

ALFONS BORRELL

Works and Days

The exhibition is open to the public from 3 July to 27 September 2015

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday and public holidays from 10 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Monday (unless a public holiday), closed

Fundació Joan Miró * *J.M.* Barcelona

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I. Prelude

This exhibition of the work of Alfons Borrell (Barcelona, 1931) unfolds in seven lines that remain open to interpretive paths which convey the impossibility of understanding the work as a completed, static, conclusive process. Alfons Borrell's art asks the viewer for forms of experimentation rather than codes of interpretation; it calls for a phenomenological rather than a psychological essay. His paintings and drawings are not treated as isolated objects; they are a manifestation that opens up to its surroundings. The selection in this exhibition enables us to examine his art according to two inseparable features that seem to support the attention that the work calls for: the first is persistence; the second is intensity. These two features are captured in the title of the exhibition, borrowed from the poem by the Greek poet Hesiod. This first section aims to set an initial tone that will allow us to essay or test the work of Alfons Borrell (and to test ourselves in his work).

II. The Oblique Revolt

In Sabadell, in the early 1960s – in the midst of the Franco dictatorship – a confluence of a series of yearnings and attitudes towards the practice of art unleashed an ephemeral gesture of revolt named Gallot, in which Alfons Borrell was involved. Several actions held in September 1960 in Barcelona and Sabadell gave meaning to the group, which gained a high profile with the public painting action held in the Plaça

de Catalunya in Barcelona. For Borrell, given his commitment to the language of abstraction, with an intimate, contained production, far removed from the grand public gestures and defying attitudes of some of the other members in the group, the Gallot experience was uncomfortable and disconcerting. The artist's passage through the group was oblique, following the angle of his own particular experience. Over time, this oblique line has become clearer, now that we draw it along its two defining points: the abstract work from the mid-fifties, prior to Gallot, and Borrell's later production, which was consolidated as a language of its own around the mid-seventies.

III. Opening and Overflow

This section brings together pieces that show an attitude which appears throughout Borrell's oeuvre and that we could define as a movement of opening up towards and resonating with nature, where nature is considered as an ever-changing, dynamic form. This movement is contrasted with the contraction and retreat of the works gathered in the next room. It is in this constant movement of release and retreat, of desire and fear, that we find the strength behind Alfons Borrell's entire production, as if they were two legs that enable him to walk and forge ahead. In this section of the exhibition, we follow the meaning of 'opening' as described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty when he defines emotion as that way of opening ourselves up to the world while also recognizing ourselves in what is

manifested as external to us. This opening contains the implicit notion of overflow in the inability to delimit that which refuses to be delimited. In this sense, it is interesting to recover *Aigua fosca* (Dark Water), a film that Borrell made in 1964. The piece illustrates and explores the notion of change and overflow based on the metaphor of the water in a river, always dynamic and changing, impossible to hold back in its course.

IV. Contained Action

Creating a space of order and containment within a language that withdraws into itself and reveals its own boundaries: that is what, in a sense, is proposed in the works by Alfons Borrell that are grouped into the fourth section of the exhibition. Unlike the evocation of nature that defined the pieces we considered in the previous section, now the work ceases to be full of external experiences and confidences and emerges as evidence by virtue of its pure autonomous presence. Upon viewing these works, we realize that their meaning or understanding does not go beyond their being grasped as a viewing experience. Borrell's rejection of colour and his use of black and white as the only elements in his work, as is particularly apparent in his output from the late seventies and was already present in his abstract pieces from the late fifties, reinforce this more contained and less evocative approach. The late seventies were also when his production took a turn towards the language of abstraction that was particularly radical and singular within the context of the art scene at that moment.

V. Experiencing the Boundaries

In the late seventies a recurrent element began to appear, one that would remain throughout all of Borrell's production from then on: an attempt to enclose and delimit a space defined by a square or rectangular shape. The appearance of this form, which in some cases acts as a presence and in others as an absence, generates a void that forces us to delve into the experience of boundaries. This view of the work as a space for exploring its boundaries (both physical and language-related) appears as a constant throughout Borrell's entire output, with its enclosing and measuring signs as a way of marking a surface with thin diagonal lines that cross and mark the space; or simply with a vertical line, which is always a symbolic indication of a presence; or a horizontal, which we inevitably associate with the notion of the horizon.

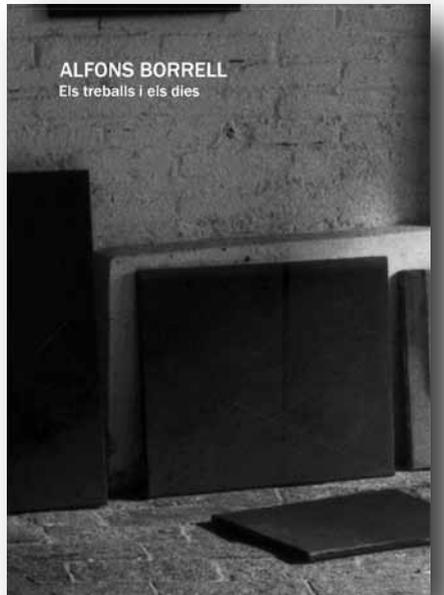
VI. Colour as Subject

For Borrell, colour has the quality of an invading agent. It dyes us. Colour invades us like a living, changing substance. In his work colour is inextricably linked to the experience of light. It moves and fluctuates, full of life, across the surface of the support provided by the piece. Colour is no longer simply considered as the quality of an object; instead it appears as a subject in its own right. Beyond the boundaries that the support of a specific object may seek to provide, colour as matter spills out of the frame and invades everything. Orange, the colour that prevails in this section, is a colour that Borrell has used and uses repeatedly.

Orange acquires symbolic connotations for the artist. It represents light, not the light of sundown but of dawn, which gives meaning to all that is born as a form of life and hope. The pieces that comprise this section attempt to show these ideas about Borrell's use of colour according to this movement and overflow that the colour itself follows in the oscillations of the support that contains it.

VII. Repetition and Variation

This last section of the exhibition is devoted to a practice that emerges significantly throughout Alfons Borrell's production and is more than just a methodology, as it includes certain ideas and attitudes that determine its visual language. This practice is related to the notions of repetition and variation, which remain as a working method capable of generating an extensive and intense output on paper, which Borrell produced alongside his painting as a strikingly unique and intense body of work. His work on paper reveals a process of research and oscillation that becomes visible and takes on its temporal meaning in the serial form that the works acquire when they are placed in order and exhibited. The drawings are shown in the form and structure of a polyptych as an expressive unit. The serial work appears not as a projection and an expression of a pre-existing idea, but rather as a process of capturing form, where form is viewed as variable and changing, as an end in and of itself.



Catalogue for sale at the Fundació Joan Miró bookshop

With texts by: Alfons Borrell, Carles Guerra, Jèssica Jaques, Álvaro Siza and Oriol Vilapuig

A project by Oriol Vilapuig