

PRESS KIT



SUMER
AND THE
MODERN
PARADIGM

28.10.2017–
21.1.2018
FUNDACIÓ
JOAN MIRÓ

Fundació Joan Miró

* *J.M.* Barcelona

Fundación **BBVA**

There is a train track in the history of art that goes way back to Mesopotamia. It skips the whole Orient, The Mayas, and American Indians. Duchamp is on it. Cézanne is on it. Picasso and the Cubists are on it; Giacometti, Piet Mondrian, and so many, many more – whole civilizations. Like I say, it goes way in and back to Mesopotamia for maybe 5,000 years, so there is no sense in calling out names.

Willem de Kooning

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Press Release

Sumer and the Modern Paradigm

Fundació Joan Miró

28 October 2017– 21 January 2018

Curator: Pedro Azara

Sponsored by the BBVA Foundation

The Fundació Joan Miró presents *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm*, an exhibition that explores the attraction and influence that the arts of Lower Mesopotamia exerted on some of the leading artists of the twentieth century.

The exhibition, sponsored by the BBVA Foundation and curated by Pedro Azara, takes as its point of departure the important archaeological findings excavated from sites in what is currently southern Iraq during the interwar period.

With some fifteen of these relevant ancient objects from the most prominent public and private collections in Europe, and over one hundred documents, including photographs, books, catalogues and magazines, the exhibition reconstructs the fascinating process these archaeological remains underwent from being perceived as ethnographic artefacts to being appreciated as works of art.

***Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* connects this group of pieces with over sixty modern and contemporary works—paintings, sculptures, engravings, and videos—by artists such as Willem de Kooning, Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró, Willi Baumeister, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Le Corbusier.**

Visitors will experience the powerful impact that these discoveries had on some of the leading figures of twentieth-century art and will be able to follow the traces they left in the development of artistic language from modernity up until today.

Barcelona, 26 October 2017. *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* examines the close connection between the ensemble of archaeological findings excavated from sites in current-day southern Iraq during the first decades of the twentieth century and the emergence of the artistic languages of modernity, while delving into a specific aspect of the phenomenon of primitivism in the history of western art.

The BBVA Foundation is sponsoring this project, proposed by the Fundació Joan Miró, which has relied upon the curatorial contribution of Pedro Azara (Bois-Colombes, France, 1955), an architect, professor of aesthetics at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya School of Architecture, and expert in ancient cultures. For Azara, 'this exhibition attempts to find answers about the modern fascination with artefacts from the ancient Near East, conveying what the artists from that period saw in these objects, why they found them so interesting, and what they expected in producing visual and written pieces that interpreted these works from the past, so distant yet apparently so relevantly addressing the present.'

The body of archaeological findings known as Sumerian art -excavated in southern Iraq, under British rule from the fall of the Ottoman Empire until the beginning of World War I - became the focus of attention for historians, anthropologists, and intellectuals from the late 1920s on. This appreciation of the objects and materials found in that region was essential to their taking on the status of works of art. At the same time, these findings influenced the development of a language that was characteristic of modern art, as we can see in the works of some of the leading figures in twentieth century art, from Henry Moore to Joan Miró, along with Alberto Giacometti, Willi Baumeister and Willem de Kooning. *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* highlights the connection between this important archaeological milestone and the history of art and twentieth-century thought up until the collapse of the colonial system following World War II.

Primarily, the show features ancient and modern works as well as documents that bridged the gap between the two, allowing artists to become acquainted with Mesopotamian pieces which were not always available for viewing during the interwar period. Specifically, the Fundació Joan Miró is showing a collection of almost 200 pieces, including a wide range of documents, significant Mesopotamian archaeological samples, and modern works dated from the late 1920s to the early 60s by artists such as Willem de Kooning, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Joan Miró, Henri Michaux, Juan Batlle Planas, David Smith, Willi Baumeister, Constant Nieuwenhuys and Le Corbusier. The exhibition closes with a sample of contemporary art inspired by the current situation in the region, featuring pieces by Francis Alÿs and Anselm Kiefer.

Sumer and the Modern Paradigm is divided into four thematic areas that analyse modern artists' reception, appropriation and recasting of aspects such as the myths, writing, composition or figuration of Mesopotamia, and examine their reasons for adopting them as ethical and aesthetic models. This detailed central analysis is preceded by an introduction about the discovery and promotion of Sumer in the West

and closes with an epilogue about the current fate of the archaeological sites in Iraq in the context of the geopolitical situation in the region, viewed from the perspective of contemporary art.

Between the two World Wars, academic and journalistic accounts of the archaeological findings in Syria and Iraq were in and of themselves a source of inspiration for modern artists, given the relatively scant opportunities for viewing the works first-hand. *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* sets forth the idea that the perspectives and the works of these artists were often the result of the interpretation of all those documents, highlighting the importance of this mediation. Catalogues, magazines, books, postcards, photographs, posters and other items thoroughly featured in the first exhibition space and throughout the show, widened the presence of ancient Mesopotamian works in the collective imagination of that time, sparking the huge interest of avant-garde artists, eager to find new references beyond classical paradigms. According to Azara, these works 'appeared to provide valid answers to questions posed in the first half of the twentieth century that continue to be pertinent today.'

Specifically, in the second room, the exhibition addresses the influence of the myths and epic poems of Lower Mesopotamia as part of an iconography that was new at the end of the nineteenth century and that became a recurrent theme in the West up until today. The translation of Mesopotamian texts and a broadened awareness of myths such as the biblical Tower of Babel or the Epic of Gilgamesh –a poetic account of the history of the King of Uruk– conveyed an imaginary about the human condition that appealed to the artists featured in this space, as we can see, for example, in the work of the German painter Willi Baumeister. In turn, the Tower of Babel myth, revisited after the discovery of the foundations of the Great Ziggurat of Babylon in the early twentieth century, influenced the pictorial utopias of the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys and even the monumental modern architecture of Le Corbusier, as shown in this exhibition area.

Next, the third section of the exhibition focuses on cuneiform script, highly valued first by Western archaeological museums and then by the artists of that time. In the late 1920s, artists such as Henri Michaux and Batlle Planas chose the script of cuneiform signs – which they were unable to read – to create their personal form of writing, shown in this space, which strove to convey the essence of things with no mediation whatsoever.

The legacy of the Sumerian compositional system in art up until today is the focus of the fourth area in the exhibition, closely linked to the previous section and hence presented in the same space. Shortly before World War II, in Athens, the sculptor David Smith discovered a type of object that was new to him: the engraved Mesopotamian cylinder seal, which was rolled across a soft surface to print a negative image of its scenes as many times as the user wished. The resulting compositions depended on how they were printed and offered an image that was unfettered by classical compositional conventions; Smith used these as the basis for producing a series of medallions

condemning the violence of war. David Smith's medallions, among other pieces, are shown in this space alongside three Sumerian cylinder seals from the *Musée du Louvre*.

The Sumerian rooms in the Louvre were a place Joan Miró often visited in search of a visual 'impact,' as he revealed to the historian Pierre Scheider in 1963. The statues of the Neo-Sumerian King Gudea, found in the early twentieth century, the effigies of female deities and the votive statues of worshippers discovered in the valley of Diyala in the 1930s had drawn the attention of sculptors such as Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti years earlier. In the fifth section, the exhibition considers the connections between Mesopotamian figuration and the works of these artists, describing how Sumerian statuary became a part of the Western artistic imagination further to its dissemination in journals such as *Documents* and *Cahiers d'Art* and, particularly, through the black-and-white photographs of Horacio Coppola. In this space, an important collection of these images accompanies relevant Sumerian sculptural works from the *Musée du Louvre* and the British Museum, such as the Head of Gudea (c. 2120 BC) or a stone worshipper (c. 2500 BC). These archaeological pieces are shown alongside the works they inspired, produced by Miró, Giacometti, Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Willem de Kooning, the latter of which is represented here with a large 1952 coloured drawing from the Centre Pompidou.

The last section of the exhibition is titled *Statues Also Die*, in reference to the documentary produced by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker in 1953 about the colonial plunder of art and the problematic relationship between ancient sculpture and exhibition. In this area, the exhibition closes with a selection of contemporary art addressing the situation of the archaeological sites in southern Iraq in the current geopolitical context, with a 1981 painting by the German artist Anselm Kiefer titled *Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Cedar Forest II* and *Colour Matching. Mosul, Iraq*, a 2016 video by the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs.

The exhibition project is rounded out with a specific programme of activities and a publication which includes a curatorial essay by Pedro Azara; a text by Marc Marín about the impact of Sumerian art on Joan Miró's work; an article by Brigitte Pedde addressing the influence of ancient Near Eastern art in the trajectory of the German painter Willi Baumeister, and an essay by Zainab Bahrani that reveals the links between Sumerian art and avant-garde art.

The exhibition will be at the Fundació Joan Miró from 26 October 2017 to 21 January 2018. Visitors to *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* will relive the journey across three millennia on which the artists of the early avant-garde movements embarked in search of the earliest signs and forms of art.



Pedro Azara. Photo: Pere Pratdesaba © Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.

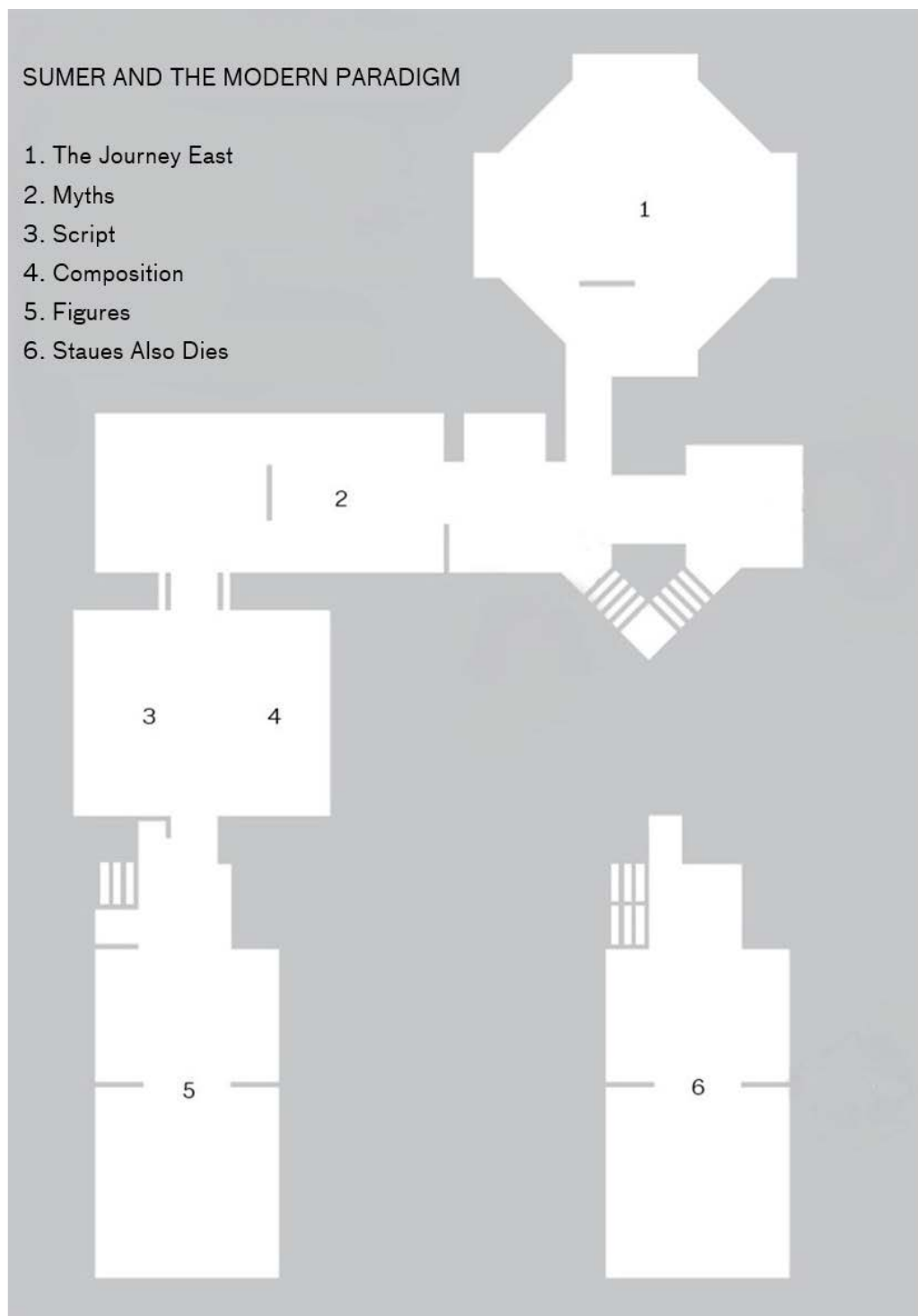
Pedro Azara Nicolás (Bois-Colombes, France, 1955), an architect and professor of aesthetics at the Barcelona School of Architecture, is also an expert on ancient culture. His background makes him a unique archaeologist, providing a highly valuable perspective for researching the origins of the tools for interpreting civilization.

Pedro Azara has curated several exhibitions, such as *Casas del alma* (CCCB, Barcelona 1997), *La última mirada* (MACBA, Barcelona, 1997), *Abans del diluvi. Mesopotàmia, 3500-2100 aC*, (CaixaForum, Barcelona, 2012), *Ciudad del espejismo, Bagdad, de Wright a Venturi* (COAC, Casa Árabe, Centre of Architecture, Society of Architects, Riwaq Bienale, Barcelona, Madrid, Boston, New York and Ramala, 2008-12), *Mediterráneo.*

Del mito a la razón (Barcelona, Madrid, 2014) and *From Ancient to Modern. Archaeology and Aesthetics* (ISAW, New York, 2015).

Pedro Azara is also the author of several books: *Imagen y olvido. El arte como engaño en la filosofía de Platón* (Siruela, Madrid, 1995). *Castillos en el aire. Mito y arquitectura en Occidente* (Editorial Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2002). As part of his scientific work, he has participated in several archaeological expeditions in Syria and Iraq.

Floor Plan



Sections

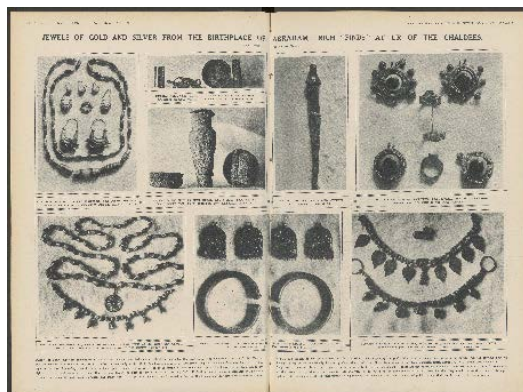
Excerpt from the Curatorial Essay and Selection of Commented Works

1. The Journey East

Sumer and the Modern Paradigm is an exhibition about the discovery, exploration and exploitation of the ancient Near East; the subsequent coverage and promotion of the findings in the press, lectures and exhibitions; and, finally, the reception among certain modern artists, primarily Surrealists (Georges Bataille; Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti and David Smith in their early years; Willi Baumeister, Joan Miró and Henri Michaux, among others), of the works found in Lower Mesopotamia. These were excavated in major archaeological missions during the interwar period, when the Near East was divided into Western colonies and mandates.

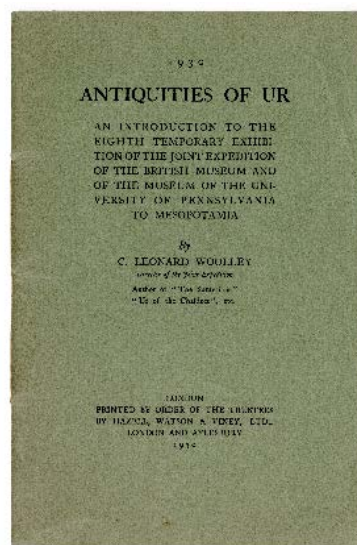
Considered primitive and anonymous, like Mayan, Cycladic, African or Easter Island art, Sumerian visual and literary works were interpreted as examples of 'primal' creativity, without the interference of language, but rather expressed through marks and forms that directly conveyed the 'truth' of things, things 'in and of themselves.' For most scholars, Sumerian works, narratives, images and myths were the origin of Western art; *History Begins at Sumer* was the title of a widely read popular work on the subject by Samuel Noah Kramer. For others, fortunately, they had nothing to do with 'Art', not being the kind of marketable objects that would be shown in a collection, but rather living works that mediated with the invisible and were capable of exerting an influence on the communities that had created them or in which they had emerged.

The Illustrated London News,
17 March 1923
Magazine
Zentralbibliothek Zürich



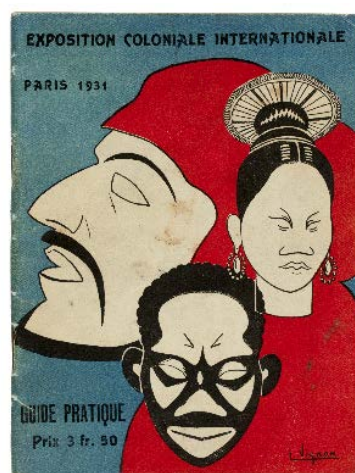
Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1924 had a worldwide impact. The organizers of Near Eastern archaeological missions soon began seeking illustrated press coverage to announce their discoveries to the broad public, aiming to secure private funding for their excavations.

Exhibition Catalogue
Antiquities of Ur. London, 1930
Private Collection



The Anglo-American mission launched to excavate the Sumerian city of Ur in the 1920s and 30s, led by the British archaeologist Charles Leonard Woolley, was perhaps the most important in the Near East prior to World War II, not only in terms of the number of participants, but also in terms of the size of the site and the relevance of its discoveries. Among the most salient are the royal tombs with rib vaulting (c. 2600 BC), the gold grave goods and the human sacrifices to honour the dead. Woolley promoted his findings in monographs, archaeological reports and articles for the press, seeking to encourage private donations for his excavations.

Guide to the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*. Paris, 1931
Private Collection



A large number of colonial exhibitions were held in European cities (Paris, London and Marseille, among others) between 1850 and World War II, displaying the 'goods' brought back by the colonial powers (art and archaeology museums) that discovered and protected them. Thirty per cent of the findings remained in the colonies after their discovery, while the rest was sent to Western museums, which competed for ownership of the masterpieces of antiquity.

2. Myths

Mesopotamian texts, written in languages that remained unknown until the nineteenth century, were discovered and translated late. Nevertheless, the myth of the Tower of Babel had been known since ancient times. This architectural structure, the biblical symbol of human ambition- and of the threat it posed to divine supremacy - was based on the existence, real this time, of the ziggurat of the great temple of Babylon.

The Tower of Babel, a recurring theme in Western art and architecture, endowed the first skyscrapers with symbolic or cultural weight. Tall-building cities such as New York may have been inspired by Babylon. Architects such as Le Corbusier and Loos used the typology of the ziggurat - and the symbology of the Tower of Babel - in ambitious projects that symbolized the Babelian mixture of languages, like a giant hotel or a museum that was to hold all the artistic, scientific and technical knowledge in the world, such as Le Corbusier's 1928 project for the Mundaneum in Geneva.

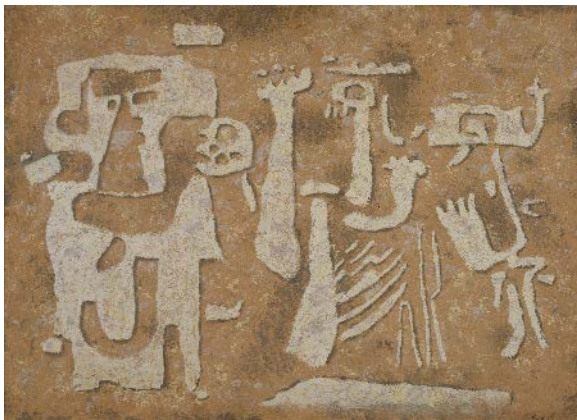
The figure of the ziggurat was associated with the biblical world due to the account of the great flood that it suggests - which, in fact, precedes that of the Bible. The same is true of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. This Sumerian epic - not available to the general public until World War II - is an account of the initiatory, real, and metaphorical journey that allowed the violent, arrogant Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, to acknowledge his mortal fate and move away, to a certain degree, from the supernatural powers that wished him ill and that, as he suspected, were fallible. Finally, the king succeeds in accepting the human condition and questioning tradition, after violent struggles with others, with the gods and with himself. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the account of a constant battle, with oneself and with fate. It may have been no coincidence that during World War II, artists such as Baumeister sought answers to human blindness and its capacity for destroying others and itself in a text that at the time was considered the oldest in history. In the midst of bomb-struck Berlin, shattered by the military forces and the police, violent deities like Ishtar and conflictive figures like Gilgamesh, capable of overcoming their ambition, proved that what was happening in the world was the eternal return to horror; a horror from which you could escape (until it caught up with you again).

Willi Baumeister

Gilgamesh and Ishtar, 1947

Archiv Baumeister at the Kunstmuseum
Stuttgart

© Willi Baumeister, VEGAP, 2017



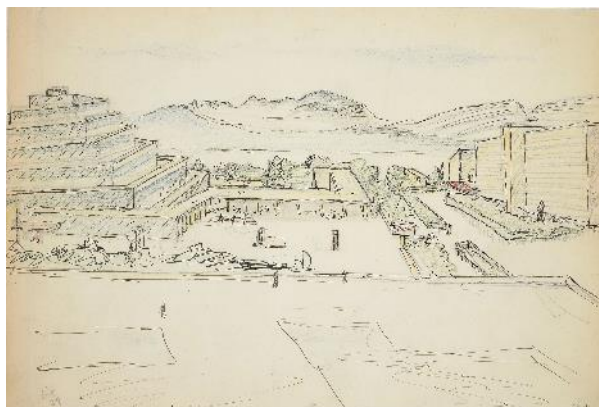
The German painter Willi Baumeister repeatedly illustrated the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the narrative poem about the adventures of the Sumerian king. After World War II, Baumeister returned to his pieces inspired by Mesopotamian myths. His view and tone changed. He introduced colour. Gilgamesh was no longer a dictatorial king confronting the world and himself; he was human, aware of his condition, but proud of his achievement: the walls of his city, Uruk, whose construction he had ordered and which survived him.

Le Corbusier

Mundaneum, Musée Mondial,
Geneva, 1929

Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris

© Le Corbusier, VEGAP, 2017



The Mundaneum was an unbuilt project designed in 1929 by the Swiss architect Le Corbusier for the League of Nations, which had just been founded in Geneva. It included a museum in which visitors would discover arts from around the world (useful and sacred arts, images and utensils) in a continuous itinerary down a spiral ramp within a monumental stepped pyramid inspired by pre-Columbian cultures as well as Assyrian and Babylonian constructions.



Constant Nieuwenhuys

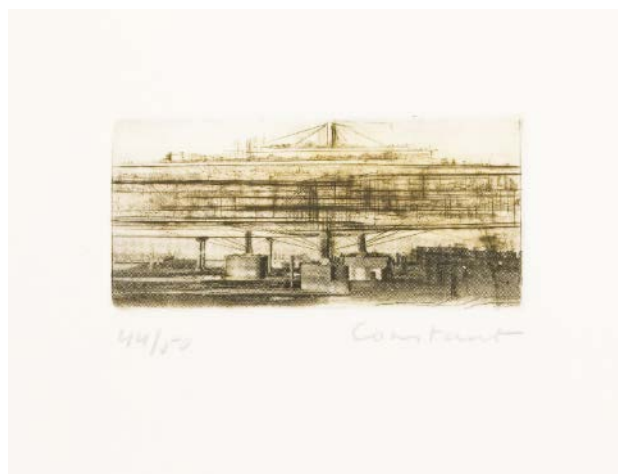
Secteur/Sector, 1970

MACBA Collection

Fundació MACBA, Fundación Repsol

Collection

© Constant Nieuwenhuys, VEGAP, 2017



Constant Nieuwenhuys

Détail d'un Secteur, 1970

MACBA Collection

Fundació MACBA, Fundación Repsol

Collection

© Constant Nieuwenhuys, VEGAP, 2017

New Babylon is a utopian project by the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys, conceived to be built in (on) existing cities, like Barcelona. This architectural utopia from the 1950s and 60s is the antithesis of the Surrealist Babylonian vision: in this case, it is a positive image of human gathering in modular pyramidal structures that are unattached from the ground and nature, providing spaces in which work and leisure, staying and walking, are undifferentiated, and which the dwellers can modify as they please.

3. Script

'... cuneiform script, the formula eternally true, forever fertile, of this unknown joy, the mystic hope of the scarlet angel of morning.' (Marcel Proust)

Tablets with cuneiform script were highly valued by Western archaeological museums. Artists such as Henri Michaux showed an interest in this 'primitive' script in which signs were practically graphic representations of things. The drawings could not be read, because they could not be translated into sounds or words; therefore, their meaning lay in their shape and layout, in their way of relating to one another. The texts were interpreted 'visually'; their contemplation – or their repetition – made it possible to know what they told. This form of writing could be used to transcribe any language, even to write down a primary language: the universal language – shared by all – sought by Michaux.

Henri Michaux

1950

MACBA Collection. Fundació MACBA. Piece acquired with support from the Fundació Catalana Occidente
© Henri Michaux, VEGAP, 2017

Perhaps inspired by his readings of Thureau-Dangin and certain works by Paul Klee with hieroglyphs and cuneiform script (Picasso also drew similar signs), Henri Michaux composed his alphabets with invented signs reminiscent of the early writing of both the Near and the Far East. They are highly personal scripts, composed as drawings of that which they refer to, shortening the distance between signs and what they represent.



Juan Batlle Planas

Sample of script, undated
Private Collection

Although Henri Michaux and Juan Batlle Planas do not appear to have met in Buenos Aires in the 1930s, the Argentine Surrealist artist produced a short series of ink drawings, never previously shown, with invented writing similar to cuneiform script. Some of them were drawn on printed paper with advertisements of Iran.



4. Composition

Cylinder seals, characteristic objects of the ancient Near East, acquired a degree of importance in modern times that they may not have had in their day. The reason is simple: they are the oldest support for images known to us. The composition with the figures is gouged out from the surface of the cylinder, without a defined limit, since that depends on the location of the beginning and the continuation of the impression; the images can be repeated in whatever way and as many times as desired, like a printed pattern. Rolling the cylinder seal over the soft surface of a clay tablet multiplies the engraved scene. Hence, when one applies pressure, an endless succession of battles appears. The compositions are not rigid or fixed, and the figures are independent from the composition; they can be printed on their own or as part of the whole, without being subordinate to it. Both the sculptor David Smith and the painter Willi Baumeister took to these humble Mesopotamian objects whose formal and expressive freedom sparked their interest in an unparalleled representational system.

*Cylinder seal.
The King Before the Great
Syrian Goddess., c. 18th
century BC.
Paris, Musée du Louvre,
Département des Antiquités
orientales*



David Smith

*Medals for Dishonour:
Cooperation of the Clergy, 1939
© David Smith, VEGAP, 2017*

The American sculptor David Smith described having discovered Sumerian cylinder seals during a long stay in Athens in 1936. The Medals for Dishonor series and some bronze plaques from the same period, populated with fantastic creatures, monsters and Assyrian bulls, are a condemnation of the violence of World War II inspired by the images of battles and the composition of those cylinder seals.



5. Figures

'For me, Sumerian sculpture ranks with Early Greek, Etruscan, Ancient Mexican, Fourth and Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian, and Romanesque and Early Gothic sculpture, as the great sculpture of the world. It shows a richness of feeling for life and its wonder and mystery, welded to direct plastic statement born of a real creative urge. It has a bigness and simplicity with no decorative trimmings (which are the sign of decadence, of flagging inspiration) [...] And in Sumerian art (as perhaps in all the greatest sculpture and painting) along with the abstract value of form and design, inseparable from it, is a deep human element.'

Henry Moore, 'Mesopotamian Art,' *The Listener*, 5 June 1935

Until the mid-1920s, there had scarcely been any exhibitions of Mesopotamian artefacts. Despite this relatively meagre exposure, by the late 1920s works from Southern Mesopotamia started being considered not only in archaeological studies (in scholarly and specialized publications) but also from an artistic perspective. The efforts of archaeologists such as Woolley and Henri Frankfort were bearing fruit: Sumero-Akkadian works, initially regarded as ethnographic objects, were ushered into the history of Western art and even highlighted as its splendid origin. Journals such as *Documents* and *Cahiers d'Art* published articles and photographs of what was already being referred to as Sumerian 'art'. The black-and-white photographs taken by the Argentine Horacio Coppola for *Cahiers d'Art* and the publication of inexpensive compilations of photographs of works from a variety of ancient cultures allowed avant-garde artists, fascinated by 'primitive' art, to discover and explore Sumerian art.

Henry Moore was one of the first modern artists to clearly voice an interest in Mesopotamian statuary. Along with Barbara Hepworth, Moore interpreted the figures of worshippers as a series of female effigies in the late 1920s. The sense of serenity conveyed by these Sumerian statues - or that he seemed to perceive in them - was what captivated the British sculptor. 'These Sumerian figures have full three-dimensional existence'. Moore carried some of the features of the worshippers over to his own works: hands held together in a gesture interpreted as pleading and eyes wide open. To organize the composition of his figures, he focused on those hands.

Less known is Joan Miró's interest in Sumerian statuary and reliefs. He admired the rooms with Sumerian pieces in the Department of Eastern Antiquities at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. On the walls of his Son Boter studio in Palma de Mallorca, he cut out photographs of Sumerian masterpieces from the National Museum of Iraq, in Baghdad, and tacked them on the wall. These clippings must have inspired some of the graffiti he drew on those walls with charcoal, some of which he used as sketches for sculptures with bulging eyes. Sumerian images provided Miró with formal solutions and expressions that he then transformed in his work.



Horacio Coppola, undated
Photographs
Kandinsky Library, Paris

In 1935, Christian Zervos published a major monograph on Mesopotamian art – held in the British Museum in London and in the Louvre in Paris – for his publishing company, Cahiers d'Art. *L'Art de la Mésopotamie*, the first publication about Mesopotamia not written from an archaeological perspective, showed the pieces as isolated works of art through the black-and-white photographs of Horacio Coppola. This photographer, known for his urban scenes of Buenos Aires, received a commission to photograph the Mesopotamian pieces at the British Museum and the Musée du Louvre for the book. These black-and-white photographs from the publisher's archive, never shown until now, defined the modern perception of Sumerian statuary.



Shaven Head of Gudea
c. 2120 BC
Musée du Louvre, Dpt. des
Antiquités orientales, Paris



Reproduction of a head of
the King of Gudea,
undated
Fondation Alberto et
Annette Giacometti, Paris



Alberto Giacometti
Still Life in the Studio, 1927,
Graphische Sammlung ETZ, Zürich
© Alberto Giacometti, VEGAP, 2017

In the 1930s, Alberto Giacometti, who was particularly interested in Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Cycladic art, portrayed several Sumerian statues from the Musée du Louvre – probably from photographs – highlighting the importance of the eyes. In addition, Giacometti had read an article about primitive art written by Pierre Verité (a collector and dealer of archaeological pieces, from Mesopotamia among other sources) and owned a plaster copy of a Sumerian head of King Gudea, which he drew on several occasions.



Stone statue of a seated figure
praying,
c. 2500 BC
The British Museum



Henry Moore
Seated Figure, 1929. The
Henry Moore Foundation.
Reproduced by permission of
the Henry Moore Foundation.
© Henry Moore, VEGAP,
2017



Barbara Hepworth
Kneeling Female Figure, 1932
The Hepworth Wakefield.
Wakefield Permanent Art
Collection

The Neo-Assyrian reliefs and sculptures at the British Museum influenced modern British art from the early twentieth century on. A pupil of the sculptor Leon Underwood, who was fascinated by 'primitive' art, Henry Moore moved away from Greco-Roman sculpture to focus on pre-Columbian, Egyptian and Sumerian art, as we can see from the position of the hands, the ecstatic gaze and the interplay of volumes: spheres and cylinders typical of Sumerian statuary, according to Henri Frankfort.

A friend of Henry Moore - with whom she studied - and of Henri Frankfort - the director of the archaeological mission organized by the Oriental Institute of Chicago in Iraq, the British sculptor Barbara Hepworth carved some of the first sculptures to reveal an influence of Sumerian statuary, especially regarding the position of the hands, the outsized carved eyes – the only salient facial features – and the schematic volumes.



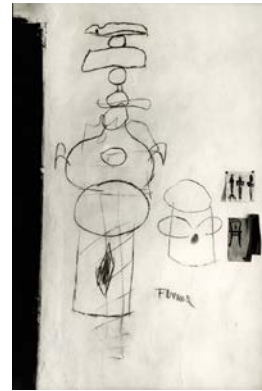
Female Figure

c. 2nd millennium BC, Inner Syria
Paris, Musée du Louvre,
Dpt. des Antiquités orientales



Joan Miró

Maquette for a Monument
c. 1964
Fundació Joan Miró
©Successió Miró, 2017



Pedro Coll, undated

Photograph. Clippings of
Sumerian statues and
sketches on a wall in Joan
Miró's studio at Son Boter.
Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a
Mallorca

Syro-Mesopotamian terracotta female effigies (both divine and human), possibly representing an age-old goddess with a human body and the face of a bird, a sign of her power over the different realms of the world. The heads of some of Joan Miró's anthropomorphic statues made of industrial hooks remind us of the pointy heads of these figures.

Willem de Kooning

c. 1952
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art
moderne/Centre de création industrielle
© Willem de Kooning, VEGAP, 2017

After discovering the statue of a male worshipper from Tell Asmar at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the early 1950s, Willem de Kooning produced his *Women* series, comprising six oils and several drawings in which he presents these women as fertility goddesses. The size of their eyes, the clasped hands and the frontality of the figures suggest the influence of Sumerian iconography.



6. Statues Also Die

The pillage of the colonial period (across a vast region rich in sources of energy), the wars ravaging the Near East since 1973, the plunder, trafficking of antiquities, radical iconoclasm and political instrumentalisation of the ruins have led archaeological remains - all fragile by definition, and particularly those built with adobe - to a point of no return. Today, Sumer evokes tragic images, symbols of human greed and political violence. In their current state, the art and environment of Mesopotamia no longer express the serenity that Moore saw in the gaze and the gestures of the Sumerian worshippers. Violence is no longer contained in the Epic of Gilgamesh, but rather in how we treat this poem. The modern artworks that Mesopotamia inspires speak of the borders established by colonial powers - as if gates could be built in the desert; they speak of loss, destruction (frenzied construction), plunder and fanaticism.

Francis Alÿs

Color Matching. Mosul, Iraq, 2016

Video still

Courtesy of the Ruya Foundation © Francis Alÿs



Further to a request from the Ruya Foundation, the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs created *Untitled, Mosul, Iraq, 31 Oct 2016* for the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 2017 Venice Biennale. Shortly after his experience on the Mosul front line, Alÿs posed the question: 'Is art just a means of survival through the catastrophe of war? [...] Why the Middle East? Because it's the nest of civilisation, the heart of all human conflicts.'

Authors and Sources of the Works

Sumer and the Modern Paradigm

Fundació Joan Miró

28 October 2017– 21 January 2018

Curator: Pedro Azara

Sponsored by the BBVA Foundation

List of Authors

Francis Alÿs	Lucien Hervé
Jurgis Baltrusaitis	Isidore Isou
Juan Batlle Planas	Alfred Jeremias
Willi Baumeister	Anselm Kiefer
Jorge Luis Borges	Samuel Noah Kramer
Georg E. Buckhardt	Le Corbusier
Francesc Català-Roca	André Malraux
Edward Chiera	Henri Michaux
Agatha Christie	Joan Miró
Juan Eduardo Cirlot	Henry Moore
Pedro Coll	Josep Planas Muntanyà
George Contenau	John Murray
Horacio Coppola	Constant Nieuwenhuys
René Crevel	Charles Olson
Henri Frankfort	Amédée Ozenfant
Douglas Fraser	André Parrot
Daniel Fresnoy	Georges Perrot
Federico García Lorca	George Rawlinson
Alberto Giacometti	David Smith
Anthony Gilbert	Francis Thureau-Dangin
Austen Henry Layard	Charles Leonard Woolley
Barbara Hepworth	Christian Zervos

Sources of the Works

Archive Baumeister im Kunstmuseum Stuttgart
Ateneu Barcelonès
Biblioteca de l'Abadia de Montserrat
Biblioteca de Catalunya
Biblioteca de l'ETSAB. Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya
Bibliothèque Nationale de France
British Council Collection
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée nationale d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle
Col·lecció Enric Granell
Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya
CRAI Biblioteca de Lletres. Universitat de Barcelona
CRAI Biblioteca de Filosofia, Geografia i Història. Universitat de Barcelona
Fondation Giacometti
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris
Fundació Joan Miró
Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca
The Estate of David Smith and Hauser & Wirth
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa
Graphische Sammlung ETZ Zürich
Hemeroteca de La Vanguardia
Jorge Mara, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart
MACBA. Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
MNAC. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Biblioteca Joaquim Folch i Torres
Musée du Louvre, Paris. Département des Antiquités orientales
Parlament de Catalunya. Col·lecció Fornas
Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres
Ruya Foundation
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum
Successió Miró
Tate
The British Museum
The Estate of Lord Zuckerman
The Henry Moore Foundation
The Hepworth Wakefield. Wakefield Permanent Art Collection
The Piers Arts Centre Collection, Orkney
Universitat Pompeu Fabra
Zentralbibliothek Zürich
Private archives and collections

Publication

Sumer and the Modern Paradigm

Published by the Fundació Joan Miró and the BBVA Foundation

Texts: Pedro Azara, Zainaab Bahrani, Brigitte Pedde and Marc Marín

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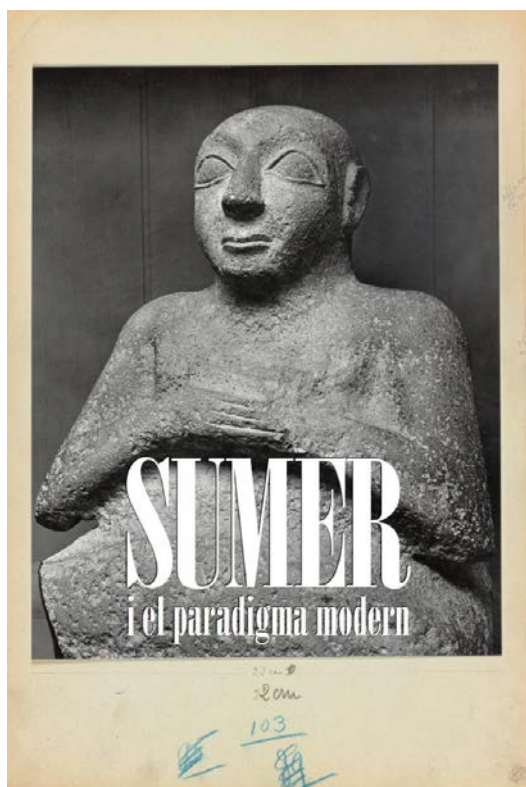
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97884161411351, Catalan and English



The catalogue for this show includes a curatorial essay by Pedro Azara that covers the different areas within the exhibition.

The publication also includes three other essays that develop specific aspects of the project. First of all, Marc Marín, Professor of Architecture at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, explores the impact of Sumerian art on the work of Joan Miró. Next, art historian Brigitte Pedde signs an article that analyses the influence of ancient Near Eastern art in the trajectory of the German painter Willi Baumeister. Last of all, Zainab Bahrani, a historian at Columbia University who specializes in archaeology, reveals the links between Sumerian art and avant-garde art.

Activities

Thursday, 14 December, at 7 p.m.

Lecture

«Modern Art and Sumer (I): The Statues Look at Us»

By Pedro Azara and Marc Marín

The exhibition does not cover all the artists and works that have been influenced by Mesopotamian art, nor is the scope of this influence limited to the narrative of the exhibition and what it shows. Other artists also took an interest in this new "primitivism", which was publicised and promoted by the media and archaeological missions. The talk offers an insight into these links.

Saturday, 13 January, at 6 p.m.

Lecture

«Modern Art and Sumer (II): The Epic of Gilgamesh»

By Pedro Azara and Joan Borrell

The principal focus of the exhibition is the influence of Mesopotamian art on plastic arts. However, other arts - literary, musical, cinematographic - have also turned to Mesopotamian imagery to comment on modern life. This talk will present some of these works, often based on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the figure of the Tower of Babel, with its complex, contradictory symbolism.

Beginning on 4 November

Free Guided Tours

Catalan: Saturdays at 11 a.m.

Spanish: Saturdays at 12:30 p.m.

From 28 October 2017 to 21 January 2018

Families visiting *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* have educational material available to them that has been specifically developed to help them discover the exhibition in an accessible, engaging way.

Designed by the Education Department at the Fundació Joan Miró under the supervision of Pedro Azara and with the collaboration of M. Carmen García Mahedero.

General Information

Hours

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except holidays) 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Thursdays 10 a.m.-9 p.m.

Saturdays 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

Sundays and holidays 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Mondays (except holidays) Closed

Last admission 30 minutes before closing

Admission

General admission

Adults: €12

Reduced price: students aged 15-30 and visitors over 65: €7

Children under 15 and unemployed persons with appropriate documentation: free admission

Admission to temporary exhibitions

Adults: €7

Reduced price: students aged 15-30 and visitors over 65: €5

Children under 15 and unemployed persons with appropriate documentation: free admission

Annual pass: €13

Multimedia guide: €5

Articket BCN

Visit the six main art museums in Barcelona for €30. www.articketbcn.org

Accessibility



Transportation

Buses 55 and 150 (Parc de Montjuïc)

Funicular de Montjuïc (from Paral·lel metro station, integrated fare)

We recommend using public transportation to visit the Fundació.

Press images and a digital press kit are available at our virtual press office, www.fmirobcn.org/prensa and at the following link: <http://bit.ly/2hipk1v>

Follow the activities related to *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* on social media with the hashtag #ParadigmaSumer and on our website www.fmirobcn.org

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