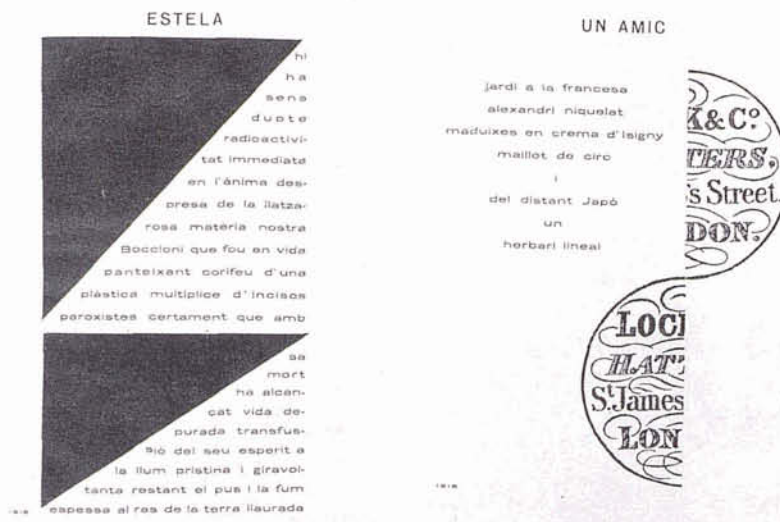


AVANT-GARDE LITERATURE IN CATALONIA



J.M. JUNOY, POEMES & CAL·LIGRAMES, 1920

THE AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS HAVE PROVIDED THE MOST VIBRANT, IMPASSIONED AND RICHEST AESTHETIC ADVENTURES OF THIS CENTURY. THE NEED TO BREAK WITH TRADITIONAL AESTHETICS AND THE SPIRIT OF AVANT-GARDE RESEARCH VERY SOON MADE THEIR APPEARANCE IN CATALONIA.

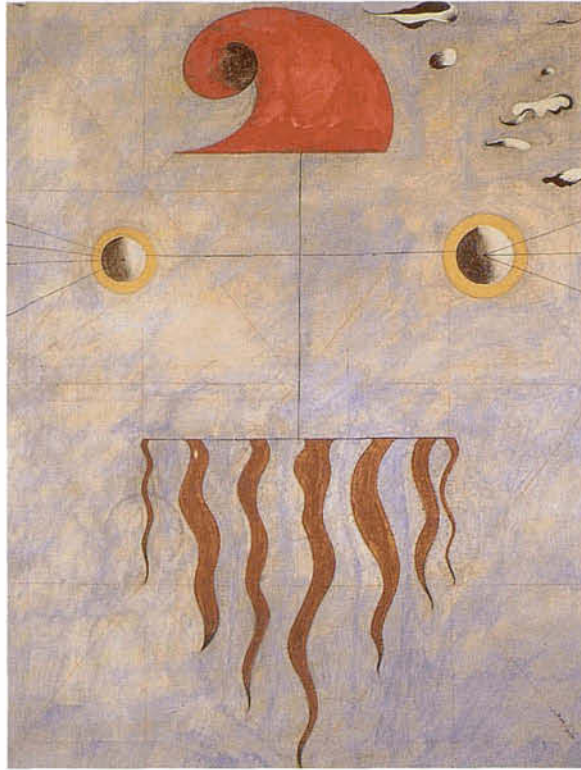
ISIDOR CÒNSUL LITERARY CRITIC

In the first third of the twentieth century, Catalonia played a leading role in the development and diffusion of the avant-gardes. But little is known about this role beyond our own borders, in spite of the fact that leading avant-garde artists such as Joan Miró or Salvador Dalí were Catalan and the importance that Catalonia came to have in the work and training of Picasso.

The avant-garde movements have pro-

vided the most vibrant, impassioned and richest aesthetic adventures of this century. The spirit of avant-garde research, along with the fever of interior rebellion and the need to break with traditional aesthetics, very soon made their appearance in Catalonia. On 18 April 1904, the Majorcan writer Gabriel Alomar used and defined the term "Futurism" for the first time, in a talk at the Ateneu Barcelonès which was published in 1905. He thus became the inventor of

a term that was to be tremendously important amongst the early avant-gardes, even if Alomar's futurism did not have the same meaning as that put forward by T. de Marinetti from 1909 on. But we now know that Marinetti borrowed the newly-coined term without acknowledging it. The Italian writer heard of Alomar and his talk through an article published in *Mercure de France* and, almost certainly, through the Castilian translation published in the maga-



JOAN MIRÓ. CATALAN COUNTRYMAN'S HEAD, 1925

zine *Renacimiento*. Rubén Darío, in a commentary on Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto", pointed out in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*, that "Futurism had already been founded by the great Majorcan Gabriel Alomar". Nevertheless, he also points out the differences and remarks on the similarity in the name, though not in the spirit of the movement. Whatever the case, in Catalonia between 1907 and 1910 there were a total of three literary magazines incorporating the word "Futurisme" in the title.

In Barcelona, the gallery owner Josep Dalmau i Rafel (1867-1937) became a leading promoter of the new avant-garde aesthetics and made an enormous contribution with his work in two complementary fields: organising exhibitions of avant-garde art and supporting publishing ventures linked to the new awareness. Of the exhibitions, I would stress the importance of "Art Cubista" (1912), "Art Francès d'Avant-guarda" (1920) and "Art Modern i Estranger" (1929); of the publishing ventures, the magazines *Trossos* and *391*. *Trossos*, directed first by J.M. Junoy

and later by J.V. Foix, appeared from 1917 to 1918. It published poems by Philippe Soupault, Pierre Reverdy and Tristan Tzara, translated by J.V. Foix and Joaquim Folguera. Amongst the illustrations there are some outstanding drawings by Frank Burty and Albert Gleizes, as well as contributions from Pere Ynglada, Joan Miró and Joaquim Torres-Garcia.

The other magazine, *391*, became Catalonia's contribution to the international avant-garde. Barcelona during World War I became a haven for artists fleeing from their own countries, amongst them Arthur Cravan, Robert Delaunay, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger and Francis Picabia. Picabia contributed to the magazine *291* founded by Alfred Stieglitz in New York, and *391* became a sort of continuation. It was the result of an initiative by Francis Picabia, financed by Josep Dalmau, and in Barcelona four issues appeared, in 1917. Afterwards Picabia continued to publish the magazine until 1924 in New York, Zurich and Paris. The Barcelona issues contain a calligramme by Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'horloge de demain*, as

well as texts by Marie Laurencin, Max Jacob, Max Goth and Picabia himself, who also contributed drawings and illustrations.

The situation in Catalan avant-garde publications is far more complex and no description would be complete without the three magazines inspired by Joan Salvat-Papasseit: *Un enemic del poble* (1917-1919), *Art Voltaic* (1918) and *Proa* (1921), the last two of which followed futurist lines, as did *Columna de Foc* (1918), published in Reus. Of similar interest are the three publications that appeared in Sitges: *Terramar* (1919-1920), *Monitor* (1921-1922) and *L'Amic de les Arts* (1926-1928), which became the most important magazine in Catalan avant-garde art. Also *Hèlix* (1929-1930), in Vilafranca del Penedès, of a Surrealist nature and co-ordinated by Joan Ramon Masoliver; or *La Nova Revista* (1927-1929), directed by J.M. Junoy. And neither can we leave out the eclectic role played by *La Revista* between 1915 and 1936, a publication of a more conventional type, but in close touch with the new aesthetic movements. To all this should be added the



JOAN MIRÓ. AVIAT L'INSTANT, 1919

proclamations and manifestos published during these years. Amongst the best-known are "Against poets with a small 'p'. First Catalan futurist manifesto" (1919), signed by Joan Salvat-Papasseit, and the "Yellow Manifesto" (1928), signed by Salvador Dalí, Sebastià Gasch and Lluís Montanyà. The second of these, in which Joan Miró, Joan Prats and Federico García Lorca were also involved, made quite an impression, provoked a brief but intense controversy within Catalan culture and has been the subject of attention and study in the general historiography of the avant-gardes.

Another result of the activism set off by the proliferation of exhibitions, manifestos and magazines was the important presence in Barcelona of some of the fundamental names in the avant-garde movements. Apart from those already mentioned, there were visits by André Breton, Filippo T. Marinetti and Le Corbusier, all this without counting the friends Dalí brought to Cadaqués in the second half of the twenties: René Magritte, Paul Eluard, Luís Buñuel or Federico García Lorca.

Catalan literature took quickly to the force, the vitality and the heterodoxy of the new aesthetics. Amongst the writers and groups of most interest are J.M. Junoy (1887-1955), who introduced cubist literature into Catalonia, or the Grup de Sabadell (Joan Oliver, Armand Obiols, Francesc Trabal, Joaquim Folguera and Carles Sindreu), who played the game of parody and piercing satire against the bourgeoisie of the time. It is also important to mention the literary work of Salvador Dalí and, especially, of Joan Salvat-Papasseit (1894-1924) and J.V. Foix (1893-1987), the leading names in the Catalan literary avant-garde.

Joan Salvat-Papasseit, as well as the programmatic activism which led him to direct magazines and sign manifestos, is the author of an innovative poetry charged with dynamism, of which *Poemes en ondes hertzianes* (1919), *L'irradiador del port i les gavines* (1921) and *El poema de la rosa als llavis* (1923) stand out. The three collections all develop an idea of modernity, mechanization and movement that comes close to Futurism and to words in freedom.

J.V. Foix, for his part, has become a key author of the Catalan avant-garde, on account both of the quality and the lucidity of his own work and of his programmatic work as an analyst and informer of European culture. He was one of the pillars of *L'Amic de les Arts* and his poetry takes in a range of avant-garde styles. He was attracted by Dada and also let himself be seduced by the futurist calligrammes. In spite of this, his most consistent contribution belongs to the world of dreams and the eddies of the unconscious, and follows paths that lie close to Surrealism. Outstanding in his work, with its great originality and rigour, are the volumes *Gertrudis* (1927), *KRTU* (1932), *Sol, i de dol* (1936) and *Les Irreals Omegues* (1948). After the Spanish Civil War, J.V. Foix, faithful to the spirit of the avant-garde, connected with the Surrealist-inspired "Dau al Set" group, which brought together painters such as Tharrats, Tàpies and Joan Ponç, alongside the poet J. Brossa. He thus became a bridge and a point of reference between the Catalan avant-gardes of before and after the war. ■