parterres as well as the landscaping.

After his enlightened activism had begun to mature, in April 1957 he stressed the need "to create an island awareness of what urban planning should really be". And along with the opportunities for urban and landscape regeneration afforded by the city's maritime facade, he took a firm stand in favour of "good taste" and the institution of modern architecture: "To create an island awareness of what urban planning should really be. Persuade people that Arrecife is endowed with superb natural features that could make it, in the future, the most charming and picturesque city on the archipelago. But this calls for proceeding with a sense of what is strictly modern and a view toward the future, establishing high standards for the approval of new building designs, under the supervision of professionals specializing in defending good taste and modernity. The Canary Islands, fortunately, has such expertise. It's not fair for a whole population to have to pay for the lack of foresight of only a few"<sup>106</sup>. He also suggested a remodel for the Charco de San Ginés and the construction of a maritime promenade alongside, which he offered to design cost-free<sup>107</sup>. A few months later he again insisted on the value of the Arrecife marina and openly criticized the construction of a building – the former ice factory – opposite San Gabriel Castle. The outspoken criticism for which he would be renowned was already beginning to emerge: "I think that what's truly tragic, and wholly unfair, is to deprive a whole people of the only thing that they felt proud of: having a marina open to the sea, full of light and corals, with its charming golden San Gabriel Castle, that has now been irreparably covered up with a monstrous blind wall. But what I can't understand is how such an atrocity could be perpetrated, since it completely blocks the view of the charming and distinctive marine landscape from the Directorate General of Tourism's "Parador"<sup>108</sup>.

Beyond his direct interest in the environment of the city where he was born, he began to champion the need to gear the island system and economy to tourism.

<sup>103</sup> The Millares family lived at Arrecife from 1936 to 1938, when Agustín Millares was exiled and the head of the family, Juan Millares Carló, found a position as liberal arts professor in the Instituto de Enseñanza Media (secondary school).

<sup>104</sup> In his *Memorias de infancia y juventud*, written in 1969-1970, Manuel Millares recalls that Lanzarote was both where he started to draw from life and where he met César Manrique, although their acquaintance was fairly superficial for the difference in age. Millares laces his description of a visit to Manrique's studio when the latter was around 18 years old with very subtle critique that reveals César's earliest interests: "Speaking of painter César Manrique, by that time already very prone to *sfumato* drawing. Once I sneaked into his studio – in an attic in his home – with his brother Carlos and was truly impressed by his very realistic and finely finished copies of movie stars and nudes that he took from fashion magazines. That made me think that what I was doing at the time was trash! With hindsight, there can be no doubt about which was more authentic: the real, the direct world, or affected copies. César used to hang out with my older siblings and was – and still is – a good friend of all of us..." Manuel Millares, *Memorias de infancia y juventud*, Valencia, IVAM, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>105</sup> "Miscelánea urbana", *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 October 1960. *Vid.*, also, "El nuevo Parque Municipal de Arrecife", *Antena*, Arrecife, 11 August 1959.

<sup>106</sup> Guillermo Topham, "César Manrique celebrará próximamente exposiciones en Norteamérica y Suiza", *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 April 1957.

<sup>107</sup> His replies in an interview with local journalist Guillermo Topham afford a glimpse of his tendency to become involved in projects for public buildings and facilities: "Any tourist-related initiatives?"

"When I was in Las Palmas the other day, Ginés Arencibia – a good citizen of Lanzarote – suggested an idea that I think is excellent and perfectly viable. To demolish the old Institute building, which is Island Council property, and expand the Charco de San Ginés to Cuatro Esquinas, building a sort of promenade or maritime avenue. The result would be fantastic."

"Would you commit to doing a preliminary design?"

"I'd be delighted, and without charging a cent. I'd be willing to do the same for the Arrecife Clubhouse environment and interiors, providing a new building is built on the marina. I'd try to make it over with a completely modern environment and style, something yet to be seen on the Canary Islands".

<sup>108</sup> Agustín de la Hoz, "El sólo hecho de nacer en esta isla es un privilegio para cualquier artista, dice César Manrique", *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 20 June 1957.

The favourable atmosphere on the island, particularly among a small number of authorities and businesspeople, made the time ripe for calling for investment in the infrastructure needed to exploit the island's landscape via tourism. That trend crystallized during the nineteen fifties. Manrique not only connected with this concern, but linked the economic alternative involved to an aesthetic proposal, associating tourism with art, heritage and nature to generate a new territorial culture. This signal contribution to the integration of the arts in the context of the leisure time industry, which he first posed in this decade and successfully and very originally developed in later years, opened up an unprecedented and original perspective for Spanish and international art. In a July 1957 interview, local journalist Guillermo Topham asked him about his ideas for tourism. A portion of the conversation follows:

"Any innovative ideas for tourism on Lanzarote?"

"Two."

"The first?"

"I think it would be a good idea to build a simple but modern hotel on the 'Island of Love'. I know that costs a lot of money but it would be wonderful. And in the long term it would be a good business."

"And the second?"

"Build a kind of stone amphitheatre in the Jameo del Agua. Bring in electric power (with batteries) to feed a group of coloured lights. For instance, once a month, when tourism is at a peak, it could be used for simple theatrical performances or ballets with just three or four characters. The effect of the light and colour on the lake in such a strange and original scenario would be something you couldn't see anywhere else in the world. The next time I come to Arrecife, which will be soon, I plan to draw up a design for that project."

"If we could find new and original ways of complementing the natural beauty of our island, Lanzarote's tourist stock would rise several points on the market. I've become more and more enamoured of my island"<sup>109</sup>.

Eight years later, the idea suggested in 1957 would begin to materialize.

In that interview, Manrique was outlining his future programme for Lanzarote: "If we could find new and original ways to complement the natural beauty of our island, Lanzarote's tourist stock would rise several points on the market. I've become more and more enamoured of my island". He was anticipating his own horizon, the involvement in the island's future, and his own after his return in the late nineteen sixties. His public art would fall within the conceptual range he defined at this time: to provide "other new and original ways to complement" the island's natural beauty for enjoyment by a broader public. He began to develop his proposal for Lanzarote on these foundations of creative added value for the natural landscape. This approach would be supplemented, among others, with a genuinely critical awareness which from the nineteen eighties onward would flow toward ecological activism. Even in the adverse Francoist atmosphere prevailing in 1957, he was publicly critical of the course of events, even as he advised of what tourism could mean for the island and its future: "You need to look at the present to see

the future. And the present could hardly be more discouraging. There's no airport, the roads are a mess, maritime communication is poor, the conservation of some of our most attractive tourist features is inexcusably neglected, the Island Council is lethargic: in a word, a disaster. And besides I don't believe that Lanzarote has really thought about what tourism can mean for its future"<sup>110</sup>. From the local iconography and nature that underlay a substantial portion of his plastic imaginative world, later enriched with the use of lava as a trope, he advanced toward territorial myth; enlarging the scale, he would turn from canvas to territory, thus charting the first few miles of his intense island course. He began by valuing the energy and aesthetic features of the island, recognizing it as the source of his creative universe and later converting that emotional experience into a shared political and social argument. He contributed to renewing how the place was seen, to capitalizing on it in terms of visual value and enriching it with his own artistic contribution, adding culture to nature, recreating the landscape in modern terms and endowing his initiative with a functional – economic – purpose. In the mid-century years, his interest in urban planning was incipient, the result of his work with architects. In 1957, journalist Luis Álvarez Cruz certified César Manrique concern for these new issues, which were to guide his action in the following decades in the framework of his territorial, tourist-driven and architectural programme; but it first arose in this initial stage when his complex personality was still blossoming: "I met César Manrique one night in Eleuterio Población Knape's studio, where I had arranged to see another architect, Félix Sáenz Marrero, from Tenerife. After I listened, naturally in silence, to a veritable conference on urban planning theories that touched on all the possibilities of aesthetics as an ally in the function assigned to urban centres, we went out for a walk..."<sup>111</sup>.

In his devotion to island cosmovision, the artist would act as a veritable driver of modernity from the vantage of art, guiding the transformation to a tourist economy that would be undertaken on Lanzarote in the nineteen sixties. He had already begun to work in that direction in the nineteen fifties, as the authorities acknowledged in 1962. José Juárez Sánchez-Herrera, the manager of the Arrecife "Parador", expressly certified as much in an official letter highly illustrative of the artist's concern for and involvement in island development:

"That during the 8 years I have been in these Lodgings, I have received all manner of selfless support, advice and guidance from Mr César Manrique, which have helped put this Island on the tourist map.

His vision of the future of tourism on the Island dates from his youth, when he created the first photographic *reportage*, to later embellish squares and facades, advise authorities and individuals, defend good taste, hygiene and the colour white, and design parks and gardens with decorative elements that have made Arrecife a friendly city and a tourist host of great promise. Altruistic counsellor to all, creator and friend, with his energy and generosity he has always been not only the architect of all that is beautiful in this city, its conservation and urban planning, but at his home in Madrid has organized photographic exhibitions, parties and showings, investing time and money with the sole purpose of promoting his Island.

<sup>109</sup> Guillermo Topham, "Antes de su regreso a Madrid, César Manrique nos habla de Pintura, Arquitectura y Turismo", *Antena*, Arrecife, 2 July 1957.

<sup>110</sup> Guillermo Topham, "César Manrique celebrará próximamente exposiciones en Norteamérica y Suiza", *Antena*, Arrecife, 7 April 1957.

<sup>111</sup> Luis Álvarez Cruz, "Un pintor: César Manrique", *El Día*, 24 May 1957.

Untiring preacher, unswerving prosecutor, he sustains a belief in a better people, adversary of poor taste.

It is with pleasure that I certify the foregoing for all intents and purposes, regretting the brevity of a certification that can never express how much the Canary Islands and tourism in general owe to César Manrique<sup>212</sup>.

This document stands as proof of his furtherance of “good taste” and hygiene and his intervention in public spaces, as well as of the campaign that he started in the early nineteen sixties to demand chromatic standardization of island architecture. It also ratifies the close cooperation between the artist and the Lanzarote Island Council and the Town Hall of Arrecife that bore such brilliant fruit in the aesthetic enhancement of the island’s heritage, conservation of its landscape and development of its tourist trade.

By that time, César Manrique – “untiring preacher”, “unswerving prosecutor” and “adversary of poor taste” – had already begun to publicly voice his critical awareness of architectural and urban planning shortcomings. His reprehension was never devoid of consequences. His criticism of what he openly called “grotesque and aberrant architecture” at Las Nieves, Agaete, Gran Canaria, denouncing the concomitant deterioration of the landscape, appeared in the *Diario de Las Palmas* on 6 September 1962, triggering an incident on 21 October 1962 that led to his arrest in the object of his criticism<sup>213</sup>. The artist was vehement

in his reprimands, while defending orderly, harmonious architecture that would blend with the surroundings: “I can’t understand why, when people build, they turn their back on the landscape”<sup>214</sup>. Even in those early years, the press acknowledged his authority, legitimized by his contribution to tourism on Lanzarote and his efforts on behalf of the island, long before he attained all that he would ultimately achieve: “We tremble under the utterly justified indignation of this great Canary Island artist who has so dauntlessly defended his Lanzarote, which is tantamount to defending all the islands. What he has achieved there is a model of what can and should be done”<sup>215</sup>.

His unequivocally modern affiliation, his cross-disciplinary creative practice acquired in Madrid in the nineteen fifties and his insular drive, firmly directed toward recognition of the natural heritage, would, under his tutelage and energy, become a local benchmark. Together with the government and an efficient team of experts, he would channel much of the transformation taking place on the island, drawing value from its landscape in a dialogue with the aesthetic paradigms of his times and a vague but very foresighted idea of sustainability. But at the same time, he was to engage in a dialogue with the market, designing an economic model for tourism in which art, the enhancement of vast natural areas, a sensitivity to limits and the aesthetic domestication of both cultural resources and the island environment as a whole, were to play a substantive role. In a word, he was to advance a personalized version of a culture of relaxation, of art applied to comfort in the framework of the tourist industry, instinctively subjected to environmentalist criteria and certain hesitant guidelines that pioneered sustainability.

César Manrique, forged in the mid-century Spanish foundry, crystallized into a genuine and unprecedented artist on the national arena. His development was as swift as it was rooted in the telluric spirit of Lanzarote’s insularity, whose features he interpreted, eventually roosting in the very heart of its lava, from where he established an ardent relationship of carnal creativity with the body of the volcano in its full territorial dimension. Pollinated by the versatility and renovation of taste that was initiated by a cross-section of contemporary creative endeavour, he embraced an artistic paradigm that, seeded in modern diversity and convergence, was to blossom in the following decades, after incubating throughout the nineteen fifties. In following this course, he deepened the concept of the functionality, the application of art, embedding it in the economy and the popular culture of leisure through public proposals that connected with the sensitivities of broad swathes of the population. What he in fact did was to

<sup>212</sup> Certificate issued by José Juárez Sánchez-Herrera, manager of the National “Parador” at Arrecife, Lanzarote. One page on the Arrecife “Parador”, Directorate General of Tourism stationery, sealed and dated 24 November 1962. Fundación César Manrique Archives.

<sup>213</sup> The episode alluded to concluded, in effect, with Manrique in the local jailhouse for about twenty hours, by order of the mayor of Agaete. The police alleged indecent exposure: he was arrested for leaving the beach and walking down the street in a very tight-fitting bathing suit. When the police reproached him on his inappropriate attire, he replied that it was more important to do something about cleaning up the beach to attract tourists. He then walked into a shop, where he was arrested. Pepe Dámaso, Demetrio Santana, Valentín Armas, Agustín Sosa and Teresa Santana had spent the day on the beach with him. At the painter’s request, a notarized record was made of the incident. Because of his alleged misdemeanour, for which architect Manuel de la Peña, on behalf of the civil governor, tried unsuccessfully to have the painter absolved, Manrique was obliged to request certificates from the authorities attesting to the services he had lent to the various levels of government to the benefit of his native island.

In November 1962, both the President of the Island Council José Ramírez Cerdá and the mayor of Arrecife, Ginés de la Hoz Gil, along with the manager of the Arrecife “Parador”, José Juárez Sánchez-Herrera, each issued texts certifying the artist’s assistance to the Council and Town Hall and his furtherance of the tourist industry in Lanzarote in general. The certificates signed by the President of the Council and the Mayor of Arrecife are similar. The one bearing the mayor’s signature, dated 20 November 1962, states: “[...] I FURTHER CERTIFY: “That the many relevant services provided [by César Manrique] to this City include:

“1.- Wholly selfless artistic advice on urban planning and green belt projects and more specifically in the Municipal Park, the city’s pride and joy.

“2.- Firm and untiring advocacy of the Island of Lanzarote, both in the press and on the radio and through other media, always with enormous enthusiasm and often at his own expense, in painting exhibitions and other artistic activities both in Spain and abroad, placing the name of Lanzarote before his own.

“3.- Wholly selfless assistance with municipal tourist brochures whenever requested, and lately, publication of the book, *Lanzarote*, all of enormous importance for promoting the tourist industry.

“4.- Embellishment of any number of public buildings, including the ‘Nautical Club Clubhouse’, ‘Guacimeta Airport’, ‘Parador’ and so on all across the island, as well as other works elsewhere not mentioned here, for the list would be endless.

“5.- Cooperation with the team of Architects and Town Planners who are presently drawing up the General Zoning Plan for this Municipal District, as well as the respective land division plans for which this Municipal Government is responsible. He has likewise performed other planning work for private enterprises aimed at fostering tourism on our beaches [...]”.

Certificate issued by Ginés de la Hoz, Mayor and President of the Municipal Government of Arrecife. One sealed page, dated at Arrecife, 20 November 1962. Fundación César Manrique Archives. See also the certificate issued by the President of the Island Council of Lanzarote, José Ramírez Cerdá. One page, sealed, on Lanzarote Island Council stationery, dated 27 November 1962; and the aforementioned certificate signed by José Juárez Sánchez-Herrera. *Vid.* also in this regard: Juan Márquez, “Carta a César Manrique”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 11 October 1962; Sebastián Sosa Álamo, “Entrevista con César Manrique”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 13 August 1962.

<sup>214</sup> Sebastián Sosa Álamo, “Entrevista con César Manrique”, *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 6 September 1962.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*. Significantly, the article bears the following subtitle: “The beauty of the landscape of Gran Canaria is being destroyed and with it the source of tourist wealth that only rational planning can assure”.

bring good taste and integrated art to mass culture, turning Lanzarote into a huge museographic industry, a systematized museum of place or, perhaps more precisely, a sort of new-fledged theme park subject to novel artifices and aesthetic norms, in which contemporary artistic expressions were popularized through co-existence with the sun, the beach and holiday amusement, while expanding the island's heritage and revaluing its landscape. César Manrique created an emotional and physical space by listening to and interpreting the essence of place, and, building on that symmetrical dialogue, by modelling and framing it, underscoring its aesthetic identity by drawing from its originary personality, of which he was acutely conscious. Lanzarote, in all its complexity, became the bloodstream of his endeavour. That vast, unprecedented adventure,

anticipating behaviour characteristic of the communication society, began to take shape in the nineteen fifties, while giving birth to a social, heterodox artist with an unsuspected localistic dimension and cosmopolitan purity, in whom a genius loci spirit was blended with the formal impetus of modernity. His most devout creativity was to materialize in the island as a whole, as a socio-economic, territorial and artistic work, but more specifically, in a formidable machinery of public and environmental art that accumulated creative languages and *genres*: machines able to metamorphose into enlightened factories of sensitization and material and spiritual well-being, sources of post-modern *semi-landscapes*, designed to be lived in, to advocate for an active living experience. Unique, indisputably unique.

Written under the sorrowful shadow  
of the recent absence of my father,  
Fernando Gómez Rueda,  
this review is dedicated to his memory.

[I wish to express my very sincere gratitude  
to Bisi Quevedo, Fernando Ruiz, Yeli Luengo,  
Irene Gómez, Chelo Niz and Margarita Amat,  
without whose generous cooperation,  
support, suggestions and understanding  
I would not have been able to complete this research on  
César Manrique's nineteen fifties *oeuvre*.]

# César Manrique in the nineteen fifties.

## Considerations on the development of a painter's imaginative world

Eugenio Carmona

Work on the first stage of the Jameos del Agua project was begun in 1966. The creative enhancement of that natural setting would soon be recognized as a decisive reference point in the Spanish art experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps even beyond. César Manrique was 47 years old at the time. He had been a professional artist for over fifteen years, but only now was beginning to receive recognition, which would slowly and continuously grow, even into the present. In the sociology of modern art, its practitioners rarely receive recognition at that age or under Manrique's circumstances at the time. However, the fact is that in his biographical data, his outlook on life and the precepts underlying his work, little of Manrique conforms *to the norm*. Certainly, what is now regarded to be *exceptional* in Manrique has defied the modes and methods of art history and critique.

In the context of an era, a chronological *point in time*, and based on some data or easily recognizable – although no doubt partial – contributions, art commentators create a *model*. Once this model has been established, everything else, everything that happens at that chronological point in time, must adapt to it or risk being left on the sidelines or classified as *excursive*. Thus, however much this epistemological criterion may be necessary in order to *manage to say something*, its basis only creates arbitrary limits.

Reviewing Manrique's work means doing battle with the models and epistemological considerations already in place. Manrique's very origins were different. Today, in any part of the world, the evocation of Lanzarote makes certain clichés regarding *The Fortunate Isles* accurate and true. Before Manrique, there was no one to look at the stony lunar landscape of the desert that dominates the island's physical features. Before Manrique, no first-rate art or artists led back to Lanzarote, despite the island's rich heritage. Since Manrique, Lanzarote has become an international beacon of contemporary creativity. This change, nearly a *mutation*, was made possible because César Manrique's life and work constantly espoused the cause of his place of birth. Lanzarote may not have enjoyed a great deal of esteem in the past as place to live. Manrique, in a perfectly coherent exercise of self-psychoanalysis, concluded that childhood is mankind's only *native land*; that in his childhood, in touch with nature, he had been happy, and that this happiness should be transmitted and exalted. Thus, it would seem that John Dewey might have had to wait for Manrique to see the *possible utopia* he described in *Art as Experience* become a reality.

However, for Manrique it was not only a question of *place* or *origin*: chronology was also a factor. The year the artist was born, 1919, also placed him in a *dissimilar* position. In the historical framework of Manrique's times, an artist's formative stage and first significant public presence was established as typically occurring between the ages of 18 and 25. As Manrique was born in 1919, these

seven years of his life coincided with the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the privations of both post-war periods. Manrique's year of birth led to a situation of *disparity*, on top of the *remoteness* and uniqueness inherent to his geographic origins. The year of his birth also affords a peculiar symmetry, in that it positions him equidistantly from two worlds and two separate eras: Manrique is the same distance in years from the youngest creators in the context of *new art* – from the Spanish plastic renovation prior to 1936 – and from the older ones among whom true modernistic tendencies resurged in the autarky of Spain under Franco. In other words, there was the same age difference between Manrique and Granell or Caballero as between Manrique and Tàpies or Chillida. Mentioning Granell and Caballero on the one hand and Tàpies and Chillida on the other is tantamount to speaking of two planets separated by the vastness of space. Because of the year of his birth, Manrique was betwixt these two frames of reference, a fact that was certainly instrumental in his segmental approach to artistic media<sup>1</sup>.

Without the twin supports of origin and context that most great creators need to develop, Manrique always had to define his own territory, serve as his own generational emphasis and stipulate his own context from within himself. This may also be the reason why Manrique arrived at his providential harmony between art and nature in Lanzarote; even if this was related to *land art*, public art or landscape architecture, it shares in all of their possibilities without falling within any of them, and in the end is something different from what all of these creative schools encompass. Even the harmony between Manrique's creative activity and the socio-productive structure (i.e., the implementation of Manrique's work in the tourism industry) places him on a different plane from the usual relationships between art and market. It distanced him from the mentality of most of his contemporary colleagues and took him back to a communion with the public and the collective experience that historically may only be comparable to the civic consciousness of ancient Greek art or the sense of a community meeting place represented by Gothic cathedrals. Certainly the utopia, the *desideratum* of not separating art and life that the avant-garde movements founded as the *raison d'être* of their plan – a *desideratum* that is considered today to be *unmet* – seems to find in Manrique's actions in Lanzarote an unexpected yet successful embodiment.

It is true that the historian's or art critic's analysis of Manrique is not accurate if it does not take into account the fact that the artist defined his own model. However,

<sup>1</sup> Manrique's strict contemporaries were Palazuelo (1916) and Barjola (1919). However, the Canary Island artist did not have the chance to travel to Paris in the immediate post-war period or to change his ideas or reshape his ambitions there.

no matter how many moulds are broken or which epistemologies are overcome, there is one thing that cannot be avoided in analyzing Manrique: the vision of his work and production as having an *end purpose*. In other words, at this time, it is impossible to consider Manrique's career without thinking that everything he created was right from the start ultimately leading up to his endeavours in the nature areas of Lanzarote. A time may come when another view is possible, but at this moment the idea of an end purpose is practically inevitable.

This is a reason to look at Manrique's work in the nineteen fifties and attempt to spontaneously take in what the work itself offers, and to try to give his *difference* historic and aesthetic meaning. However, first and foremost, an encounter with Manrique's work of the nineteen fifties inevitably gives one the urge right from the outset to confirm from the perspective of the past what would later become the greatest virtue of his experience as an artist: the universal value of the harmony between art and nature in Lanzarote's physical and human geography.

### 1. Traditional theatre on "Isla de Amor"

The painter at the age of thirty. The artist should already have expressed himself. The artist should already have given an indication of what his art aspires to be: the description of a *place*, of a place in art, of a definition in the plastic experience. Manrique's time frames and processes were not the usual ones. They had their own unconventional slant. It is surprising to find works by Manrique dating from 1949 or 1950 that do not yet have the premise of *the new*, the stamp of the modern. And then, almost suddenly, with no information available to help us understand exactly how it came about, Manrique was commissioned to paint murals in some of the main rooms of the recently built and opened National "Parador" or inn at Arrecife, Lanzarote. The artist had just completed his studies at the San Fernando School. For Manrique, getting to *San Fernando* had been a milestone, made possible by a combination of fate and tenacity, so he never had any disparaging comments about that place. However, when today's analysts or scholars think about what was happening in the world of art in the second half of the nineteen forties, about the almost heroic re-awakening of all things modern in the Spanish plastic arts of those years, and then see who Manrique's teachers were at this *venerable* Madrid institution, they cannot help but formulate equations that do not explain the results. But speculation on what might have been serves little purpose. Things happened the way they did, and life sometimes works out through paradoxes. When Manrique received and carried out the commission for the murals for the "Parador" in Arrecife in 1950, he encountered what would ultimately be his own destiny, because in this initial work his activity as a creator of public art and the link between his creative work and what today would be called the *tourism industry* came together, foreshadowing the future. At the same time, in these murals the artist established the presence of Lanzarote in his work as a *theme and a motif*, but especially as a *raison d'être*. One thing that has yet to be analyzed in depth is how and why an artist like Manrique decided, right from the start, to reject any subjectivity, any expression of the intimacy of the id in his art in order to devote himself to something that represented the aesthetic identity of an *origin* – almost in the Blochian sense of the word – which had to be set out, redefined and understood in its own context, in order to finally disseminate and universalize its most unmistakably characteristic traits.

Along with these initial examples of the exaltation of Lanzarote's *genius loci* and the social and industrial implementation of artistic practice, on another level, the first surprising thing that one notices upon viewing the frescos in the Arrecife "Parador" is the *style* in which they were done. The reference that immediately

comes to mind is Picasso's classical style. It seems strange, but it is undeniable: it is in the sculptural volume of the bodies, in the strong features, in the forceful presences, in some of the beautifully drawn limbs<sup>2</sup>. It is even better than any other *classical style* immediately prior to this 1950 work by Manrique. Historians might be tempted to allow mentions of Eugenio d'Ors, of Jesús de Perceval and the *Indalians*, or of one Vázquez Díaz. But no. If one looks carefully, Manrique is unlike all these. Manrique's creations are even reminiscent of an earlier time, of different historical circumstances in which recovering forms of expression akin to classicism had a very different meaning than the *classical styles* of the post-war period in Spain. The fact is that, strictly speaking, Picasso's classical period – the modern classicism of the period in Europe between the two World Wars – was not taken into consideration until practically the end of the nineteen seventies. Not until that time was this period of Picasso's production considered something other than an *excursus* or a rejection of modern style. And because of their stylistic kinship with Picasso's classical period, who can doubt that it has taken until our times for these frescos by Manrique to be understood and appreciated? Only after the neo-figurative emphasis of the nineteen eighties did the murals in the Arrecife "Parador" fit in with contemporary tastes. However, no matter how much the contemporary eye accepts these works in their singularity, one cannot help but think that the figurative encoding used by Manrique was out of sync with the progress of the Modern Movement in 1950. No matter how surprising one may find this fact, it may have some *justification*. The style of the murals at the Arrecife "Parador" is reminiscent of Picasso's classical style, but not only of this style. Manrique's principal affinity in this work is with the creators of *new art*, of the Spanish plastic renovation prior to 1936, who used the language of the new classical and realist styles to revisit or re-embrace the use of iconographic representations to capture the vernacular style. This would not be the first time that Manrique's work in the nineteen fifties harked back to his predecessors more than to his contemporaries in the attempt, unsuccessful because of the hostilities, to link the Spanish art experience to the international Modern Movement. It is as if Manrique had become the *heir* – a spontaneous and intuitive heir – to that entire historical experience. Manrique's frescos are thus similar to Picasso's classical period, but even more so to Maruja Mallo's 1927 Canary Island work<sup>3</sup>; to some of Josep de Togores' proposals; and even to Arteta's work of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Oddly enough, the relationship with Oramas, although conceptually explicit, is technically and formally less intense because of the way the pigment is applied and because of the different emphasis placed on capturing motifs. Oramas' quietistic condensation and metaphysical air are not found in Manrique, whose murals tended to be expansive, narrative and explicit<sup>4</sup>.

Even though it seems that Manrique falls within the tradition of the modern classical and realist styles, his Arrecife murals can be differentiated because of a singular feature. In each of the scenes, the artist gives priority to the full awareness of the idea of *representation*. His murals are *representations* both in the broad and figurative sense of the word. In the largest composition of them all, *Alegoría de la isla* (Island allegory), there are drapes on both sides, as if they had been drawn back

<sup>2</sup> How can one not mention Picasso's 1919 *Sleeping peasants*, his *Pipes of Pan* dated in 1923 or, in short, so many other masterpieces in this period of the Andalusian artist's creative genius that Manrique had to be familiar with, although how is not clear, because at the time Picasso's classical works had not been reproduced in publications about the artist, nor included in monographs or reports.

<sup>3</sup> Among other works, this includes the famous *Mujer de la cabra* (Woman with goat), which now forms part of the collection of the Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza.

<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to relate in greater detail this work by Manrique to some contributions by Plácido Fleitas and even Felo Monzón, to whom Manrique is undoubtedly to some degree an heir. Manrique also seems to have inherited the ideal of Domingo Doreste at the Luján Pérez School when he stated that it was necessary to impress upon Canary Island artists the need to revalue autochthonous art and to create it from the symbols and landscapes of the islands.



to allow us to witness the staging of a *tableau vivant*. *El viento, la pesca y la vendimia* (The wind, fishing and the grape harvest) deploys the well-known rhetorical device of a *picture within a picture*, as *baroque* as the previous one. Furthermore, in these three compositions, the figures go beyond the frame that gives the scene its contextual setting. This device is typical of graphic design, although it emphasizes the composition's *theatrical* appearance. In *La pesca* (Fishing), the anchor and mooring line that are depicted even go outside of the abstract area of the frame around the scene, creating a *trompe l'oeil* that forces the viewer to question the nature of the relationship between what is real and what is painted. The development of all these *linguistic alterations* and the priority given to the awareness of representation over the meditated verisimilitude of what is portrayed made it clear that Manrique was conscious that he was creating an imaginative world. For Manrique, an encounter with the tradition of modern painting meant devising an imaginative world. An encounter with the representation of the vernacular style meant constructing another imaginative world. Regardless of the characteristics of his figurative language, these assumptions made Manrique an essentially modern creator, in whom the determining factors created by the scenic and film arts played a fundamental, shaping role. This not only distanced Manrique from the painters of the nineteen twenties and thirties, whose heir he had seemed to be, but also from mural art that was *pro-classical* in theory but retrograde in practice, and which, tacitly or explicitly, was laden with propagandistic value. The walls of many official provincial buildings are covered with such paintings, most by artists who have long since been forgotten.

## 2. Two metaphysical still lifes and one mystery

The painting of the murals in the Arrecife "Parador" must have been the focus of all of Manrique's productive efforts in 1950. Two oil paintings, one on canvas and the other on burlap, show the style of the murals in easel works. They are both still lifes. The first one, done in 1951, has no known title. The second one is known as *Frutos en la alfombra* (Fruit on the rug). In these paintings, the sense of a metaphysical legacy is greater than in the murals. The influence of the Italian Novecento is even more evident, although Manrique, anticipating future attitudes, swings right from a truly penetrating metaphysical density (seen in *Frutos en la alfombra*) to a tendency towards cheerful, straightforward decorativism, seen in the 1951 work.

However, these two still lifes are the only known works by the artist done in 1951 or 1952. Unless new discoveries come to light and change what is already known, the only thing that can be stated is that a productive void took place in Manrique's work during these years. No causes or reasons for this are known, nor are there any signs or indications that invite conjecture. There is a mystery enshrouding these dates, and the only thing that can be confirmed is that Manrique's production regained strength in 1953, to such a degree that he even began to diversify his styles and approaches. He became several Manriques in one, and thus began his *nomad painter* style.

## 3. Towards an aesthetic of leisure. The *Guacimeta Style* and its implications

Manrique's *awakening* or *renaissance* in 1953 was accompanied by his undertaking and creating a great work: a mural over one metre high and almost ten metres long for the terminal of Lanzarote's Guacimeta Airport. Once again, the details surrounding this commission, which would undoubtedly have been

enlightening, are unknown; but in looking at the work itself, it can be said that the artist created *ex professo* one of the primary *styles* or *approaches* of this period in his career.

Yet again, the theme of the mural is none other than an allegory of Lanzarote, or better still, in this case, a *presentation* of the island. More accurately, one could say that the theme of the mural is the presentation of the elements that the artist and the sponsors of this work felt gave the island its identity. Thus, it was intended both as an *introduction* and an *affirmation*.

Because of the unusual dimensions of the composition, Manrique divided it into three connected sections (we might say three sections and four scenes), distributed almost proportionately and separated by a date palm and a flowering cactus, and linked together by a symbolic female figure in the centre. The scenes on the two sides are devoted to the island's maritime and fishing activities. The central area of this composition focuses on references to volcanoes, to vernacular and monumental architecture, to agriculture and farming, to flora and fauna, and finally, to the *local population*. At this time in Manrique's work, the scenery of the island blends with the elements that populate this landscape.

The nudity of the jug-bearing female in the centre indicates this figure's allegorical nature; she is the descendent of the female figures carrying jugs in the Arrecife "Parador" mural, albeit with a different stylistic approach. This figure is undoubtedly alluding to the island's first settlers, and therefore to a tale of Lanzarote that goes beyond history; like the Arrecife painting, it nevertheless shows continuity within itself as it fuses the image of this jug-bearer with those of peasant women in contemporary dress. Note here that Manrique is still using the *classical* layout that places the allegory of the island's identity in the relationship between the female figure and the landscape. Meanwhile, the island's legendary *timelessness* is emphasized by the simultaneous presence of the sun, moon and stars in the sky.

The relationship between the Arrecife and Guacimeta murals is evident. This was inevitable. However, in three years, Manrique had not only evolved conceptually but also *stylistically*. From the artistic adaptation inherited from the modern classicism and realism of the pre-war period, the artist had progressed to a flat, figurative, schematic style with a moderate propensity towards geometric shapes. The relationship between classicism and flat, schematic figuration is not unusual in the context of historic avant-garde movements; this occurred in cubism and also in Italy during the period immediately after World War I. Once again, Manrique seems to feel more comfortable looking back towards the first "-isms" than he does with contemporary artistic trends. However, the figurative style used by Manrique in Guacimeta is also related to graphic illustration, to caricature and to *decorative art*, the latter in the full sense of the term, i.e., to the incorporation of modern developments in the so-called *minor arts* – no slight intended. In a certain sense, the synthesis that the artist achieved was foundational, because the style Manrique developed in the Guacimeta mural apparently launched in Spain what Juan Antonio Ramírez called *El estilo del relax* (relaxation style)<sup>5</sup>; in other words, a variation on everything relating to the art of the leisure culture and specifically to the tourism industry and the presence of visitors, especially in places where a beach and the sea are decisive factors. In Spain, this *relaxation style* particularly took root on the Costa del Sol, in Majorca and on the Costa Brava, especially after the mid nineteen fifties. To a lesser extent, the *relaxation style* also developed in the Canary Islands and in Lanzarote, but this work by Manrique, which was truly anticipatory or ahead of its time, may also be the first *monumental* example of this trend – a trend, by the

<sup>5</sup> See: Juan Antonio RAMÍREZ, *El estilo del relax. N-340. 1953-1965*, Málaga, Colegio de Arquitectos, 1987, Carlos Canal and Diego Santos (eds).

way, that is usually anonymous in many of its manifestations, but in this case is the work of a famous painter.

Among other things, this means that when Manrique painted the Guacimeta mural, he simultaneously used two tones: one corresponding to the *intellectual* or *liberal* artist involved as such at a supposedly *high* level in the Fine Arts system, and the other to a creator involved in developing *applied arts*. Because of Manrique's temperament, convictions and personality, the interaction of these two tones in his work created no contradictions. The aim of the modern utopia at its best was to eliminate the boundaries between these two fields of creative activity, whose delimitations are actually not very clear. Even so, many plastic artists of Manrique's time – many of his contemporaries – emphasized the role or model of the artist as an *intellectual*, even giving rise to collusion with certain political positions, philosophical tendencies and *lifestyles*. Because of this attitude of *differentiation*, they looked down on or stifled the role of the creator involved in the *trade* of applied or decorative art, although the desire for the integration and symbiosis of the arts under the umbrella of modernness, especially favoured by some architects, was one of the milestones of the nineteen fifties. At the same time, graphic design was reaching unequalled heights of aesthetic effectiveness.

In any case, from the standpoint of the aesthetics of mediation – or from what was known some years ago as the *sociology of taste* – Manrique's attitude in the Guacimeta murals must be regarded not only from the perspective of historic artistic models but also from the artist's desire to create an *advanced* plastic or aesthetic point of reference, establishing a perfect empathy with the interests of the developing tourism industry<sup>6</sup> in Lanzarote in the same way as earlier artists who painted religious subjects might have been empathetically connected to the beliefs or doctrinal positions of their sponsors.

From this point of view, Manrique's mural had to embrace certain values. In principle, it had to serve as a nexus between the pre-eminence of technological development that the airport represented – keep in mind that this was the Canary Islands, Spain, in 1953 – and the pre-eminence of nature and the vernacular style that Lanzarote's tourist appeal demanded. It is necessary to consider the fact that if Lanzarote had not had any specific identifying traits, or a unique *physis*, i.e., *interesting* natural features, the island would have never attracted tourists. However, Lanzarote's geography and identifying features at that time could be said to represent the *primitive*, while the airport was a symbol of *modernness* and *evolution*. Something had to bridge the gap between these two extremes, and the mural claimed this mediatory role for itself. At that time, the mural's mediatory nature was more important for everyone involved, including Manrique himself, than the latest artistic proposals arriving from a distant place to the setting where those affected lived and worked. Manrique's mural, therefore, had to express the island's distinguishing features while at the same time giving the impression of *modernness*, of belonging to a *modern* era that was also *universal*, *understanding* and *warm*. It would be a visitor's first indication that he was arriving in a place where the vernacular landscape and culture remained untouched, but where modern efficiency (in other words, *comfort* and *technology*) would facilitate his stay.

Even so, even acknowledging the Guacimeta mural's role in *aesthetic mediation*, Manrique's creation was also linked to other lineages. These are pedigrees that reflect the development of modern style in the different ways in which art is received and consumed. On a certain level, what Manrique created in Guacimeta might be related to the spread (*popularization*, if you will) of certain modern

features of Art Deco<sup>7</sup> in which geometric simplification was a stylistic *requirement*. Another influence that Manrique's mural might have received is in the decoration of outside walls, a result of the modification of rationalist or functionalist architecture, either because of its sponsors' *horror vacui* or a need to *compensate* for the universal standardization of a rationalist style through allusions to vernacular or institutional elements. In its early days, some clients of rationalist architecture *feared* that the social importance of certain buildings would not be understood through their architecture *alone*. They missed the persuasive powers or reassuring properties of symbolic references<sup>8</sup>.

In the nineteen thirties, this correlation among modernness, applied arts and architecture was seen in the presence of mural art in American architecture, in a large percentage of official architecture in Europe – the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, for example – and in some works under Italian fascism. Although it may seem surprising, Manrique's mural seems to be a descendent of some aspects of the work of Renato Paresce or Mario Campigli, especially the Campigli who created the frescos for the Fifth Triennial Exhibition in Milan, or the Mario Sironi who painted the frescos in Milan's courthouse, although in the Guacimeta murals the *virtual space* characteristic of the Italians is replaced by Manrique's *accumulation* and by the overlapping of geometric planes created through the schematic reduction of key iconic elements. On the other hand, both the law of frontality and the Italians' *tutto scandito e delineatto* do seem to be assimilated by the Canary Island artist, although the mythification of the vernacular style transmitted by the fascist ideology is obviously missing in Manrique's work. The latter, in the midst of defining the *relaxation style*, chose to show a synopsis of vernacular elements in a play of *warm* and *friendly* references.

On a smaller scale, with less talented artists involved and with less straightforwardness from the authorities, certain aspects of the integration of the arts that were encouraged during Italian fascism later became incorporated into the official artistic activity of Franco's dictatorship, relating to the Falangist presence<sup>9</sup>. How familiar Manrique was with this type of artistic expression, which extended to the print media, is unclear. Manrique's iconic reductionism is formally related to it to some extent. The way he transfers the iconography of vernacular elements to the modern field of communication is also related. However, Manrique's vital emphasis is so different that any comparison or epochal relationship between these two references simply cannot be maintained. What can be maintained, on the other hand, and also points to an avenue of future research, is the relationship between Manrique's mural and the use of art applied to architectural decoration that began to develop in California years before Manrique undertook his work in Lanzarote. The *relaxation style* certainly had its origins in the architecture of leisure and the world of entertainment that developed in California, influenced by the American Art Deco style and by organicistic rationalism.

In any case, the aesthetic synthesis achieved by Manrique in the Guacimeta Airport mural may or may not merit our approval today. One might debate whether its decorative style is appropriate or too *plain*. Whatever the case, Manrique's great success, his great achievement with the Guacimeta mural, was to establish the bases for a linguistic system, a means through which the island

<sup>7</sup> And this on top of the fact that Art Deco was already a *popularization* of modern style.

<sup>8</sup> Something similar might have occurred with the Guacimeta airport. The developers of the property may have *feared* that the airport might look like *any airport anywhere*, and so they supported Manrique's mural in order to anchor the airport to its surroundings, among other reasons.

<sup>9</sup> To a certain degree, and on a smaller scale, as already mentioned, this applied to some public works relating to "vertical trade unionism" (the official union organization set up under Franco), Centres for Education and Relaxation and for the Women's Division of the Falangist movement.

<sup>6</sup> And also the infrastructure and communications industry. *Tourism* here is understood to include its socioeconomic aspects as a whole.

of Lanzarote's adaptation to tourism could *speak*, could *express itself* from a modern perspective. Other geographic regions of Spain that were also involved in the tourism industry did not have this *language* (perhaps a better way to refer to it than *speech*) that would have enabled them to express themselves in their own accent; and in the end, this cost them dearly, with the unfortunate loss of their identity and essence. Manrique's creation, on the other hand, proved its effectiveness in 1953 and would continue to do so two decades later.

#### 4. Primitivism and archaeology

In the Arrecife and Guacimeta murals, Manrique did not neglect to include the earliest settlers of Lanzarote. He actually gave them a prominent role that had never been theirs before by placing them in the centre of their respective scenes, despite the fact that so little was known about them at the time. He imagined their features, depicted the Zonzamas petroglyph and recreated some elements of native material culture. Manrique's relationship with the archaeologist Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez<sup>30</sup> had probably kept him informed on these subjects, and for a time, in around 1953 and 1954, he felt the pull of primitivism. He was not the only one to feel this attraction. In a great deal of the best innovative art of post-war Spain, the rediscovery of prehistoric art was given the same emphasis as the reencounter with modern tradition. César Calzada recently recounted this occurrence<sup>31</sup>. Miró's case was special, and among experts on the subject, the *Escuela de Altamira* and the special primitive presence in the work of Mathias Goeritz and Ángel Ferrant surely come to mind. In Las Palmas between 1950 and 1952, *Los Arqueros del Arte Contemporáneo* (LADAC), expressed their explicit desire to revive prehistoric and primitive Canary Island art. It is a well-known fact that Manuel Millares openly borrowed pictographs and other elements from the native culture of Gran Canaria in the first, brilliant stage of his work. Strictly speaking, in the context of these islands, all of the renewed awareness of native primitive art dated from 1918, when Domingo Doreste founded the Luján Pérez School of Decorative Arts. One of the founding principles on which the school was based that is worth recalling at this time was the almost simultaneous renewal of an appreciation for both native and vernacular elements, in the quest for an artistic style based on the rediscovery of the primitive past and on capturing typical island landscapes. As this proposal was launched when the movement to embrace and expand modern art was at its height, these ambitions relating to autochthonous art on occasion formed an alliance with the new aesthetic (as in Oramas, mentioned earlier or Felo Monzón for instance). They even crossed the dramatic Rubicon of the Civil War, before reaching César Manrique in the early 1950s.

It was evident – *inevitable*, one should say – that when the *raison d'être* of Manrique's poetics was established as the exaltation of the vernacular elements and *genius loci* of his native island, he should be tempted by the primitive style. It was, nevertheless, a brief but intense encounter, which shaped some premises for the future. A 1953 monotype, with no known title but which might be called

*Ídolos, exvotos y arquitectura* (Idols, votive offerings and architecture) within this document, shows how the *Guacimeta* style was applied in the encounter with the iconic reference to native culture. The colourful composition describes a nocturnal setting, and this gives it a special air of mystery. The presence of votive offerings depicting limbs that have been cut off or are shown separately from the body as a whole makes the mysterious atmosphere almost surreal. The large idols that, like primeval telamones, cover the entire façade or entrance arch of a dwelling, heighten the sense of magical unreality. By including references to the aboriginal culture in this work, Manrique actually takes us on a tour of the island's history, shown through a variety of historically consecutive architectural elements. Thus, he shows that his vernacular aims are always all-encompassing and owe no debt to passing or temporary intellectual fashions.

The synthesis of elements presented by Manrique in *Ídolos, exvotos y arquitectura* (Idols, votive offerings and architecture), together with the primacy of the plastic language used, make this work similar to certain solutions of Latin American indigenism, especially as found in mural art, with which Manrique apparently was very familiar, as evidenced by some of his statements to the press. However, on the other hand, the tone used by the artist, the primacy given to style and the air of naïveté are powerfully reminiscent of the primitivism of Jean Dubuffet and Roger Bissière in the second half of the nineteen forties, and therefore take him to the threshold of Art Brut.

But Manrique did not pursue this possibility. In 1954, the artist changed direction to some extent in his involvement with primitivism. He painted a composition in oil on particleboard, whose elongated format, measuring 46 by 174 centimetres, evokes a mural frieze. In this work, he presented an entire, consecutive set of idols, votive offerings, fauna and native ceramics, in the manner of a logographic writing system from the earliest great civilizations<sup>32</sup>. Once again, the similarity between Manrique's work and some indigenist expressions in Latin American art is striking. However, Manrique was not to continue along this avenue, and he never went on to enlarge this composition to a work of greater dimensions.

In those same years, Manuel Millares complained that some of the island's native artistic elements were being trivialized and cheapened by being used as a decorative setting to attract the emerging tourism industry, based on the premise of exotic appeal. Perhaps Manrique's intention in this piece was to begin responding to his friend's complaint, one which he most likely shared. However, for whatever reason, any direct allusion to things aboriginal was excluded from his plans after this attempt. It may be that Manrique needed something related to all this, something having to do with the primitive, but with a different intellectual significance. He tried to achieve this with archaeology, an unusual point of departure in arriving at an encounter with telluric matters. Between 1954 and 1957, although these dates are somewhat inexact, Manrique developed a peculiar style in which some strange, arcane objects are displayed to the viewer in a presentational manner, on a neutral or indistinguishable background. According to the contemporary local press<sup>33</sup>, these pieces were generically entitled *Objetos enterrados* (Buried objects) and were inspired by the artist's curiosity about the work of the archaeologist Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez, who in 1941 had published a book on *Enterramiento y enterramientos de los canarios y los guanches* (Burial and the burials of Canary Islanders and Guanches). Indeed, Manrique's works seem to be recreations of a vision of

<sup>30</sup> Biographies of Manrique always suggest that he met Jiménez Sánchez in the mid nineteen forties. This would lead one to believe that Manrique's later interest in anthropological and archaeological matters took on meaning when the artist began to establish the bases of his imaginative world. For information about Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez and his activities, see: RAMÍREZ SÁNCHEZ, Manuel E., "Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez y la investigación arqueológica en la provincia de Las Palmas (1940-1969): un balance historiográfico," *Actas del XIV Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2002, Volume II, pages 549-565, Conference held in 2000.

<sup>31</sup> CÉSAR CALZADA, *Arte prehistórico en la vanguardia artística. Miró y la posguerra española*, PhD thesis presented at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, June 2004.

<sup>32</sup> The work is now entitled *Ídolos y exvotos guanches* (Guanche idols and votive offerings) and forms part of a private collection. Whether the word *guanche* was contributed by the artist himself is unclear.

<sup>33</sup> One of the works in this series was reproduced in *Falange* on 9 April 1957, accompanied by the announcement of an upcoming exhibit of the artist's work in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

archaeological sites, which may very likely have dated back to the prehistoric era, or at least to pre-conquest times.

In any case, in his experimentation with primitive elements, however tentative this might have been, Manrique added another of the pieces necessary to complete his imaginative world. The passage of time would eventually confirm the direction of his quest. However, for the moment, in the mid nineteen fifties, Manrique had to explore other avenues of contemporary creative work.

### 5. Solar myth and the joy of living (a modern tradition...)

In 1954, Manrique effusively praised Pancho Cossío and his work in some statements to the press. There are no clear references or assimilations of this Cantabrian painter's work in Manrique's paintings. However, Manrique left a clue, which leads once again to the scenario and the examples of the Spanish plastic renovation prior to 1936 and its possible continuity in the historic context of the post-war period – not the period immediately following the war, but the longer period that went on well into the 1950s.

Manrique's compositions do not remind one of Cossío's, although some of them are reminiscent of Francisco Bore's work<sup>24</sup>; the latter, together with Cossío, created *pintura fruta* ("fruit painting"), or *lyrical figuration*, in Paris in the second half of the nineteen twenties. This style would also be present in the work of Viñes, Palencia and Moreno Villa both inside and outside the Spanish mainland<sup>25</sup>.

Strictly speaking, of Manrique's surviving or known works, only two are clearly reminiscent of the historic approaches of *lyrical figuration*: the monotype known as *Marinera roja* (Red seafarer), from 1953, and the acrylic on panel, also from 1953, usually known as *Desnudo azul* (Blue nude). In addition, from a generous (or skilled) vantage, the famous monotype entitled *Noche de Malpaís* (Badlands night)<sup>26</sup>, also from 1953, could be included within this frame of reference as well. Even though the figurative presence is crucial and inescapable in the original or paradigmatic *lyrical figuration*, the tendency towards the abstraction of the figures is greater, as is the refusal to consider the existence of a *scene* that can be linked to the conventional or traditional system of representation. Whether through a coincidental style in his own vein or via assimilation through a familiarity with specific works, Manrique's paintings have in common with *lyrical figuration* a penchant for diluted ink and for sketching, the effects of immediacy and transparency, and a latent sense of enjoyment in their execution, whose aim, when transmitted to the viewer, is to arouse empathy centring on a certain *élan vital*: the wellbeing of feeling oneself part of the existential flow, the fruition of the subject

portrayed and harmony with one's environment evoked through plastic materials. However, as always in Manrique's works, the exaltation of the vernacular traits of Lanzarote is more powerful than any other factor. This is why the figurative and descriptive emphasis is more pronounced in his works, because the artist undoubtedly wants these visual references to be immediately recognized by the viewer and not confused with any other geographic location or setting.

Furthermore, some works almost blend seamlessly with others, as if all of the references now regarded to be diachronic were shown simultaneously, or as if the artist were able to *move very quickly* in what he is experiencing and along the avenues he is exploring. Manrique *refers* in a very particular and personal way to the *lyrical figuration* of the second half of the nineteen twenties only to immediately tend more towards the creative space born of the milieu of the artists promoted by *Cahiers d'Art* in the post-war period. While it is true that some of Manrique's monotypes are clearly *Bore'sian*, viewed from a broader perspective the artist can be seen to be moving closer to the Paris-based creative spirits who, while embracing Matisse's legacy as fundamental, continued the tradition of some of cubism's essential tenets (not, however, without some detours along the way): more from the *cubist* style than from *cubism*; better from the cubism of the strictly French school than from Picasso's and Braque's cubism. Faced with the situation created by World War II, these painters quickly reached an awareness tinged with nationalism and the desire to affirm the modern style at a sombre moment: in 1941, with the German occupation well underway, they were presented to the public in Paris at the Braun Gallery, under the title *Twenty young painters in the French tradition*. Bernard Ceysson pointed out that this title was as explicit as it was ambiguous, especially because it juxtaposed the notions of *youth* and *tradition* and affirmed that a certain sense of modernness was a *French tradition*<sup>27</sup>. The most interesting artists from this 1941 show came together once again in 1943, this time at the Galerie de France, at the exhibit entitled *Twelve painters of today*. Present were Bazaine, Bore, Estève, Fougueron, Gischia, Lapique, Le Moal, Manessier, Pingnon, Robin, Singier and Villon. These artists to a large degree constituted what was known even during World War II and in the period immediately following it as the *School of Paris*<sup>28</sup>. This is when this term took on its full or most authentic meaning, because it did not vaguely refer to a simultaneous presence in one place but denoted stylistic or poetic traits.

When Manrique travelled to Paris<sup>29</sup> in 1953, he experienced this world. The announcement to the press that he was preparing an exhibit for the Louis Carré Gallery<sup>30</sup> confirms this, even though in the end this event did not take place, because

<sup>27</sup> In "L'histoire et la mémoire: tradition et modernité", *L'Art en Europe. Les Années décisives. 1945-1953*, Saint-Étienne, Skira and Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne, 1987, page 25 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> Evidently, other names that should be included with those mentioned, even though they no longer worked in the French capital, are Picasso, Matisse and Braque; and Nicolás de Staël is especially deserving of a place among this group. It is also true that both the concept of a *School of Paris* and the name itself are debatable. The value given here to the term *School of Paris* is first and foremost instrumental; however, at the same time, it reflects the formal and stylistic sense of a certain modern pictorial tradition, as has been stated.

<sup>29</sup> Once again, little information is available about an important event in the artist's life. It would be appropriate to investigate further in order to clarify all of these issues, as historians usually do with any creative artist of Manrique's importance.

<sup>30</sup> It appears that Manrique never did exhibit at the Carré Gallery. Perhaps the first announcement from the artist himself about this upcoming exhibit was a brief statement made to the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria newspaper *Falange*, published on 6 October 1953. In this statement, the artist said that he was preparing the exhibit and mentioned that he had been in Paris for "two months." Manrique's stay in Paris, therefore, was not a long one. One might think that it was not long enough to leave its mark on him, and therefore, Manrique's entire relationship with the new School of Paris must have taken place through other avenues of information and exposure, especially through journals and publications. For the rest of this year and into the next one, Manrique would continue to discuss his plan to exhibit at the Louis Carré Gallery in the local press. Incidentally, in the above-mentioned interview, Manrique was already showing an unusual degree of concern about the urban planning and public aesthetics in Arrecife and Lanzarote.

<sup>24</sup> For example, a 1954 monotype, untitled at this time, which depicts two fruit bowls and some cut oranges on a table, is especially similar to works by Francisco Bore from the same years. For more about Bore, see: *Bore esencial*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1999, Elena Dechanet and Eugenio Carmona (eds).

<sup>25</sup> For more information about *lyrical figuration*, see: Eugenio CARMONA, *Pintura fruta. La figuración lírica española. 1926-1932*, Madrid, Comunidad de Madrid, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> In his monograph about the artist, Lázaro Santana reproduced a well-known photograph, usually situated in Madrid in 1954, in which Manrique, who was thirty-five at the time, is showing this composition to one of his former teachers at the San Fernando School, Daniel Vázquez Díaz, who was widely known as *don Daniel* in a demonstration of reverential respect unusual in the Spanish art world. Vázquez Díaz, who was almost Picasso's contemporary, was seventy-two years old at the time, and he appears pleased with Manrique's monotype, although actually nothing could be further from his plastic approaches and his *teachings* than the aesthetics of the piece by the Canary Island artist. Evidently, some now find Manrique's loyalty to some of the people he trained with somewhat surprising.

Louis Carré in the nineteen fifties took up the baton passed by the Galerie de France in promoting and taking an interest in this type of painting and painters. At that time, these painters and their work were also achieving their greatest critical and commercial success. Ceysson<sup>21</sup> pointed out, for example, the importance that these artists had in the critical thinking of Pierre Francastel, who finally, after writing a great deal about them, classified them years later in *Painting and Society* as the culmination, no less, of the new concept of plastic space that emerged with post-impressionism. Because Francastel's work was widely disseminated internationally, this was no small acclaim. The amount of space devoted to this type of artistic experience by René Huyghe and Jean Rudel in the well-known and encyclopaedic *Art and the Modern World* is also worth recalling at this time. In short, French journals in the period immediately after the war had made these artists the leading figures in the latest example of modernity, although it is true that the quick spread of art informel and the increasing American domination substantially and unexpectedly changed the course of some prospects that had seemed excellent. Thus it was that when Manrique arrived in Paris, this artistic milieu, which had already been active for a decade, was experiencing a unique paradox: the social presence of this trend had reached its apogee, while at the same time, the historic relevance of its proposal was beginning to fade and showed no clear signs of having a future<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, Manrique became acquainted with the legacy of what was known as the *School of Paris* at a moment that was both culminating and terminal. However, this sociology of taste must not have mattered very much to him. It is true that in around 1955 or 1956, the artist himself nearly eliminated the elements assimilated from the *School of Paris* from his varied repertoire. The crux of the matter is that, apart from specific works in which it is evident that he felt very comfortable, what interested the Canary Island artist in all of this creative environment was *something else*, and he managed to obtain it.

In the early nineteen eighties, when critics reviewed this whole historic period – the nineteen forties and fifties – and saw the way the interests of the painting that descended from the earliest avant-garde movements were replaced by the interests of art informel, they were nearly unanimous in pointing out the void that had been left. This did not merely refer to the social and cultural permutations that the change from *Parisian* to *New York* movements entailed. It was another type of loss as well. The use of an informalist style and of lyrical abstraction, except in cases where this was inspired by orientalist lyricism or by pantheism, was tinged by their proximity to existentialism and to some forms of *negative thought*. On the other hand, among those who carried on the tradition of the *School of Paris*, starting with the explicit example of Picasso's Antibes period and Matisse's Nice period, the connection between painting and the affirmation of *la joie* or *la bonheur de vivre* was complete. This affirmation must have been what especially interested Manrique, and this was probably because of his temperament and his plans; in other words, because of his personality and because of a *desideratum* for his art. This *desideratum* was to positively affirm the immanent plastic and aesthetic values of an island he saw as his true *native land*.

Given this emphasis on the flow of vital and *solar* forces, it is not surprising that Manrique expressed his aesthetic connection with the principles of the *School of Paris* in two still lifes. The titles of these two monotypes from 1952 are unknown, but might well be called *Bodegón de las sandías y las manzanas* (Still life with watermelons and apples) and *Bodegón frutal canario* (Canary Island fruit still life). These clearly show that Manrique, while aware of the parameters and the profound

critical interpretations of the plastic environment in which he moved, did not shy away from involvement with decorative art. In other words, it seems clear from both monotypes that Manrique, while using an aesthetic approach that at times seems more hedonistic than vitalistic, had no qualms regarding the immediate correlation of his work with areas bordering on the *applied arts*, because after all, hedonism essentially amounts to the specific events of daily life. In fact, in 1953 the artist produced his first sketches of designs to be printed on fabrics made by Gastón y Daniela, and Manrique was not the only artist in his context interested in these *immediate and practical implications* of his plastic experience<sup>23</sup>.

Bearing this fact in mind, if Manrique approached the *lyrical figuration* of the nineteen twenties in *Desnudo azul* (Blue nude), and to a certain extent in *Marinera roja* (Red seafarer); if he combined the principles of this *lyrical figuration* with the imperative of the native paradigm in *Noche del Malpaís* (Badlands night); if he included a clear reference to Bore's style of the nineteen fifties in *Bodegón de las naranjas* (Still life with oranges); and if it is clear in these two monotypes from 1952 that one of his interests in moving towards this type of painting and its legacy in the post-war period also lay in the opportunity to use his aesthetic resources in the context of the applied arts, then this all goes to show that Manrique's imaginative world could move from one tone to another in his creative efforts, i.e., from the concept of painting as the epitome of fine arts to the more humdrum context of decorative arts, with no hesitation or fuss, just perfect naturalness. He also applied the same degree of excellence to all types of creative work, eliminating any type of artistic hierarchies. In Vallauris and Antibes, Picasso had explored the paths leading from painting and sculpture to disciplines that were considered *crafts*. Matisse did the same in Nice. Vallauris, Antibes and Nice immediately evoke the Mediterranean world, and therefore sunlight, a gentle sea, the caress of warm, humid air, harmony with one's existence and the pleasure of living. One might wonder to what extent Manrique tried to become assimilated into the significance of this aesthetic trend in order to transfer it to the essential and positive leisure experience of Lanzarote's physical environment, based on similar vital assumptions.

In any case, along with the implications of his life plan, Manrique never ceased to cultivate his identity as a *painter*. In its edition of 6 October 1953, the newspaper *La Provincia* showed him at work. The painting reproduced in the photograph seems to be related to the work of Bore, Gischia, Le Moal or Manessier<sup>24</sup> from the second half of the nineteen forties, although little can be said with certainty; as the painting's current whereabouts are unknown, it can only be evaluated through a rather poor reproduction. A similar case is that of *Bodegón de la figura románica* (Still life of the Romanesque figure), a work also dating from 1954 which is known today because it was reproduced in a daily newspaper<sup>25</sup>. This painting apparently formed part of a larger group meant to *decorate* the main rooms of some "paradores" (inns) in Galicia.

Be that as it may or as it might have been, in 1954, with the dizzying capacity for change and evolution that characterized this entire period, Manrique painted

<sup>21</sup> Ceysson, op. cit., footnote 17.

<sup>22</sup> 1955 was when Nicolás de Staël died, and also when the writings of Michel Tapié were most widely disseminated. It is also usually considered the date when this turning point took place, or the moment when the scales of interests among the most intrepid mentors of modern art tipped from the epigonism of the synthesis inherited from cubism and fauvism to the choice of matter painting, art informel and lyrical abstraction as the *best* representations of post-war art.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Jesús de la Sota, Arcadio Blasco and Luis Feito also designed prints for Gastón y Daniela. Manrique's fabric prints would continue until at least 1955. Oddly enough, a fabric print from that year, the one known as *Cerámica y gallo* (Ceramics and cock) was clearly in line with Bore's work from the same period. The applications of modern style in the context of daily life, consumer goods and group environments may have been of greater concern to architects. Actually, this entire field of Spanish creative activity of the nineteen fifties has yet to be discussed or described. The research and writings of Patricia Molins and Carlos Pérez are especially enlightening in this regard.

<sup>24</sup> Proof that Manrique knew these painters is that he stated his opinion on Manessier in an interview published in *Canarias Deportiva* on Saturday, 20 April 1957 on page 6.

<sup>25</sup> The painting was reproduced in *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, on Thursday, 10 April 1954, on page 2. The work was shown at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hispano-American Art Biennial.



two compositions that, while still within the aesthetic parameters discussed earlier, signalled a step in a new direction. These are two all-over compositions in which the figurative elements are articulated in a subjective or non-orthogonal geometric network. Both compositions represent a new boundary between abstraction and figuration. One of them *contains* a still life of fruit and flowers on a table, and the other is entitled *Mujer desnuda en la playa* (Nude woman on the beach). The first shows a clear Picassian influence, once again from this artist's Antibes period, although it is true that it is Picasso carried beyond his own conclusions to extremes of abstraction able to establish a dialogue with concrete art. The second was clearly influenced by Miró, from his *Las Constelaciones* (The Constellations) period. Once again, these are two references from the nineteen forties revisited in the following decade. One can easily guess that Manrique is trying something new. Yet again, it seems that Manrique is comfortable with the pictorial space inherited from the *School of Paris* and is not trying to be on the cutting edge of artistic innovation. Rather, his aim is to assimilate formulas – starting with initial references backed by an acknowledgment of modern trends – that enable him to develop solutions applicable to symbols that densify an existential dimension in Lanzarote, identified in this case not with the volcanic enigma but with the culture of pleasure characteristic of primeval coastal areas<sup>26</sup>. The language developed by Manrique in these two paintings is evidently derivative of the two great artists mentioned, perhaps even excessively so. But the important thing is the way both appropriations are implemented, and thus the way they are transformed. At this point, after first filling the entire painted surface while remaining loyal to certain themes, Manrique's work succeeds in expressing itself as *painting*, defined in the fullest sense of the word and of the concept of fine arts; as *graphic art*, apt to form a part of global actions in a utilitarian space; or as a *mural*, involved or participating in the public art dimension. One might guess that this is what Manrique sought: to achieve a language that would confer a quality of ubiquity on his work. The shift to this *ubiquitous mode* is undoubtedly found in other, possibly contemporary, paintings, whose origin can be pinpointed. As the aforementioned works borrowed so heavily from Picasso and Miró, they needed to be painted in a style that would achieve something that was more obviously original, in keeping with the importance of what they contributed. A first *solution* to this issue, or a first *correction*, can be found in two undated monotypes usually placed in around 1954. In these works, Manrique uses paradigmatic island icon themes, and these compositions only serve to expand on the vernacular motifs developed earlier in the mural for the Guacimeta airport using the new linguistic tone. One of the monotypes deals with the island's seafaring and fishing facets – and one might also find a certain allusion to the culinary aspects of the fauna, to farmhouses and to the Risco de Famara cliffs – while the other painting has a clearly agricultural component with mixed allusions to the physical features and wildlife of Timanfaya and the architecture of Tegüise (or of La Caleta) and other towns and villages in the island's interior<sup>27</sup>. At first glance, this second monotype seems nocturnal, feminine and Miró-inspired, while the first one seems diurnal, masculine and Picassian. Even though they are monotypes, both compositions have a sort of *mural* feeling, perhaps because of their *all-over* nature, and the stylistic ubiquity pursued by the artist is therefore explicit in them. To achieve this, Manrique had to get rid of schematization as a formal reduction of

recognizable prototypes and then develop a language of logographic signs that, when repeated, create a speech unique to the artist, an idiolect; nevertheless, it is easily recognizable by anyone who is familiar in the least with Lanzarote's physical and anthropological map. Some of the signs and symbols crystallized by Manrique in these paintings (fish, boats, plant life, architecture, etc.) would become separate from the whole in their own monotypes and compositions. In the long term, the elements systematized by the artist would now serve as a basic language in developing emblematic or symbolic icons, both in his art-nature works and those of a decorative character.

In only a year or two, while still alluding to the same visual and cultural icons, Manrique had left behind what might be called the *Guacimeta Style* and had developed a new style or *approach*, based on what he had assimilated from the legacy of both the School of Paris of the second half of the nineteen twenties and its new, post-war version. In the mid nineteen fifties, Manrique was using plastic resources that dated from at least a decade earlier. The artist ran the risk of becoming outdated; but in hindsight, it seems these delayed assimilations were essential to creating his imaginative world. With these assimilations, Manrique managed to move closer to a style of art that involved improving and enhancing life, and his figures served to enrich vital energies, intensify experiences and celebrate existence. This celebration of existence consisted, first and foremost, of emphasizing the pleasure gained from contemplating the island, Lanzarote, as a whole charged with aesthetic meaning, a meaning all its own that can be transmitted and objectified in the artistic realm.

Even with all he had developed, the timbre of Manrique's sensitivity and aesthetic practice did not stop here. In a 1954 monotype, the artist has eliminated both the superficial and the narrative effort of the logographic signs and icons to such a degree that the viewer does not notice the presence of two figures in the foreground which appear to be of different sexes. In this painting, the meeting point between the abstract and the figurative arrives at a *zero degree* similar to what is historically found in hermetic cubism, in Kandinsky and Klee, or undoubtedly comparable to that of the work of Jean Bazaine, Afro and Roger Bissière, and so many other artists of the *New School of Paris* in the second half of the 1940s<sup>28</sup>. Like them, Manrique also made the move to absolute abstraction. He achieved this seamlessly in 1954 and through at least two monotypes whose titles are unknown, in which the iconic memory lingers on like a peculiar stamp in the interwoven, non-referential forms. Upon arriving at this point, and through the colour of his sensitivity, which connected him with the memory and legacy of the most genuine *School of Paris*, Manrique reached a par with his Spanish and Parisian contemporaries. The emphasis on abstraction as a paradigm of the art of that time began to creep into his statements. This would not be the only avenue through which Manrique would delve deeper into abstract principles. Another quality of his sensitivity – his nomadic and varied sensitivity – would also take him to the same point, although in another way, from another point of departure. However, despite all this, what seems to interest Manrique more than anything else is not exactly *painting in itself*, *pure painting*, a referential art. In principle, Manrique arrived at abstract art through a route other than art informel, other than constructivist abstraction. His *possible evolution* was so quick – barely a year – that current critics hesitate to demarcate stages in his career based on events that might have taken place almost simultaneously. The history of art has shown that there is not necessarily a single evolutionary path from figurative to abstract art, and that the course of events can even point to the opposite route. The succession of dates next to the signatures on his works would support the belief that the artist's progression to a large degree followed the route outlined herein. What is worthy of note, however, is the independence of his sensitivity: at this point, it is neither

<sup>26</sup> Or in coastal areas suitable for tourism, with no negative connotations intended. One must consider the fact that, in the nineteen fifties, tourism had not yet acquired any associations of this type, especially for the natives of Lanzarote, who viewed it as a means for the island to survive. It might even be said that, at the beginning of the nineteen fifties, tourism had a sort of *chic* quality. On the other hand, this liveable space in Lanzarote served as a paradigm of Manrique's imaginative world, even though it had an immediate practical dimension. Ever since he created the murals for the Arrecife "parador" or inn, Manrique's imaginative world was shaped by this *desideratum*.

<sup>27</sup> Oddly enough, the geographic, cultural and iconographic setting that Manrique was slowest in assimilating more than just superficially was La Geria.

<sup>28</sup> Even Nicolás de Staël's proposal, substantially different in its plastic expression, was similar in creating this point of encounter between abstraction and figuration.



informalist nor constructivist. Even above that is the fact that the iconic stamp that is latent in these abstractions (in other words, the mark of his Lanzarote sign language) seems to show through like a pentimento, one that sets his work apart and reveals his true, underlying intentions.

## 6. The lichen metaphor and the poetics of the telluric

Towards 1954, the derivations, consequences and correlations of the most authentic languages of the School of Paris – both what was now the *old* School and the until-recently *new* one – seemed to be the focus of Cesar Manrique's plastic interests. This was not true – or at least not completely so. As already stated, Manrique in the nineteen fifties was, above all, a diverse artist, a *nomad* who superimposed varying stages of sensitivity or different stylistic interests, having them coexist for a time before developing some of the alternatives that had been coexisting. This all happened very quickly, in a short period of time. From what can be seen in his preserved works, Manrique the nomadic and diverse creator moved into a new tone in his production in early 1954. He continued in this vein until late 1957, and his work during this intense three-year period became the basis, even the *foundation*, of all of his later work.

This new Manrique who emerged from the heterogeneous Manrique was, in fact, also diverse: diverse in solutions developed from the same poetics. It has been said of the works at hand that they are compositions which – *finally* in the field of abstract painting, the abstract painting that seemed to be demanded by this period – swung between capturing art informel and concrete art. The truth is that these works – now painted in different techniques, media and sizes – can belong to both. However, strictly speaking, they were not exactly either one or the other. Manrique himself wanted to elucidate this, and he offered explanations about his work for the first time.

Early on, in the winter of 1954-1955, the artist wanted to present his new artistic tone to the public. He did this at the Clan Gallery. A photo from his personal files shows him at the age of thirty-five (although perhaps he looks younger), wrapped in a duffle coat (in fashion at the time, but anticipatory of the nineteen sixties) and posing in a corner of Tomás Seral y Casas' shop; this bookshop, which also contained exhibit rooms, played a decisive role in Spanish post-war culture, as did its owner. In the photo, some of the works on display can be seen hanging on the wall, with none of the requirements of today's exhibits<sup>29</sup>. The whereabouts of two of the four paintings shown in the photo are unknown, but as a whole these works show three of the possibilities of this new Manrique who is, almost unexpectedly, a Manrique influenced by things telluric<sup>30</sup>.

Throughout more than a decade, the Canary Islands press had always reported fully on the artist's activities. The national press had been more miserly in its coverage. With the exhibition at Clan, this trend began to change. This was proof

that Manrique was beginning to arouse new interest. Even so, the artist continued to save his best comments for the islands' newspapers, and this loyalty turned out to be revealing. Manrique spoke about his own work for the first time, establishing a *poetics*. When asked by Juan Hernández Rodríguez, the artist stated that his *style* – in other words, his new *approach*, as exhibited at Clan – aimed to represent “a virgin world, one still being formed, long before its natural crystallization,” adding that the *forms* that he brought to his paintings were “those of a dawnless world, on its first day...uncatalogued nature, with no documentation, before it was classified by Linnaeus.” According to Manrique, in these works “the light is solidifying on the canvas, (while) maintaining its luminosity and brilliance, as if it were transmuting into solid bodies.” The artist continued his inspired response by adding that “the transparency of the air” was becoming “palpable” in these paintings<sup>31</sup>. It was because of this explicit reference to nature, this plastic empathy with the emerging origins of the world of *physis*, that Manrique himself concluded that his painting was not abstract, even emphasizing in his statement that it was not abstract “in any way.” Strictly speaking, it was not, because his works captured or transmitted “a georgic world.” “I paint,” stated Manrique, “georgics of the forms of dawn, of daybreak. Nature is dawning in my paintings”<sup>32</sup>.

These statements were definitely enlightening. They summarized and determined the intentions of an entire creative project, one newly discovered but destined to develop in the future. At the suggestion of the artist himself, the journalists, although not exactly specialized art critics<sup>33</sup>, began to speak of “nature in a state of transformation between the real and the limitless,”<sup>34</sup> of “depths of a geologic nature,” of a similarity in textures to those of “mineral seepage on rock walls,” of hints of “volcanic rock” and of “sea beds,” of “unexpected microscopic displays” and, in short, of inward-looking and geologically incipient “crystallizations of lichens.”<sup>35</sup> Even the artist himself, two years after his exhibition at Clan, would keep insisting on clarifying the meaning of his work, stating that his *abstract* painting corresponded to Lanzarote's volcanic *landscape*, and adding that the work of other abstract painters was “more like an invention.” Manrique was not trying to rank these styles according to their merits; he simply wanted to make it clear that, despite the abstract appearance of his compositions, his work contained something “sentient” and “cosmic” that corresponded to nature on the island of Lanzarote, simultaneously profound and obvious, “incomparable” and “full of undiscovered (natural) spots.”<sup>36</sup>

Manrique's statements may have surprised his contemporaries. At the time the artist made them, the entire body of critical opinion that held abstract art up as a paradigm of modern art had already taken root in the United States and Europe<sup>37</sup>. The art of the historic avant-garde movements was even subjected to

<sup>29</sup> HERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Juan, “César Manrique expone en Madrid”, *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2 January 1955, page 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>31</sup> César Manrique's neglect by critics for a large part of the nineteen fifties is truly surprising. Few of the usual critics took enough notice of his work to comment on it properly, and this fact undoubtedly had an impact on the correct interpretation of the artist's intentions.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem*, footnote 29.

<sup>33</sup> CABEZAS, Juan Antonio, “La pintura abstracta como decoración mural. César Manrique y sus fondos geológicos”, *España*, Tangiers, 19 December 1954, page 10.

<sup>34</sup> In statements to Julio Trenas in the “Literature and Art” section of the newspaper *Pueblo*, Madrid, in April 1956.

<sup>35</sup> Strictly speaking, one must bear in mind the fact that by the mid nineteen fifties, all of the main aspects of the paradigmatic dominance of the abstract had already been set forth. The process began in the mid 1940s. By the mid nineteen fifties, the most noteworthy new trends encompassed everything relating to pop art, and to a certain extent to conceptual art; however, it took some time for these two proposals to shape a new line of critical thought capable of modifying historiographic models.

<sup>29</sup> Manrique exhibited a set of twenty *paintings* and two sketches for mural projects at Clan. It can be assumed, although this is really only speculation, that these twenty *paintings*, using different techniques and media, were somehow related as a whole. This assumption is based on comments in the print media which give this impression.

<sup>30</sup> *Telluric* is an adjective referring to everything relating to the Earth as a planet. The adjective has no pejorative connotation, although its allusion to superhuman geological forces or everything volcanic, for example, gives it disquieting connotations to some. The use of this term in the context at hand is an appropriation from the semantic field of the word to indicate any options that go beyond portraying vernacular elements and enter into identifying references based on capturing the aesthetics of the geophysical and material data of the artist's environment.

historiographic review against this yardstick<sup>38</sup>. At that time, the discussions in Spain on the relevance and meaning of the abstract were at a decisive moment, although the subject had already been the focus of debate for several years<sup>39</sup>. However, the abstraction that became a paradigm was aniconic abstraction, that of *painting-in-itself*, of pure, *non-referential* painting. With exemplary sincerity that conflicted with the most peremptory intellectual interests of the time, what Manrique said was that his work might look *abstract*, but its meaning, its *raison d'être*, was *representative*. Manrique's painting that appears to be abstract sprang from creative empathy with *natura naturans*, but it took specific aspects of *natura naturata* as a model, even if these specific aspects were either sensed or not visible to the human eye. When he mirrored nature in his painting, when he made nature both the foundation of his plastic poetics and the meaning of the mimesis in his works, Manrique, who did not hesitate to publicly defend abstract art<sup>40</sup>, distanced himself from the standards of the times and from the emphasis on the abstract – the absolute pro-abstraction *dogma* – of his contemporaries. In a critical system as authoritarian as the one in the post-war period, this exposed him to the risk of being left *on the sidelines* or of having the shadow of doubt cast on the relevance of his work. However, on the other hand – from a profoundly *beneficent* or even, to some degree, *visionary* standpoint – his proposal aligned him with other powerful traditions (even more powerful than those of aniconic abstraction), which in the long run turned out to be not only more suited to his personality but also more enriching in furthering his own creative experience. Obviously this refers to the entire tradition of the romantic idealization of nature, with which he was aligned intuitively and by affinity, and to which he would make a commitment in his artistic practice in favour of a productive pantheistic materialism. In choosing to pursue this route, Manrique positioned himself solidly within one of the most authentic and differentiating tones of the Spanish creative movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the one that based both the artist's vision (*eidos*) and the poetics of his works on the aesthetic rediscovery of vernacular nature. The sense of the telluric that Manrique developed is the same one that other artists had already established as the basis of their paintings or as the primary space in which they carried out their work. These included Gaudí; the Picasso of the *Period of Metamorphosis*; the Albertos and Palencia of what was known as the Vallecas School; the Miró of the *pinturas salvajes* ("savage paintings") period; the Dalí or Oscar Domínguez interested in the representation of the phylogenetic chain and in the emotional or psychological interpretation of geomorphologic configurations; the biomorphic Ángel Ferrant of the immediate post-war period; and the Chillida who began to develop a new, nearly definitive sense of his work between the late nineteen

forties and the early nineteen fifties. In other words, in pursuing his course towards the creative assimilation of the principle of *natura naturans* and the reflection of *natura naturata*, Manrique began to position himself in his own right in one of the main vectors of identification (or of *identity*) of modern Spanish art. As in all of the referenced cases, the reflection of the telluric essence, or the vernacular telluric elements, would establish the direction of all of Manrique's mature *oeuvre*, and of all of what is now his most important work.

But what was the origin of this tendency in the artist, which appeared to arise unexpectedly and which even coexisted with other, very different language styles for a time, even though in the long run it turned out to be so powerful? This is a question that cannot be answered at once. The answer may not even come from anywhere other than the capacity for discovery that all fully *active* and talented creators experience. Nevertheless, there is one clue. It will turn out to be a red herring, but there is no harm in pursuing it, because the alternative to this approach will lead to interesting conclusions and considerations.

There is a painting dated and signed by the artist in 1956, a lovely acrylic on cardboard, untitled, done in pristine whites and ultramarine cameo; it seems to represent the bottom of the sea or a lake on a bed of lava. Inscribed on this background is a motif covering the entire painted surface, in which an irregular ring or doughnut shape is connected by fine filaments to four tapering, horizontal forms. Because of the presence of this motif, this painting will be known within this text as *Forma anular y formas ahusadas* (Ring and tapering forms), solely for identification purposes. At first glance, the painting is immediately reminiscent of some of the versions of the 1931 work *Piedras y peces* (Stones and fish), by Benjamín Palencia, who in turn might have been inspired by a small painting of the sea bed done by Paul Klee in 1919 and reproduced in the Parisian journal *Cahiers d'Art* in 1929. Some tapering or fish-like forms also crept into the work of Pancho Lasso. Palencia and Lasso are directly reminiscent of the Vallecas School<sup>41</sup>. In 1939, when Manrique was twenty years old, he met Lasso in Arrecife, where both were from. Years later, well into the nineteen fifties, they may have met again in Madrid, although this is not known with certainty. In any case, the link between Lasso and the Vallecas School was through Alberto's work, and Manrique's acrylic painting is reminiscent of Palencia. However, even though Lasso represented a connection to the Vallecas School, why would this link be revived now? This is difficult to understand if one believes that Manrique simply wanted to update an episode from the *new art* years, from the Spanish plastic renovation of the nineteen twenties and thirties. However, it makes more sense if one thinks that Manrique, through a process of his own which will probably never be known with certainty, suddenly – but successfully – managed to arrive at a personal formula in line with certain aspects of what the original Vallecas School was trying to achieve – but many years later<sup>42</sup>. The similarities between Manrique's and Palencia's *oeuvre* are, in the event, actually a *false trail*. And to detour from that *false trail* is to blaze a truly revealing new one. A close look at what Manrique painted in *Forma anular y formas ahusadas* (Ring and spindle forms) shows that the similarity stems not from art history but from the natural world. The suggestive layout of horizontal rings and spindles placed, with subtle transparency, on a bluish-black bed of hollows and chiaroscuros imitating limestone formations or lava congealing as it reaches the sea, is very likely the

<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning the very well-known fact that some of the great retrospective exhibitions put on by Alfred J. Barr at the MoMA already redefined the experience of the first avant-garde movements from the perspective of abstraction.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the critical reception of abstract art in Spain, the following works by Julián Díaz Sánchez are unquestionably of great value: *La "oficialización" de la vanguardia artística en la posguerra española: (el informalismo en la crítica de arte y los grandes relatos)*, Cuenca, Universidad de Castilla – La Mancha, 1998; and *El triunfo del informalismo: la consideración de la pintura abstracta en la época de Franco*, Madrid, Metáforas del Movimiento Moderno, 2000. Deserving of equal consideration although its focus is not exclusively on abstract art is this work by Mercedes CABRERA GARCÍA: *Tradición y vanguardia en el pensamiento artístico español (1939-1959)*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 1998. Even though the first abstract practices date back to 1945 or 1946, the subject did not really become generalized in artistic circles until 1953, when the famous International Congress on Abstract Art was held in Santander. In recent years, several contributions have brought back the nineteen fifties in Spain; most of these have been in the form of temporary exhibitions. It is *strange* to see that César Manrique is absent in most of these exhibitions. This is even true when for some of these initiatives "the fifties" include part of "the sixties." The subject would be worthy of careful analysis, but in principle, it shows both the independence of the artist, who is difficult to link to situations marked by group action, and the *misfortune* that has always surrounded the critical reception of his work.

<sup>40</sup> He stated this to the local press in Las Palmas, and to the Canary Islands press in general. His statements in favour of abstract art began to become recurrent in around 1954 or 1955.

<sup>41</sup> For more information about Pancho Lasso and his relationship with the Vallecas School, see: *Pancho Lasso. Retrospectiva*, Lanzarote, Fundación César Manrique, 1997, Josefina Alix (ed.), texts by Josefina Alix, Fernando Ruiz GORDILLO and Eugenio CARMONA. For more about the poetics of the Vallecas School, see: Eugenio CARMONA, "La Escuela de Vallecas: Naturaleza, arte puro y atmósfera surreal", in *El surrealismo y sus imágenes*, Madrid, Fundación Cultural MAPFRE Vida, 2002, pages 257-280.

<sup>42</sup> One might wonder whether in the Madrid of the nineteen fifties anyone ever spoke of the Vallecas School of 1929-1932. Probably not. It is likely that the only Vallecas School discussed was the one from the post-war period.

portrayal of a microscopic lichen<sup>43</sup>. The spontaneous and, in the field of art, virtually anonymous reviewer who asserted that Manrique painted *microscopic visions* was not mistaken. Lanzarote has a particularly rich lichen cover. Timanfaya, where over 150 different species have been determined, is a veritable lichenological park. Conditions for the development of plant life are particularly harsh anywhere on the island's volcanic environment. The high temperatures, long periods of solar radiation and constant drying effect of the winds hamper the formation of soil where plants might grow. Providentially, lichens contribute to changing that panorama. They grow on bare rock, subsist on the water from dew or carried in the trade winds and resist the wide fluctuations between daytime and night time temperatures. They are the first visible colonizers of geologically recent lava, contributing to the fragmentation and weathering of the ground where they settle as well as to the formation of an initial soil apt for higher forms of plant life with more demanding implantation and survival requirements. The efficient ecological responsibility of lichens is certainly very familiar to biologists and zoologists<sup>44</sup>. From the aesthetic standpoint – *aesthetic* in the broadest sense of the word – this efficient ecological responsibility indisputably harbours a metaphor. Standing in contrast to the volcanic cataclysm, the zoologically void magma, whether red-hot or congealed, lichens, the microscopic crystals of lichens growing on lava, are the origin of life, the first link in a phylogenetic chain that binds the mineral, vegetable, animal and human worlds in a single principle. In the compositions discussed here, Manrique sought a *lichen metaphor*. He sought that fine, sensorily imperceptible point where a vital principle emerges from inert stone out of chance and necessity, the sheer assertion of existence. And obviously, seen from this vantage, the lichen metaphor carries a *metaphor* for the island of Lanzarote itself.

On the occasion of the 1954 Clan Gallery exhibition, the Canary Island press reproduced several of the works displayed. The columnist or the editor of a local newspaper, perhaps at the artist's behest, re-christened one of the pieces shown under a new title that was none other than *Origen del liquen* (Origin of lichens)<sup>45</sup>. Manrique, therefore, made the metaphoric meaning of his compositions public, explicit. The fact that his intention was not understandable at the time is another matter. The fact that the artist, who never denied the ultimate meaning or interpretation of his works, found no response for or was unable to freely proclaim his proposal in an environment dominated by the imperative orthodoxy surrounding non-referential abstraction, is another matter. And the fact that today's art critique, drawing from analytical axioms that survive in atavistic vestiges, has insisted in seeing in these works only traits concomitant with two forms of aniconic abstraction contemporary with the painting of these pieces, is another matter.

The present location of *Origen del liquen* (Origin of lichens) is presently unknown, but other very similar works have been conserved<sup>46</sup>. In these pieces the background, normally black and ochre, consists in reservoirs of paint applied not exactly with a brush but rubbed or deposited *ad libitum*, with no attempt to prevent it from

trickling<sup>47</sup>. Thanks to the pressure applied with the monotype plate and the artist's skill, the surface appears to be textured with tiny grotto-like hollows that suggest not only recent lava or a close-up view of limestone, but the features characteristic of matter painting. Over such surfaces the artist painted an abstract motif comprising a free but harmonious articulation of soft geometric figures or rounded outlines resembling triangular, rectangular, circular or elliptical shapes in the complex networks described by linear white filaments. These geometric motifs are reminiscent of many things. Initially, while depicted on a plane, they bring to mind Plucker's conoidal space, and therefore certain of Pevsner's or Gabo's three-dimensional pieces. They can also be likened to some of Alberto Magnelli's late nineteen forties compositions, Pol Bury's and Cesar Domela's late fifties reliefs or even – with a two-dimensional projection – Calder's mobiles. Actually, as suggested on several occasions in the foregoing, there is an obvious relationship between these abstract signs and the premises of geometric abstraction and concrete art<sup>48</sup>. The artist was certainly aware of this. Manrique also knew that the backgrounds for these pieces associated him with matter painting and informalism. But in this case the reference underlying his personal poetics was the transposition of the physical aspect of lava and limestone formations, whereas what Manrique deposited on the foreground of his works, the geometric forms, was a magnified reproduction not of lichens *per se*, of but their crystallography; he sited the origin of life itself on the microscopic lichen, or more precisely on an ancestral lichen-like entity characteristic of the Archaean Age, settling and even feeding on lava pillows, in a qualitative leap from mineral to vegetable and from inorganic to organic.

Manrique developed his *lichen metaphor* in these compositions and telluric suggestions with great originality and skill. Using similar manners and forms, he expanded on the theme, taking it from the generative capacity of lichens to the following stage, namely the formation of virgin soil. *Tierra virgen* (Virgin soil) was, in fact, the title of another composition – a work with muralist intentions – that was reproduced in the daily press<sup>49</sup> but which has since disappeared. In other words, this was the artist's approach, as far as we now know, until 1957, the prolegomenon to another period of his production.

But this was not the only way that Manrique arranged his encounter with telluric themes from 1954 onward. Strictly speaking, the morphology of the work cited above, *Forma anular y formas ahusadas* (Ring and spindle forms) is also visible in purely environmental pieces such as the 1954 *Sinfonía azul* (Blue symphony)<sup>50</sup> and a well-known untitled acrylic painting dating from around 1955. In other pieces, all of indisputable plastic value, tubular and circular microscopic lichens or microorganisms are laid against a bluish or limey white background. Manrique even experimented with textured backgrounds containing inscriptions similar to schematic prehistoric paintings, although only one such piece has been located<sup>51</sup>. But this work affords a glimpse into the profound, more conceptual than stylistic, connections to be found between Manrique's lichen metaphor, telluric setting and what in the present discussion of the other extreme of his production has been referred to as *primitivism and archaeological painting*.

<sup>43</sup> A microscopic lichen, a lichen crystal or a *prior* or primeval form, suggestively ambiguous in the definition of where its mineral nature ended and its vegetable nature began.

<sup>44</sup> Although this author is sincerely unaware of how familiar mid-nineteen fifties scientists were with the subject or what sources of information in this respect might have been available to César Manrique.

<sup>45</sup> The work was reproduced in the daily press on several occasions, explicitly under that title. Particularly significant in this regard is the series of photographs published in an article titled "César Manrique, en Madrid" in *Falange*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, on Friday 14 January 1953, page 6.

<sup>46</sup> The present whereabouts of several other works reproduced in the press at the time is likewise unknown.

<sup>47</sup> Manrique's backgrounds in these paintings can be likened or at least related to the backgrounds on which such utterly dissimilar authors as Hartung or Miró painted their calligraphies and figurations in the early nineteen forties.

<sup>48</sup> But that's not all. There is a surprising similarity between these compositions and contemporary graphic arts, including the covers of certain magazines published at the time or a few years earlier, such as the reborn or redefined *Art d'aujourd'hui*, and the poster art for the nineteen fifties Salon des Artistes décorateurs.

<sup>49</sup> In *Diario de Las Palmas*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 16 May 1955, page 9.

<sup>50</sup> The composition may not have been named by the artist himself. In any event, the title is not overly consistent with the plastic determinations of the times, for the immediate comparison it draws between music and the abstract experience.

<sup>51</sup> The title of this piece is also unknown today.

In any event, César Manrique's nineteen fifties production is also particularly relevant in another respect that must necessarily be broached, albeit succinctly. The painter's *artistic will*<sup>52</sup> was always driven by two essential aspirations: firstly, the conquest of modernity wedded with the traits of his own identity and origin, and secondly, the vital exaltation of his native geography, from the tacit awareness that what for him was paradise in communion with nature (*man's perpetual childhood*), for others was the expression of a barren land, lost in ahistoric time. Manrique made Lanzarote his theme from his earliest training. And when the artist began to embrace the premises of modernity, the island continued to be his subject. For him, it was an inalienable *subject*. But Manrique, whether painting in renovated classicist or kindly schematic style, painted type models. He painted farmers, men and women, fishermen, vernacular architecture, local fauna and flora and the schematized profiles of volcanoes. He always tried to illustrate the *wealth* of this primary life. But irrespective of the stylistic tone used, the iconographic support in his *oeuvre*, as in the works of so many other artists embarking on similar attempts, referred his efforts back to the long tradition of Spanish painting based on the illustration of *local manners*, landscapes and peoples. This focus on local manners, whether popularized in regionalist folklore or ennobled by a regenerative spirit, it ultimately endured. It was even embraced with all its *acquis* by Unamuno's *casticismo* (purity of tradition) and early twentieth century *authenticity*<sup>53</sup>, although armed with new ideological weaponry; and it was revived, as if reborn – an indisputable or at least ostensible self-heir – in modernist territory in the form of new classicism and magic realism. Although he was not alone in this endeavour, José Jorge Oramas achieved an admirable feat with his painting: the synthesis between modernity and vernacularity. But Oramas was very short-lived. There is no way of knowing where his skilled but brief youthful experience would have led or if it would have been ultimately diluted in the endless wave of local mannerism. In any event, his formula died with him. It could not have survived. Beyond the historic boundary of the Second Republic, any art based on the *obvious* exaltation of the iconography of popular type models inescapably professed its own obsolescence. And the matter took a turn for the worse when the idea was adopted by the Francoist dictatorship's propaganda machine. Beginning in the nineteen forties, therefore, artists who felt the need to base the meaning of their *oeuvre* on an encounter with their original cultural identity had to adopt an approach that would save their art from anachronistic results. The most lucid, the ones most keenly aware of the spirit of their times, realized that the solution lay in a move away from the *obvious*, which had become *anecdotal*, and toward the conceptual. The only possible conceptual vision of vernacular culture entailed a break with contingency and stimulation of the encounter with something beyond time-bound determinations. The solution was only to be found in the identification of the telluric dimension, in something that is so definitely ultimate that it scarcely accommodates opinion. And in nineteen forties and fifties art, the telluric dimension could only be expressed in formally abstract language. Manrique was able to take that step, fortunately. His *oeuvre* and his person reached maturity. Intermediation ceased to exist between his life and his art. And when the artist added to that finding the third trait of his artistic will – the practical and productive application of all his aesthetic experience to the social dimension –, the mature Manrique made his appearance and breathed life into the utopian ideal of *art as experience*. This was something he would have never achieved without the new turn taken in his work in the nineteen fifties, or without the *lichen metaphor*.

<sup>52</sup> This expression, *artistic will*, is intended in the strongest possible sense.

<sup>53</sup> This term is fairly uncommon and requires some explanation. By twentieth century *authenticity* is meant the new turn taken, in the context of the Generation of 1914, in everything relating to the quest for national identity through the personality of the working class and the landscape. The phenomenon was present in the art produced in Catalonia, the Basque Country and central Spain, with the epicentre in Madrid. Impacted by the intention prevailing at the time to divest it of both nineteenth century and Unamunian *casticismo*, that quest for identity was to be the preamble to the ennoblement of the working classes that took place during the Second Republic.

## Final (Principio)

An opportunity to aesthetically organize an environment in all its complexity was afforded to the artist when Anasagasti asked him to design the bar and grille in Madrid's Fénix Hotel. Although Manrique's work there no longer exists, photographs of the interiors and press reviews show that he delimited spaces, modified grades, built curved screens, created special effects with spots, indirect and phosphorescent lights, designed specific furnishings, installed three-dimensional objects, chose the plants and hung some of his monotypes on the walls. One of the murals, with very schematic linear figures, depicted a hunting scene inspired by Neolithic rock paintings. In the other scene, titled *Toilette en el campo* (*Toilette in the country*), he deployed the resources used in his apparently abstract geometric painting along with very intense colouring. In light of the subjects of the murals, the appearance of the furnishings and the overall atmosphere, Manrique created a comfortable and *enjoyable* den; a pleasurable cave, a delightful hollow, where primitivism and sophistication merged in an organic, fluent relationship that seemed to be not only fitting, but natural. This project synthesized all of Manrique's nineteen fifties creative sensitivity. Yet it also contained the kernel of the fully developed Manrique who would conquer the future.

Surprising as it may seem, judging from the artist's sources of inspiration, he could not have seen or visited interiors like this. Their existence in nineteen fifties Lanzarote or Gran Canaria is highly improbable and in the unlikely event that there were any in Madrid, the artist would probably not have had access to them. Manrique may or may not have sought inspiration in architectural journals. He might have had a glimpse at stage designs of similar characteristics in American or French films. But what Manrique created in the Fénix Hotel grille was the projection of an aesthetic imagination forged over several years of work that ranged from muralism to the artist's aesthetic interpretation of the telluric dimension.

Significantly, shortly before Manrique took up interior designing, the French worlds of industry, architecture and design launched the notion of the *art d'habiter* or the art of dwelling; this paraphrase of a well-known Le Corbusieran principle referred not only to the aesthetic determinations of architecture but to the individual's overall relationship with the environment, in which the interaction among the arts was intended to be of service in everyday life and contribute to the sensation of being alive. Similarly meaningful is the fact that when art historians take inventory, they judge the history of modern art from the vantage of the prevalence of objects that can be likened to the notion of *painting* or *sculpture*, and only cross those bounds in two periods: the nineteen thirties and the nineteen fifties, since in both the identity of what is artistic is more straightforward if the evaluation includes graphic and industrial design, mass architecture and activities relating to public spaces, all in their own right.

Manrique lived in this *circumstance* in the nineteen fifties. And he lived in it fully, not because he forced it upon himself but because it suited his creative temperament. Manrique believed that the traditional straw hats worn by Lanzarote islander farm women were reminiscent of a Schiaparelli design<sup>54</sup>. For Manrique there were never irreconcilable aesthetic differences between the products of "high" and "low" culture, art and handicrafts, the activity of artists as intellectuals and their activity as designer/decorators. This series of non-antagonistic dualities was to be supplemented by Manrique through his wedding of art and nature. All this he did in the nineteen fifties. In the nineteen fifties a fully mature Manrique discovered a suitable scenario and the proper

<sup>54</sup> Manrique sustained this indisputable truth in the April 1959 issue of *Teresa* (No. 64).

references not only to grow exponentially as an artist, but to realize that there was no contradiction in the various aspects of his own sensitivity. In the nineteen fifties Manrique learned to develop his artistic interests above and beyond topical contingencies; he learned to understand, in depth, the aesthetic entity of his island and to turn it into his own artistic identity. In the nineteen fifties Manrique learned that the plastic creator's activity could be extended from two-dimensional media to habitable environments. Manrique tied up all the loose ends and merged his different creative polarities into a single beam. Just one year after he had designed the Fénix Hotel interiors, fully developed the lichen metaphor and deduced the aesthetic interpretation of Lanzarote's telluric dimension, he made a public appeal in the local press for artistic intervention in Jameos del Agua<sup>55</sup>. That's where it all began. Although nothing ever happens at once, that's where it all began. In the nineteen fifties César Manrique engaged in unique creativity, all the while ponding experience that would later rise to the surface like a generous fountain; in the nineteen fifties, César Manrique melded all the elements that were to guide the construction of works that extol the vital harmony between art and nature.

<sup>55</sup> In *Antena*, Arrecife, issue 215, 2 July 1957, page 5. Also published in Manrique sustained this indisputable truth in the April 1959 issue of *Teresa* (No. 64).





# Chronology.

Bisi Quevedo

**1919**

Born in Arrecife, capital of Lanzarote on 24 April, to a local middle class family. He lived in the city of his birth during his childhood and youth.

His talent for drawing surfaced very soon.

While still in his teens, he acquired a deep admiration for Picasso, Matisse and Braque, whose work he saw in the journals that his father, a travelling salesman, brought home from his business trips.

**1936**

Victims of a political reprisal, the Millares family move to Arrecife from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, where they had been actively involved in the city's cultural circles. César became friendly with Agustín, José María, Jane and Manuel Millares, youthful sources of information on art and culture that Manrique was lacking and peers with whom he could share his artistic interests. Manuel Millares, who was to be one of the most renowned exponents of informalism in Spain, did his first drawings from life in this period. The Millares lived in Lanzarote until 1938.

**1937**

César's parents, Gumersindo Manrique and Francisca Cabrera, decided to take all their children (César, Amparo, Carlos and Juana) to the capital city of the island of Gran Canaria to live for three months. They took a house with a luxuriant garden in a quarter known as "Ciudad Jardín". César was drafted.

**1938**

He was stationed first in Ceuta and later in Madrid and on the Catalanian front.

**1939**

Manrique met Lanzarote sculptor Pancho Lasso, who, after thirteen years in Madrid, had returned to the island with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. In Madrid he and Alberto Sánchez had participated in the Vallecas School, a Spanish avant-garde movement that gave shape to a surrealist poetics of nature in the first third of the twentieth century. Manrique conversed with Pancho Lasso about art and the island's plastic dimension, a concern that connected with the recognition of the aesthetics of nature proposed by the Vallecas School, with the rediscovery of each artist's own, immediate surroundings. The first-hand knowledge of Lasso's abstract works with volcanic stone was a revelation.

**1942**

He spent several days travelling around the island with a group of friends, in a very well documented outing. César took pictures of the most emblematic features of the Lanzarote landscape Timanfaya, El Golfo, Jameos del Agua, Risco de Famara...).

On 1 November he opened his first solo exhibition at the Lanzarote Island Council headquarters, titled *César Manrique's drawings*, consisting in thirty four watercolours, gouashes and crayon drawings. The subjects ranged from portraits (*Rostros actuales, Retratos de jóvenes, Rostro de mujer*) [Today's faces, Youths' faces, Woman's face] and scenes depicting local manners (*Anatomía guanche, Viento, Vecinos de Famara, Tocando en Tahiche, Campesinos de Timanfaya, Mosiando, Puente de las Bolas*) [Guanche anatomy, Wind, Famara villagers, Playing in Tahiche, Timanfaya farmers, "Mosiando", Las Bolas Bridge] to copies (*Viejo desnudo, Caras de mujer*) [Old nude, Womens' faces] and sundry themes (*Mundo actual, Bronce y plata, Meditación, Oriente, Atardecer, Ya llegó, Venus del cactus, Deportistas, Ritmo, Venecia, Adán y Eva*) [Today's world, Bronze and silver, Meditation, East, Dusk, Arrival, Venus of the cactus, Athletes, Rhythm, Venice, Adam and Eve].

To please his father, he moved to Tenerife to study to be a quantities surveyor. Although he passed the entrance exam and all the first year subjects, he soon left the university to reassert his artistic vocation, a decision for which he received no paternal support.

His early painting was strongly influenced by Néstor (Néstor Martín Fernández de la Torre, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1887-1938), a symbolist and modernist painter in possession of an exuberant and affected language.

**1944**

The artist submitted his *Campesina de Lanzarote* [Farm woman in Lanzarote] to the *II Annual Fine Arts Exhibition* organized by the Sociedad Gabinete Literario in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in conjunction with the city's municipal government and the Gran Canaria Island Council. The Captain General of the Canary Islands, García Escámez, was visiting the exhibition when the jury's decision was read and Manrique was awarded honourable mention. García Escámez granted him a scholarship to study fine arts in Madrid.

An *Exhibition of artists from the province of Gran Canaria* was held in Madrid's National Museum of Modern Art under the auspices of the Canary Island Museum and the sponsorship of the Gran Canaria Island Council and the Las

Palmas de Gran Canaria City Hall. The catalogue included a preface authored by the Marquis of Lozoya. The showing contained paintings by Manrique as well as Néstor (*Poema del mar* [Poem of the sea]), Juan Carló, Jesús Arencibia, Tomás Gómez Bosch, Juan Guillermo, Nicolás Massieu, Jorge Oramas, Servando del Pilar and Santiago Santana, among others. Sculptures by Abraham Cárdenes and Pancho Lasso and other artists were likewise displayed. Manrique's contribution consisted in ten watercolours: *Mundo actual* [Today's world], *Ecos de existencia* [Echoes of existence], *Una vida* [A life], *Cal y volcán* [Lime and volcano], *Oriente* [East], *Campesina de Lanzarote* [Farm woman in Lanzarote] (reproduced in the catalogue), *Parranda de Tahíche* [Amateur musicians in Tahíche], *Arcos y tallas* [Arches and woodcarvings], *Mociando* and *Amor de Capraria* [Love for Capraria (Roman name for Lanzarote)].

#### 1945

He moved to Madrid on his scholarship to study in the San Fernando School of Fine Arts, where he met and became friendly with other artists: Francisco Echaz, Francisco Farreras, José María de Labra...

Manrique's arrival in Madrid predated, by ten years, Manuel Millares', Elvireta Escobio's, Martín Chirino's, Manuel Padorno's and Alejandro Reino's "legendary" descent on the capital city as ambassadors of Canary Island culture.

Shortly after his arrival in Madrid, he met Pepi Gómez, later his wife.

He spent part of his summer holidays in Lanzarote and the other part on the Mediterranean coast. During the summer, he went on frequent outings with archaeologist Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez to places on his home island of archaeological or historic-artistic interest. This had an impact on the subject matter of his 1950s *oeuvre*, specifically the monotypes, where he occasionally included iconography borrowed from traditional ceramics.

#### 1947

The artist's father died.

He painted a mural in the former Arrecife Clubhouse, representing traditional island architecture, landscape, characters, flora and animals, all with a surrealist spirit, and took part in the interior decoration for Bar Panchito.

#### 1948

In September he travelled with Pepi Gómez to S'Agaró on the Costa Brava and the island of Majorca (Puerto Príncipe, Formentor and Palma).

#### 1949

He painted the sketches for the murals in the Arrecife "Parador".

#### 1950

He participated in the *I Spring Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings* in Lanzarote with Cándido Aguilar, Esperanza and Enrique Spínola, Antoñita Cabrera, Fernando Montenegro, Daniel Martínón, and others. César Manrique was awarded one of the prizes.

He graduated from the San Fernando School of Fine Arts in Madrid.

He participated in the *National Fine Arts Exhibition* held in the two palaces in Retiro

Park, Madrid. He was identified by the press as a pupil of Joaquín Valverde (1896-1982), professor at the San Fernando School of Fine Arts and painter – from Seville – specializing in drawings and murals. Critics singled out *Naturaleza* [Nature] from the artist's other works for its colour and composition. José Aguiar and Gregorio Toledo, among others, also showed pieces in the Retiro Park exhibition.

He painted murals for the Arrecife, Lanzarote "Parador" coffee shop – *Alegoría de la isla* [Island allegory] – and restaurant – consisting in three scenes: *El viento, la pesca y la vendimia* [Wind, fishing and grape harvest]. The figures in all three were visibly marked by classic Picassian influence. He decorated the "Parador" interiors in conjunction with architect José Enrique Marrero Regalado.

On the occasion of Franco's visit to Lanzarote in the month of October to open the island's new hospital, headed by Dr Molina Orosa, Manrique took part in the embellishment of Arrecife's Las Palmas Square adjacent to San Ginés Church, where he installed benches, parterres, decorative elements and so on.

The artist made a photographic record of Lanzarote that he installed on a panel – including an island landscape painted by the artist with a volcano, camel, palm tree, prickly pear, spurge, century plant – titled *Lanzarote turístico* [Lanzarote for tourists]. This panel was probably displayed at the Directorate General of Tourism office, located in the "Parador" building at Arrecife. The pictures showed different views of Jameos del Agua, Timanfaya, El Golfo, the Janubio salt mines, Las Bolas Bridge, the future Cactus Garden... Traditional architectural components, farming scenes, island flora and so forth were also depicted.

#### 1951

The Arrecife "Parador" was officially opened in the summer, in a ceremony presided by the Directorate General of Tourism's Senior Officer for Accommodations Enrique Silvela Tordesillas, on behalf of the Minister of the Interior.

The Directorate General of Tourism, finding the female nudes in the *Alegoría de la isla* [Island allegory] mural in the Arrecife "Parador" coffee shop to be immodest, obliged Manrique to cover them with goatskins and cloth.

#### 1952

He was living at the time in a rented flat near Madrid's bullring, at 6 Rufino Blanco Street, where he set up his studio. He shared his life with Pepi Gómez. The Rufino Blanco flat and studio drew attention from art critics and fellow artists for its cheerful decoration: brightly coloured original furniture and gourd-lamps – all designed by Manrique – and a mural titled *Camellos en celo* [Camels in heat], with elements from his native island (farmer, camels, volcano, cactus...), all in a light-hearted tone. His flat was a centre for literary gatherings, essay and poetry readings, parties...

Manrique began to experiment with monotype, painting a series of highly coloured, modern figurative style still lifes.

He spent the summer holidays in Alicante with his wife Pepi Gómez.

He took courses at the Institute of Cinematographic Research and Experiment in Madrid.

#### 1953

In the spring he travelled to Paris with his friends Francisco Farreras and Manuel Conde. He lived in the French capital for two months, mostly viewing painting.

That summer he visited Ibiza with Pepi Gómez

Manrique began to work with overlaid figures, eliminating perspective and adopting a flat approach to composition. He continued to paint modern figurative still lifes while experimenting with an austere series of monotypes in which decomposition led to more abstract forms. He combined figuration and geometric forms. He began to develop a personal iconography based on island archetypes: boats, fishing baskets, fish, cacti, volcanoes, architectural elements, camels...

His work was included in the *Exhibition of contemporary religious art* shown in the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos at Santiago de Compostela, sponsored by the National Industry Institute; the catalogue had a brief introductory text by Manuel Sánchez Camargo. Manrique submitted an oil painting titled *La Virgen* [The Virgin]. The exhibition also showed works by Farreras, Ferrant, Gabino, Mampaso, Mignoni, Molezún, Oteiza, Vázquez Díaz, Vento, Caballero, Dans, Mayo, Molina Sánchez, Redondela... to name a few. Manrique's painting was included in the *Tribute to painter Manuel Ortega* held at Madrid's Alcor Gallery from 17 to 30 November, alongside pieces by artists such as Daniel Vázquez Díaz, Francisco Farreras, Manuel Mampaso, José Caballero, José Antonio Molina Sánchez and Agustín Úbeda.

In November he held a solo exhibition at Arrecife in the Lanzarote Island Council headquarters, in which he showed works painted on the island that summer: nine island landscapes, a still life titled *De la figura románica* [On the Romanesque figure] – the second version of the piece submitted to the *II Spanish and Latin American Art Biennial* held in Havana –, a sketch on silver for a mural, and fifteen monotypes. On the occasion of this exhibition, the artist delivered a conference titled *Meaning of contemporary art*. In one of the series of these monotypes, painted in subdued black and white tones in a deliberate move away from Manrique's characteristically vivid colours, he depicted female figures, coastal scenes, typical farmhouses, boats, marine fauna...

He began to work on a large mural for Guacimanta Airport, commissioned by the Lanzarote Island Council. The subject of the mural is the island of Lanzarote: its people, architecture, geology, fauna, plant life... The composition is post-cubist, with faceted planes, overlaid figures and vivid colouring.

Madrid's Hotel Castellana Hilton opened its doors. Decorated by Luis and Javier Feduchi, the hotel had purchased five of Manrique's paintings.

#### 1954

Manrique participated in the founding of the Fernando Fe Gallery in Madrid, which would play a prominent role in the renovation of the Madrilenian avant-garde, along with Fernando Mignoni, Manuel Mampaso, Luis Feito, Francisco Farreras, Diego Lara, Antonio Molina Sánchez, Tony Stubbing, José Vento and art critic Manuel Conde, who initially headed the gallery.

He took part in the group exhibition *Today's artists* organized by the Fernando Fe Gallery from 2 to 14 April, with two still lifes that attracted attention for their colouring (*Bodegón de los exvotos* [Votive offering] – a frieze inspired by the offerings conserved in San Marcial Church at Femés, Lanzarote – and *Bodegón de las cerámicas* [Ceramics still life]). Other artists exhibiting works in the showing included Farreras, Feito, Lara, Mampaso, Mignoni, Molina Sánchez, Nellina Pistolesi, Stubbing and Vento.

In April, he travelled to Palma de Majorca where he painted two murals for Bar Panchito and took part in its interior decoration.

He participated in the *II Spanish and Latin American Art Biennial* that opened in May at the Fine Arts Palace in Havana under the auspices of the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica.

T.E. McMahan, member of New York's Museum of Modern Art and prominent collector of Paul Klee's works, purchased two of Manrique's paintings.

César Manrique lent his Madrilenian studio to Ortega Muñoz, a painter from Extremadura, for a newsreel. The narrator drew attention to the contrast between Ortega Muñoz's austere painting and the "sensual decoration, exotic objects, plants and ornaments, and the canvases that reveal César Manrique's personality, diametrically opposed to Ortega Muñoz's".

He did a ceramic mural for the Huarte construction company's materials plant at Madrid, commissioned by Pradillo, a contemporary architect.

José María Anasagasti, architect in the employ of Agromán, enlisted Manrique's cooperation to decorate the bar and grille in Madrid's new Fénix Hotel. The artist regarded this to be his most important commission to date. The hotel opened two years later.

Manrique experimented with a series of highly coloured, abstract, geometric monotypes, inspired by archaeological motifs, while continuing to paint still lifes and deploy modern figuration as he had in the past.

From 10 to 30 December, he held a solo exhibition at the Clan Gallery, Madrid, then managed by José Antonio Llardent. He showed a series of twenty-some monotypes featuring both lyrical and geometric abstraction. Manrique associated these paintings with nature, construing them to be primitive forms, nature in the making. The titles of the works shown were: *Astros en celo* [Stars in heat], *Calorías de Timanfaya*, [Timanfaya calories], *Brújulas atlánticas* [Atlantic compasses], *Cangrejos-espejos* [Mirror-crabs], *Origen del liquen* [Origin of lichens], *Dame tu semicircunferencia* [Give me your semi-circle], *Lava en flor* [Lava in bloom], *Diversión de la luna* [Moon amusement], *Fósiles fotografiados* [Fossil pictures], *Frutos de jable* [Fruit of volcanic sand], *Origen del hombre* [Origin of man], *La llave del tiempo* [The key to time], *Abismo compungido* [Contrite abyss], *Nacimiento oscuro* [Dark birth], *Disgregación vital* [Vital disintegration], *Cajas disciplinadas* [Disciplined boxes], *Itinerario eléctrico* [Electric itinerary], *Tierra virgen* [Virgin soil], *La multitud siempre es tonta* [Crowds are always silly] and *Región* [Region]. He also included two drafts for the Fénix Hotel mural in the showing, one of which was reproduced in the exhibition leaflet. Poet Carlos Edmundo de Ory wrote the introductory text.

Architect Julio Cano, who participated in the remodelling that transformed the Royal Hospital at Santiago de Compostela into the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos under the leadership of Moreno Barberá and in conjunction with Juan Gómez G. de las Buelgas and Rafael de la Joya, commissioned thirty monotypes from Manrique for the dining room, lobby and hotel rooms.

He was commissioned to paint a large-scale mural for the Princesa movie theatre, regarded at the time to be one of Madrid's most modern facilities.

#### 1955

He finished the Princesa movie theatre mural, measuring eleven metres long by three metres high, commissioned by architect Luis Sanz Magallón.

Manrique's painting continued to fluctuate between lyrical abstraction, geometric abstraction (particularly in murals) and modern figuration.

He painted three large murals in the Fénix Hotel in Madrid. In one, titled *Toilette en el campo* [*Toilette in the country*], he used modern figuration. The mural behind the bar was based on totally abstract geometric motifs. The third, representing a hunting scene with stylized human and animal figures, was made by burning incisions into wood with acid. For the first two murals he used acrylic – or in the artist's words “miraculous” – paint. He installed an iron sculpture next to the stairway leading to the grille and a mobile wafted by the draught from an air conditioning vent; the black light reflecting against the black background on the wall and ceiling highlighted the coloured forms of the suspended mobile. His work in the Fénix Hotel also embraced the design of the lamps on the columns, ceramics, colour arrangements and lighting, as well as designs for table cloths, tableware, tapestries...

He completed an abstract mural on wood for Juan Huarte's office in Madrid, which also housed an abstract frieze by Jorge Oteiza.

The Banco Guipuzcoano commissioned murals from Manrique for several of its branches. In 1955, he finished the one for the Madrid office – *Sin título* [Untitled] – (acrylic abstract mural done in black, green and violet tones) and the one in San Sebastián – *La pesca, la industria y la agricultura* [Fishing, industry and agriculture] – (triptych painted on wood in which he used both geometric abstract and modern figurative techniques).

He did a number of sketches for textile prints for the First Print Design Competition, organized by Gastón y Daniela. These sketches and the prints made from several of them were shown in Madrid from 1 to 30 June 1955. Manrique's *Sandías* [Watermelons] was awarded third prize, shared with the designs submitted by Canogar, Blasco and Tapia. A catalogue was subsequently published with all the winning sketches, printed on different types of fabric. Other artists also participated in the competition, such as Cárdenas, Molezún, Paredes Jardiel, Farreras, Feduchi, Ibarrola, Álvarez Ortega, Stubbing, Feito y Mignoni.

Eighteen artists, Manrique among them, participated in the *I Contemporary art show* in Cartagena held at the San Isidoro Centre in Cartagena, Murcia. First prize was awarded to Ángel Luque, César Manrique and Guillermo Delgado. Manrique's winning painting was titled *Tierra virgen* [Virgin soil].

He participated in the *III Spanish and Latin American Art Biennial* held at Virreina Palace and the Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona. The last edition of this international event, sponsored by the Spanish Culture Institute and the Barcelona City Hall, it opened in September 1955 and ran through January 1956.

Three of Manrique's paintings dating from 1955 and titled *Motivo decorativo* [Decorative motif] were purchased for the Ybarra Collection, after being awarded prizes in competitions organized by Ybarra y Cía, S.A., to decorate the company's two new trans-Atlantic liners, “Cabo San Roque” and “Cabo San Vicente”. These works were exhibited in Bilbao, Barcelona, Seville, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The introductory text for the programme was authored by Enrique Lafuente Ferrari.

Manrique buys a penthouse flat at 19 Covarrubias Street in Madrid, with a large balcony and spacious studio.

## 1956

He completed a bas-relief mural for the Banco Guipuzcoano branch at Tolosa. This branch office also housed an iron sculpture by Chillida, First International Prize at the X Milan Triennial, and a wall clock designed by Manrique.

Manrique's work explored lyrical and geometric abstract lines against matter-painted backgrounds.

A group exhibition was opened to the public between 21 February and 3 March at the Clan Gallery, featuring works by Manrique, Mignoni, Quirós, Abela and Paredes-Jardiel. Manrique hung four paintings. Luis Figuerola-Ferretti remarked, with respect to César Manrique's *oeuvre*: “In this showing his pictographic vein is perceived in one of the works, where thin matter with a glossy patina depicts figures reminiscent of oriental script. In all the others there is, in addition, a sense of moderate balance, the serenity that Manrique confers on both his monochrome and polychrome work, an uncommon but meritorious virtue in the practitioners of this tendency”. Manuel Sánchez Camargo praised him “because the spirit of our most decorative practising abstract painter resides in him. His *oeuvre* is executed and thought out in the strictest formalization”.

His works participated in other group exhibitions, such as the *VII Artists' Exhibition* held at the Salamanca Clubhouse, Salamanca, or the showing organized in June by the Spanish Culture Institute in the Madrid headquarters of the Continental Association of European Intellectuals, that featured works by Ayaín, Espinosa Dueñas, Esplandiú, Farreras, Feito, Ibarra, Mignoni, Paredes Jardiel, J. de Ortega, Oguiza, Olmos, Ostria, Parabue, Parera Simont and Schablesky.

He moved to his new home and studio on Covarrubias Street in late March. Manrique's imprint was perceptible in both the interior decorating – lamps and furnishings designed by the artist – and in the building itself (front lobby and lift).

Madrid's Fénix Hotel bar and grille opened to the public in the summer.

He worked on a mural for the Pantano de Cijara building lobby – Puerto Peña Hydroelectric Plant at Talarrubias, Badajoz.

Engineer Francisco Benjumea commissioned a mural for Agromán's Kino building materials factory at Villaverde, Madrid.

He travelled to Torremolinos.

He participated in the *XXVIII Venice Biennial* with a painting titled *Pintura* [Painting], which highlighted the properties of matter and organic forms.

The *I Regional New Art Exhibition* was opened on 22 September as part of the VI La Laguna University Outreach Course, with works by Manrique as well as the following artists: Tony Gallardo, Antonio Padrón, Baudilio Miró Mainou, Cristino de Vera, Eduardo Gregorio, Felo Monzón, Freddy Szmul, Juan Ismael, Manuel Millares, Martín Chirino, Plácido Fleitas... Art critic Juan Eduardo delivered a conference on the occasion of the showing.

## 1957

He took several trips to Paris.

In March, an exhibition of stylish figurines designed by Alejandro Reino was held at Manrique's Covarrubias Street home. The press focused on the unique layout of the showing and the variety of visitors.

Manrique continued to work along lyrical and geometric abstract lines, with matter-painted backgrounds.

On the occasion of the 474th anniversary of the annexure of Gran Canaria to the crown of Castile, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria City Hall invited him to conduct an anthological exhibition, which opened on 20 April. The venue was the former Civil Government headquarters on Triana Street. He showed paintings as well as ceramics made at Talavera de la Reina, Toledo, in an original layout. Ventura Doreste wrote the text for the catalogue. The press highlighted the large number of visitors, including writers and artists, as well as the design of the exhibition itself and the expectation it generated. Poets Manuel Padorno and Henri Robert, writer Servando Morales and painter Felo Monzón paid tribute to the artist in texts dedicated to his *oeuvre* that were published first in the local media and later in Tenerife's daily, *La Tarde*.

On 24 May, twenty four works from the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria anthological exhibition were shown at the Tenerife Clubhouse, along with a sketch for a mural. Eduardo Westerdahl wrote the text for the catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition. During their stay at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Manrique and architect Luis Cabrera worked on the decoration for the Clubhouse terrace. Seven of the paintings in the exhibition were purchased for this purpose and the artist did a mural with ceramic materials. He also set out guidelines for the plants, lighting and so on.

The exhibition then travelled to the Lanzarote Island Council headquarters auditorium, where it was shown from 16 to 23 June 1957. Nineteen non-figurative paintings were presented, in which Manrique continued to experiment with matter, colour, and compositional rigour. On 29 June, a farewell party was held for the artist on the Arrecife "Parador" terrace.

The Clubhouse terrace at Santa Cruz de Tenerife was opened to the public on 26 July 1957. The artist authored the design for the decoration.

He travelled to Italy during the summer holidays with Pepi Gómez and Waldo Díaz Balart.

He worked on a marble tessera mural for the plant room in the Pantano de Cijara building – Puerto Peña Hydroelectric Plant at Talarubias, Badajoz.

Manrique painted a non-figurative mural for his Covarrubias Street flat.

A gathering of artists in his home on Covarrubias Street in early December was followed by the media. The Marquis of Cerralbo was awarded honorary membership in Art Patrons of America, Inc., Los Angeles. César Manrique organized an exhibition with the works of different Spanish artists, which was visited by prominent artists, diplomats and members of Madrid's high society.

## 1958

He participated in the *Exhibition of sacred art* that opened in April in the Tapestry Room of Saragossa Cathedral, organized by the Semana Nacional de la Parroquia, in conjunction with the Directorate General of Information, the National Colonization Institute, the Madrid Ateneo and the Movimiento de Arte Sacro. In the painting section, Manrique exhibited alongside Francisco Ferreras, José María de Labra, Manuel Mampaso, Fernando Mignoni, Manuel Rivera, Daniel Vázquez Díaz and José Vento; in architecture, the showing displayed designs by Oriol Bohigas and José María Martorell, Francisco Javier Carvajal and José María García de Paredes, Miguel Fisac, Santiago Laguna, Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oiza, Luis Laorga, Alejandro de la Sota, and Ramón Vázquez Molezún and José Antonio Corrales, among others. There were also sections covering sculpture, stained glass, mosaics, iron and metal forging, silver- and goldsmithing, enamelling and lacquering, liturgical vestments and sundry. César

submitted two works: *Símbolos de la Pasión* [Passion symbols] (design for a mural) and *Cabeza de Jesús* [Bust of Jesus].

His work was included in the exhibition titled *Sacred art, continuation*, shown at the Madrid Ateneo's Santa Catalina room, which organized the showing in conjunction with the National Colonization Institute and the Movimiento de Arte Sacro, under the auspices of the Directorate General of Information. His *Símbolos de la Pasión* [Passion symbols] (design for a mural) was reproduced in the catalogue.

In July Manrique organized a flamenco concert in his Madrilenian home, featuring singers Gabriela Ortega and Fosforito, that was attended by representatives of the world of art and literature, as well as the aristocracy.

On 18 November he held a solo exhibition in the Madrid Ateneo's Prado room titled *César Manrique. 17 paintings*, with non-figurative paintings and monotypes. Manrique's chromatic palette turned austere – black, grey, ochre ... –, and his canvases, structured around orthogonal shapes, were the outcome of his experiments with the properties of matter in painting. At the time, Manrique referred to his *oeuvre* as paintings of "orderly lands". The foreword to the catalogue, titled "César Manrique's austere phase" was written by Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño. The showing also included sketches for the murals for new Barajas Airport.

## 1959

After the Madrid Ateneo exhibition, he painted two large murals in Barajas Airport, Madrid, measuring three metres high by twenty five metres long.

In March he was invited by Luis Díaz de Losada, to work on the interiors for the Las Vegas Hotel that Díaz de Losada was building in Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

From Tenerife, he travelled to Arrecife to collect volcanic materials for the exhibition on Lanzarote in the Canary Island Week in Madrid.

The exhibition, titled *Lanzarote*, opened at the Nebli Gallery in Madrid on 18 May on the occasion of the *IV Canary Island Week*. The showing included paintings by Manrique, large-scale photographs by Pablo Barceló, crafts, samples of volcanic rock and so forth. The introduction was authored by Antonio Rumeu de Armas. Luis Fernández Fuster lectured on 21 May. The cocktail parties Manrique held in his Madrid home as a preamble to these events were attended by famous novelists, journalists and radio and cinema celebrities.

Manrique's works were included in several group exhibitions devoted to young Spanish painting held in Paris (*13 peintres espagnols actuels*, Musée des Arts Decoratifs), Fribourg (*Jeune peinture espagnole*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Fribourg), Basel (*Junge Spanische Maler*, Kunsthalle) – whose billboard advertising reproduced one of Manrique's paintings –, Munich (*Junge Spanische Maler*, Handwerkskammer für Oberbayern), Rio de Janeiro (*Espaço e cor na pintura espanhola de hoje*, Museo de Arte Moderno), and Lima, Santiago de Chile, Valparaíso and Bogotá (the travelling exhibition *Space and colour in contemporary Spanish painting*). Manrique's participation in the last of these consisted in three oil paintings. The exhibition was curated by Luis González Robles.

Manrique also exhibited with Canogar, Cossío, Echevarría, Mignoni, Mompó, Ortega Muñoz, Palencia, Paredes, Quirós, Serrano and Vázquez Díaz at the San Jorge Gallery in Madrid.

He painted a five-metre high by fourteen-metre long mural on the Sical Factory building on the road from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria to Tafira.

He participated in the third and final phase of the Arrecife Municipal Park, where he designed the playground. The overall design, including exterior walls, parterres and planters, was authored by Gregorio Prats. In the second phase, Manrique and his architect friend Manuel de la Peña had added new elements: a curio shop, pavements, a volcanic monolith...

His painting underwent a significant change: he threw himself into experimentation with matter, dissociated from objects. In August he began to do his first matter paintings, initiating what was to be his mature language.

He was represented in other group exhibitions on the mainland and in the Canary Islands: *1959 art critic prize*, Madrid Ateneo (the artists represented in the showing, held in the Santa Catalina room, were: Trinidad Fernández, Gerardo Rueda, César Manrique, Lucio Muñoz, J.I. de Cárdenas, Manuel Rivera, Venancio Blanco, Eva Fischer, José Guinovart, Cristino de Vera, Francisco Farreras and Juana Francés); *III May Salon*, chapel of the former Santa Cruz Hospital, Barcelona (from 9 to 23 May, with works by Rafael Canogar, Pancho Cossío, Martín Chirino, Díaz Caneja, Equipo 57, Luis Feito, Ángel Ferrant, Alfonso Fraile, María Girona, Joan Hernández Pijuan, José María de Labra, Manuel Millares, Manuel Mompó, Jorge Oteiza, Benjamín Palencia, Enrique Planasdurá, Ráfols-Casamada, Antonio Saura, Pablo Serrano and Joan Josep Tharrats. Alexandre Cirici-Pellicer wrote the introduction. The catalogue reproduced Manrique's *Pintura n° 15* [Painting No. 15]; *Westerdahl collection*, National Museum of Fine Arts at Santa Cruz de Tenerife (from 5 to 25 April 1958. Manrique's work was a *gouache* titled *Abstracción* [Abstraction]); *Contemporary art exhibition*, Neblí Gallery, Madrid; *Theme in black and white*, Madrid (besides Manrique, the participating artists were: Canogar, Chirino, Farreras, Ferrant, Gabino, Labra, Mampaso, Millares, Molezún, Rivera, Rueda, Saura, Serrano, Zóbel... The showing was a tribute to Chillida – Grand Prize for Sculpture at the 1958 Venice Biennial; Graham, 1958 –; Oteiza – First Prize for Sculpture, São Paulo Biennial –; Miró Artigas – Guggenheim Prize, 1958 –; Tapiès – First Carnegie Prize, 1958, UNESCO Prize, 1958 Venice Biennial – and Palazuelo – Fifth Carnegie Prize, 1958).

He painted a mural on a plastered wall in a store front on Covarrubias Street, Madrid with tempera, varnish and mixed technique.

The exhibition *New Christmas Objects* that opened in the artist's Covarrubias home on 10 December featured jewellery by Maud Westerdahl, sculptures by Pablo Serrano, paintings by Fernando Mignoni, and paper pieces and mobiles by Manrique. The text on the invitation was drafted by Manuel Conde. The opening was attended by "everybody who was anybody in Madrid" – aristocrats, cultural attachés, ambassadors, men and women of prestige from the worlds of finance, art critique and literature, cinema, the media... Cinema director Nicholas Ray took shots of Manrique's mobiles for American television, while Spanish television filmed and subsequently broadcasted a documentary.

#### 1960

His works were shown in several group exhibits devoted to young Spanish painting held in São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Oslo and Göteborg.

In Spain, he was represented in a number of group exhibitions: *Oh immortal. Informal tribute to Velázquez*, Gaspar Gallery, Barcelona; *24 contemporary painters*, Valladolid City Hall, Valladolid and Liceo del Círculo de la Amistad, Córdoba; and *15 abstract painters*, Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, Santiago de Compostela.

He held a solo exhibition at the L'Entracte Gallery, Lausanne.

He participated in the XXX Venice Biennial. He showed seven paintings, in which the qualities of matter played a primary role. The reviewers associated these works with Lanzarote's volcanic landscape.

In Venice, César met Luigi Nono.

On his return trip to Madrid via Paris, he met the owner and director of the Craven Gallery, John Craven, whose gallery would organize a solo exhibition for Manrique the following year.

#### 1961

He participated in group exhibitions such as *Contrasts in Spanish painting today*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; *Contemporary Spanish art*, Fine Arts Palace, Brussels; and *New realities*, Salon de mai, Paris.

In the summer he spent a full week on Lanzarote with the Craven Gallery director.

Solo exhibition in the Craven Gallery, Paris, where he presented twenty eight paintings and a large tapestry. The catalogue carried a text by Luis González Robles and photographs of island volcanic landscapes taken by John Craven during his summer stay at Lanzarote.

#### 1962

Group exhibition with Rueda, Sempere, Vela and Zóbel in the Neblí Gallery, Madrid.

He did a matter painting mural for the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Nautical Club.

He built a mural for the Arrecife, Lanzarote, Nautical Club clubhouse with materials from ship scrap yards.

He worked with journalist Agustín de la Hoz on *Lanzarote*, a book published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Act founding the island councils.

Fernando Higuera designed a house for César Manrique at Camorritos, on the outskirts of Madrid. Nature was a primary element in this home, whose organicist landscaping was designed by Manrique.

#### 1963

In March he, Manuel Millares, Eusebio Sempere, Manuel Rivera, Pablo Serrano and Gerardo Rueda jointly designed the shop windows for the El Corte Inglés department store at 3 Preciados Street, Madrid

His partner Pepi Gómez died in Madrid.

He held a solo exhibition at the L'Entracte Gallery, Lausanne.

He participated in the VII São Paulo Biennial.

#### 1964

He painted a mural for the Seaman's Home at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in which he again resorted to objects found in ship scrap yards, using the *assemblage* technique.



He spent the summer in Majorca with his cousin Manuel Manrique and wife Leny and artist Waldo Díaz Balart, all of whom lived in New York. They very likely persuaded him that it was time for a change and that he would do well to relocate in Manhattan.

After his Mediterranean summer, he put all his effort into gathering enough work to enable him to live in the United States, selling it to American collectors during the first few months after arrival.

In November, a party in honour of Nelson Rockefeller, Governor of the state of New York, was organized by Luis González Robles at architect Javier de Carvajal's home. Manrique attended as a guest and must have mentioned his intention to travel to America to Rockefeller, who invited him to get in touch with him after he arrived.

He departed for New York in December 1964, on the invitation of Cuban artist Waldo Díaz Balart. He spent Christmas with his cousins and Díaz Balart, who introduced him to gallery owners, artists and members of the city's artistic circles, connections that were instrumental in the swift sale of the paintings he brought with him from Spain.

## 1965

He lived in his own studio-flat in New York at 65 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, between the East and the West Village.

In February, thanks to Manuel Manrique's good offices, he was awarded a grant by the Institute of International Education, headed by David Wodinger, which made it financially feasible to lengthen his stay.

A few months after his arrival in New York he met gallery owner Catherine Viviano through Mauricio Aguilar, an artist who lived in the same building as Manrique and was friendly with Salvadoran collectors. He signed a contract with the Catherine Viviano Gallery for his exhibitions in the United States.

He participated in the group exhibition *Contemporary Spanish Art* in the Art Original Gallery at New Canaan, Connecticut, which opened on 3 April 1965. The other artists in the showing included Farreras, Guerrero, Rueda, Rivera, Sempere, Tàpies, Zóbel...

He met John B. Myers, art critic and director of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York, who introduced him to American abstract expressionism and pop art as well as the world of music, dance, avant-garde theatre...

He made the acquaintance of numerous artists, including Theodoro Stamos, Frank Stella, Andy Warhol – who stayed at César Manrique's Covarrubias flat in Madrid on his way to Tangiers –, Larry Rivers, Mark Rothko, Jimmy Ernst...

He did a series of collages – a technique that was undergoing revival in the nineteen sixties – with different qualities of paper, in which matter acquired the same preponderant role as in his painting. He presented nineteen of these *collages* in his first solo exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery the following year.

He incorporated brush strokes in his matter painting and freed part of the canvas from matter, generating more intensely coloured backgrounds.

He returned to Lanzarote on 25 June 1965 for his summer holidays. In August,

Manuel Millares, Elvireta Escobio, Francisco Rojas Fariña, Chichi Rojas, Pepe Dámaso and John B. Myers visited the island as Manrique's guests.

## 1966

He started to organize commercial exhibits at the Spanish Trade Centre in New York.

The first phase of the Jameos del Agua ("Jameo Chico") facility at Lanzarote was opened to the public. While in New York his involvement in the project consisted in ideas, while he participated more directly during his summer holidays on the island.

He opened his first solo exhibition in New York at the Catherine Viviano Gallery on 11 February 1966. John B. Myers published an essay titled "One particular Spanish painter and the Spanish scene: an American viewpoint" in the January 1966 issue of *Art International*, in which he reviewed Manrique's *oeuvre*.

In July, he moved back to Lanzarote, preparing his future New York exhibitions from the island.

In conjunction with the Lanzarote Island Council, he headed the island's transformation to a tourist economy. From this date onward, Manrique would engage in countless landscape architectural projects, creating an environmental awareness in Lanzarote and defending its natural and cultural heritage.

## 1967

Group exhibition at Kent State University, Ohio.

He painted two murals for the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Nautical School, deploying the *assemblage* technique.

He held a solo exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York, which opened on 11 April. After attending the opening, Manrique travelled to Mexico and then returned to New York for the closing. He presented 23 large-scale works painted in the two years previous.

## 1968

He participated in the group exhibition *Afro, Manabu Mabe, César Manrique* at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York that opened on 1 October.

He travelled to New York.

He did a series of murals with scrap material for different public places on the island of Lanzarote.

In the midst of public controversy, he installed a monumental sculpture titled *Fecundidad* [Fertility], a tribute to the island farmer, in the centre of Lanzarote.

Construction began on the El Campesino House-Museum at Mozaga, Lanzarote.

The Ministry of Information and Tourism awarded the artist the Silver Medal of Honour for Tourist Endeavour.

Construction was begun on his Taro de Tahiche, Lanzarote home, sited on a lava coulee and built in five volcanic bubbles. He used traditional island architectural elements on the exteriors and modern language (large windows, glass domes) in the interiors.

Work started on the El Diablo restaurant at Timanfaya, Lanzarote.

He travelled to the Côte Azur, the Riviera and Corsica.

#### 1969

His third and final solo exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York opened on 22 April.

He was appointed Lanzarote Island Fine Arts Commissioner.

He was commissioned to supervise the embellishment and adaptation of the Martiáñez Coast works at Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife.

#### 1970

He participated in the *Paintings, sculpture. American and European* group exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York that opened on 1 October.

He did compact stone murals for the Arrecife Gran Hotel, Lanzarote and the Cristina Hotel at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

He travelled to Switzerland.

He took a long tour through Europe, visiting Cannes, London and a number of Italian cities. He visited the Venice Biennial.

He travelled to several Asian countries and visited the Osaka 1970 World Fair.

On 18 December he opened a solo exhibition at the Skira Gallery in Madrid, with works brought in from New York and pictures of several of his projects on Lanzarote (his Taro de Tahíche home, the Jameos del Agua, the sculpture titled *Fecundidad* [Fertility], the El Diablo restaurant...). Eduardo Westerdahl wrote the text for the catalogue. Emilio Machado did the project drawings of his home.

He continued to exhibit his work in Spain and Europe throughout this decade.

#### 1971

He travelled to England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Morocco.

He began to work on the pictures for the book *Lanzarote. Arquitectura inédita*, (Lanzarote. Unexplored architecture) in conjunction with photographer Francisco Rojas Fariña.

#### 1972

He did a Salamanca stone mural for the Postal Savings Bank on Recoletos Boulevard, Madrid.

#### 1973

The works on the El Río Lookout, Lanzarote, were completed. He hung two large mobiles from the ceiling and installed an iron and steel sculpture inside the shelter.

Manrique's canvas work evolved toward non-figurative matter painting, with matter contained within the drawing. His "buried", "fossil" and "scorched" objects date from this period, with a predominance of black and red tones.

#### 1974

Manrique published *Lanzarote. Arquitectura inédita* (Lanzarote. Unexplored architecture), a book containing a graphic inventory of traditional Lanzarote architecture designed to contribute to conserving the island heritage, presented at La Laguna University, Tenerife.

He founded the El Almacén Cultural Centre at Arrecife, Lanzarote.

He began restoration on the San José Castle, Lanzarote, the future International Museum of Contemporary Art, an idea conceived in the mid nineteen sixties, when he was living in New York.

He rebuilt the shrine at Máguez, Lanzarote, and set a volcanic stone mural over the altar.

#### 1976

Controversial opening at Arrecife, Lanzarote, of the International Museum of Contemporary Art in San José Castle, restored and retrofitted for this purpose.

Manrique resumed work on the Cactus Garden at Guatiza, Lanzarote. The garden was originally begun in 1966, with the restoration of the Guatiza mill. After yet another interruption, it was completed in 1990.

King Juan Carlos I awarded the artist the Gold Medal of Honour for Tourist Endeavour.

Work was begun on the Jameos del Agua Auditorium, Lanzarote.

The artist participated in the conversion of water tanks into offices for Río Tinto at Tahíche, Lanzarote, later remodelled to house the Los Aljibes restaurant.

#### 1977

He styled the garden and swimming pools for Las Salinas Hotel at Tegüise, Lanzarote, designed by architect Fernando Higuera. Manrique also painted the murals in the hotel lobby and restaurant.

The artificial lake at Martiáñez Coast, Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife was opened to the public. The artist installed several of his sculptures and mobiles on the grounds.

#### 1978

The Association of German Journalists awarded him the World Prize for Ecology and Tourism in Berlin.

He exhibited large-scale colour photographs of all his environmentalist work at Theo Gallery, Madrid.

King Juan Carlos I awarded him the Grand Cross of the Order of Civil Merit for his environmentalist endeavour.

#### 1979

At the end of the year, César Manrique, along with other colleagues in Lanzarote, promoted the creation of an environmentalist association to conserve and defend the island landscape.

#### 1980

The Government of Spain awarded him the Fine Arts Gold Medal.

The artist was instrumental in the founding of the Círculo Ecologista de Lanzarote.

He painted a bas-relief mural for the new Lanzarote Airport terminal.

He continued to exhibit his work in Spain and Europe throughout this decade.

#### 1981

The city of Goslar, Germany awarded him the Goslarer Monchehaus-Preises für Kunst und Umwelt 1981 (1981 Goslar Monchehaus Prize for Art and the Environment).

#### 1982

He was appointed honorary member of the Dutch Van D'Abeod Foundation by the Nederlands Laureat Van D'Abeod (Netherlands D'Abeot Prize).

#### 1983

The Madrid-2 shopping mall was opened to the public in Madrid.

He held a solo exhibition titled *Manrique. Environmentalist work* at the Theo Gallery, Arco' 83, Madrid.

#### 1984

Work was begun for the recovery and use of the Charco de San Ginés at Arrecife, Lanzarote.

He travelled to New York, where he visited Andy Warhol and Barbara Rose.

#### 1985

Manrique intensified his militant defence of Lanzarote heritage, criticizing the deterioration of the island's urban and scenic values.

He created *Banderas del Cosmos* [Flags of the cosmos] and the environmental setting for the Roque de los Muchachos Astrophysical Centre, La Palma.

He held a solo exhibition at the Münchner Volkshochschule, Gasteig Kulturzentrum, Munich.

Europa Nostra (International Federation of Associations for the Protection of Europe's Cultural and Natural Heritage), affiliated with the Council of Europe, awarded him the Europa Nostra Prize for his artistic and environmental work on Lanzarote.

#### 1986

He painted a mural for the El Risco de la Caleta restaurant at Famara, Lanzarote and an *assemblage* technique mural for Jameos del Agua, titled *Naufragio feliz* [Lucky shipwreck].

#### 1987

The Jameos del Agua Auditorium at Lanzarote was opened to the public.

He was appointed Honorary President of the Asociación Cultural y Ecologista El Guincho, Lanzarote.

He worked on a mural for the CajaCanarias head office at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

#### 1988

He moved to his new home at Haría, Lanzarote, which he had built and decorated himself.

He wrote *Escrito en el fuego* (Written in fire). The book, published by Lázaro Santana, includes Manrique's essays on Lanzarote, the *oeuvre* of artists in his inner circle and a series of personal reflections.

#### 1989

The Canary Island government awarded him the Canary Island Fine Arts Prize.

He received the Fritz Schumacher Prize for Architecture for his spatial and landscape work on Lanzarote from the University of Hanover, which had never before awarded the prize to an artist.

He was appointed to the Spanish MaB (UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme) Committee.

He drafted the preliminary design for the Mediterranean maritime Park, Ceuta.

He designed the El Palmarejo Outlook, Valle Gran Rey, La Gomera.

The La Peña Outlook at Valverde, El Hierro, was opened to the public.

#### 1990

The Cactus Garden at Guatiza, Lanzarote, was opened to the public.

Remodelling was begun to convert his Tahiche house into a museum and Fundación César Manrique headquarters.

He designed an automobile car for the BMW Art Car Collection.

#### 1991

The Canary Island Government organized a travelling anthological exhibition titled *César Manrique. Made in fire* (1968-1990), shown at the La Regenta Art Centre, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and the La Granja Exhibition Hall, Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

In September he was commissioned to design the Maritime Park at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

#### 1992

In March the Fundación César Manrique held its official opening ceremony, attended by the Spanish Minister of Culture and the President of the Canary Island Government.

He participated in the 1992 World Fair at Seville with an anthological exhibit titled *Manrique. Art and nature*, Arenal Gallery, Seville.

He died on 25 September in a traffic accident at Tahíche, Lanzarote.

In November, he was posthumously named Corresponding Member of the San Carlos, Valencia, Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

#### 1994

He was named Adopted Son of the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Procedures were instituted to have César Manrique's public art declared works of cultural interest.

Playa Jardín at Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, designed by Manrique, was completed.

#### 1995

He was named Adoptive Son of the town of Tías, Lanzarote.

The Lanzarote Island Council posthumously named him Favourite Son of Lanzarote.

The "César Manrique" Maritime Park, initially designed by the artist but completed after his death, was opened to the public on 17 February at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Work was undertaken to catalogue all of César Manrique's plastic work under the auspices of the Fundación César Manrique.

An exhibition titled *Manrique. Latest painting (1992)* was opened on 15 June.

The Mediterranean Maritime Park, designed by the artist but completed after his death, was opened to the public in Ceuta on 18 June.

The FCM published the books *César Manrique* by Fernando Ruiz Gordillo and *César Manrique in his own words*, with selected texts and an introduction by Fernando Gómez Aguilera.

La Laguna University created the César Manrique Chair.

The El Palmarejo Lookout at Valle Gran Rey, La Gomera, designed by Manrique but built after his death, was opened to the public.

#### 1996

The exhibition *César Manrique. New York*, held at the Fundación César Manrique, was one of the first fruits of the FCM's efforts to catalogue Manrique's work in the United States.

Five of the artist's works were included in the travelling exhibition titled *Canary Island Fine Arts Prizes* organized by the Canary Island Regional Deputy Department of Culture.

Axel Menges publishers released the book *Fundación César Manrique, Lanzarote*, with a text by Simón Marchán Fiz, Stuttgart, Germany.

The Government of the Canary Islands created the César Manrique Environment Prize, designed to encourage both institutional and private initiatives to protect the Canary Island environment.

#### 1997

He received a posthumous Honorary Doctor degree from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Manrique was represented in the exhibition titled *10 years at La Regenta*, organized by the Canary Island Regional Deputy Department of Culture and Sport, held at the La Regenta Art Centre, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

The FCM published the book *Timanfaya. Restaurante El Diablo* (Timanfaya. El Diablo Restaurant), with texts by Lázaro Santana and photographs by Pedro Albornoz.

A replica of one of César Manrique's mobiles was installed at the main entrance to the Berlin fairgrounds on the occasion of the Tourism Fair.

#### 1998

A number of Manrique's works were included in the exhibition *Indigenous art* organized by the Canary Island Regional Deputy Department of Culture and Sport and shown at the La Granja Exhibition Hall, Santa Cruz de Tenerife and the La Regenta Art Centre, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

#### 2000

The exhibition *Future Perfect (Art on how architecture imagined the future)*, organized by the Cardiff Centre for Visual Arts in Wales, contained drawings and photographs of three of César Manrique's spatial works.

The FCM published *Cactus Garden* with texts by Juan Ramírez de Lucas and *El Río Lookout* with texts by Francisco Galante. The photographs for both were authored by Pedro Albornoz.

#### 2001

One of Manrique's sculptures was shown in the exhibition *Spanish Civil War. Dreams and Nightmares*, organized by the Imperial War Museum in London.

#### 2003

The Fundación César Manrique published a monograph devoted to the artist's pictorial oeuvre titled *César Manrique. Pintura (César Manrique. Painting)*. The texts were authored by Fernando Castro Borrego, María Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, Mariano Navarro and Lázaro Santana.

#### 2005

An anthological exhibition of the artist's works was shown at the Valencian Institute of Modern Art (IVAM).

## **FICHA TÉCNICA DE LA EXPOSICIÓN**

### **Título**

César Manrique 1950-1957

### **Fecha**

29 junio – 10 septiembre 2006

### **Comisario**

Fernando Gómez Aguilera

### **Organización y producción**

Fundación César Manrique

### **Número de obras**

34 pinturas

### **Procedencia de las obras**

Lanzarote

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Madrid

Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Santiago de Compostela

Soria

Zaragoza

### **Textos del catálogo**

Fernando Gómez Aguilera

Eugenio Carmona





El catálogo *César Manrique 1950-1957*,  
editado por la Fundación César Manrique,  
se acabó de imprimir el día 20 de junio de 2006.