

# Joaquim Sunyer in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



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**BILBOKO ARTE  
EDERREN MUSEOA  
MUSEO DE BELLAS  
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Painter and engraver Joaquim Sunyer i de Miró's (Sitges, Barcelona, 1874-1956) career in art falls into two distinct periods. The first was marked by a vibrant post-Impressionism, an idiom he worked in for the most part in Paris, where he lived from 1896 to 1908. From 1908, while not entirely cutting ties with Paris, where he would continue to live until at least 1910, Sunyer began to return to Sitges, frequently spending time in other locations. From then on, his work was increasingly imbued by what we might term "Mediterraneanism", heavily influenced by Cézanne. This was the second, definitive phase in his development as an artist, which to a greater or lesser extent would last until the final years of his career.

There are major differences between the early and later periods of Sunyer's career. So much so, in fact, that we might almost be dealing with two different personalities, and not just in artistic terms. The Parisian Sunyer lived the bohemian life to the full, a life that has its stylistic correlative in the expression of an occasionally slummy visual world close to both Bonnard's and to Steinlen's. It was a world in which Sunyer even cut something of a figure. The bohemian Sunyer could be stand-offish and unpleasant. Theatrical designer Josep Rocarol, a good friend of the young Picasso, described him in Paris as high and mighty, arrogant and puffed with his relative success. That apart, Rocarol also accused him of living off women<sup>1</sup>. When she was Picasso's lover, after having been Sunyer's, Fernande Olivier said of the latter that he had an "air d'un paysan intelligent, madré, malin un peu prétentieux et que le milieu jugeait toujours trop soigné"<sup>2</sup>.

The later Sunyer was very different: a balanced, almost patriarchal man, as placid as his art, someone who had clearly found a peace of mind paralleled by the mature artistic style his biographer Rafael Benet—himself a fine painter—defined as the "unequaled style"<sup>3</sup>. The critic, art historian and future politi-

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1 Rocarol 1999, p. 49.

2 "air of an intelligent peasant farmer, sly, malicious, a little conceited, someone people reckoned to be always too careful". In Olivier 1933, p. 29.

3 Benet 1975, p. 9 *passim*.



1. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Pastoral*, 1919  
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81.5 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/357

cian Alexandre Cirici was hugely emphatic in his assessment of Sunyer's place in Catalan painting and, although Cirici's assertion might seem a little exaggerated, one particular sentence is worth quoting, if only to give us an idea of how highly Sunyer was rated at one time:

He was the initiator and creator of the first organized Catalan school of painting, not just a provincial echo of foreign innovations but really authentic and capable of taking its place amongst the schools of the first half of the 20th century, with a personality comparable to Italian or Mexican painting<sup>4</sup>.

Joaquim Sunyer's work is well represented at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, which has eight oil paintings, all in the "unequaled style" of this latter phase. The style matched the artist, by then the leading figure, alongside Torres García and Xavier Nogués, in the *noucentisme* movement in Catalan painting. There's nothing unusual about the Museum having such a fine collection of major works by Sunyer, as the artist had plenty of contact with Bizkaia, where his art was much appreciated. A couple of fine landscapes painted in 1929, take the port of Ondarroa as their theme<sup>5</sup>. Sunyer coincided there with his musician friend Joaquim Nin<sup>6</sup>, who had lived in Sitges, Sunyer's home town, ten years before.

One of the beliefs about modernity in art most firmly held by the generation Sunyer belonged to was that, in painting, visual values were more important than theme or argument. To put it another way, they gave priority to form over subject matter. However, for reasons too prolix to go into here, in the context of the *noucentisme* movement, style and execution in painting command the same attention as the themes portrayed. Voluntarily or not, in Sunyer's oeuvre the influence of Cézanne, for example, is rivalled in importance by what is evoked through and beyond it, which is, in short, the world he describes for us.

The oldest of Sunyer's works in this collection-within-a-collection in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum is *Pastoral* (1919) [fig. 1]<sup>7</sup>, an idyllic composition showing three nude young women at their ease in pleasant natural surroundings against a backdrop of pine trees and sheep. At that time, Sunyer used the title, which conjures up Theocritus and Virgil, on several occasions: *Pastoral* [fig. 2] was also the title of the work that made his reputation as a flagship painter of the *noucentisme* movement in his one-man exhibition in Barcelona in 1911. The paintings share the same thematic features, although the earlier oil painting portrayed just one young woman dozing, with several playful sheep, plus birds and a dog. Such was the furore surrounding that first *Pastoral* by Sunyer (particularly after an article published, at the instigation of Miquel Utrillo, by the leading Catalan poet Joan Maragall in the Spanish-language journal *Museum*<sup>8</sup>), that Francesc Cambó, the foremost young politician in the Catalan movement and a consummate lover of art—and life—decided he simply had to buy it for his collection.

When Sunyer exhibited the earlier *Pastoral* in the company of several other very similar works, he was dismissed as childlike. Not everyone agreed, however. In his press review at the time, Joaquim Folch i Torres reckoned that, far from being a defect, this "és justament la seva glòria"<sup>9</sup>. Today people don't tend to notice this supposed ingenuousness, as it has been fully assimilated by a public well aware of how painting subsequently evolved in the 20th century. But we need to remember that the naïf was a mode imposed by Henri Rousseau, *Le Douanier*, who had died not long before. Rousseau had been acclaimed by the first members of the nascent avant-garde in Paris, who saw in him one more way of returning to the origins. Going back to

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4 Cirici 1959, p. 30.

5 Benet 1975, nos. 485 and 487, p. 207. With no *catalogue raisonné* of Sunyer's oeuvre available, I take Rafael Benet's essay as my reference. His is the most complete work available today, with reproductions of more than seven hundred works by the artist.

6 Nin photographed Sunyer at large in Ondarroa. See Panyella 1997, p. 78.

7 Benet 1975, no. 405, p. 202.

8 Maragall 1911.

9 "It is precisely his glory". Folch 1911.



2. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Pastoral*, 1911  
 Oil on canvas, 104 x 144 cm  
 Arxiu Maragall, Barcelona

the origins was what artists looking to renew art were insistently aiming to do. The idea was to unlearn the technical knowledge and skills accumulated over centuries, as a first step in the creation of a new art shorn of rusty routine: what the art of the 20th century ought to be.

But Sunyer resorted to the same title on other occasions: in June 1922, for instance, he presented a watercolour called *Pastoral* at a group exhibition at the Galeries Dalmau in Barcelona. Although I cannot at present identify the work, it is cited in the catalogue for the show<sup>10</sup> unequivocally with the same title.

With or without this title, many of Sunyer's works from those years, like some later ones, revolve around the same theme: young people, mostly nude, set against placid green Cézanne-like Mediterranean landscapes. A brief, by no means exhaustive, list might include *Composition* (1910; Isern Dalmau Collection), *Mediterrània* (c. 1910-1911; Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in free deposit at the MNAC, Barcelona)<sup>11</sup>, *Two Nude Female Figures. Ceret* (1912; MNAC, Barcelona), *Three Nudes in a Wood* (1913; MNAC, Barcelona), *Spring* (1915; the former Miguel Lerín Collection, Barcelona), *Nudes* (1916; Basi Collection, Barcelona), *Composition with Nudes* (c. 1916; private collection), *Cala Forn* (1917; MNAC, Barcelona), although in this case the characters portrayed, one of them male, are dressed, *Summer* (1918; private collection), *Watermelon* (1920; MNAC, Barcelona), an oval *Nudes* (1921; Isern Dalmau Collection), *Bathers* (c. 1923; private collection, Barcelona) and a pastel with the title *Bathers* in French (1934; former collection of gallery owner Montserrat Isern).

<sup>10</sup> Number 30 in the catalogue.

<sup>11</sup> This is one of Sunyer's absolute masterworks and one of the most ambitious in terms of the format used. Sunyer was particularly attached to the work, which occasionally appears in some of his subsequent oil paintings, set in Sunyer's home, as in *Interior* from 1950 (Benet 1975, no. 301, p. 162).

<sup>12</sup> Mur 1985, p. 105.





3. Henri Matisse (1869-1954)  
*Le bonheur de vivre* or *La Joie de vivre*, 1905-1906  
 Oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm  
 The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia  
 Inv. no. BF719



4. Othon Friesz (1879-1949)  
*Ideal Landscape*, 1910  
 Oil on canvas, 113 x 146.5 cm  
 Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Galerie Neue Meister  
 Inv. no. 80/15

The Bilbao *Pastoral* was shown at Sunyer's one-man exhibition at the gallery of the Association of Basque Artists (AAV), in February 1925<sup>12</sup>, when the artist donated the work to the Museum. There is nothing coincidental about the visibility of Sunyer's art in Bilbao in the early 1920s: in a groundbreaking book Guillermo Díaz-Plaja pointed out the parallels, until then largely unnoticed, between the Catalanian *noucentisme* movement and certain aesthetic, formal and conceptual tenets espoused by members of the Roman Pyrenees School, a significant cultural tendency within early 20th-century Basque classicism<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, it is by no means difficult to see Sunyer's influence in the work of one of the most representative Basque painters of the time, Aurelio Arteta, in the mature phase of the artist's career that spawned several different *Bathers* and *The Three Graces*.

As we noted above, this particular Sunyer drew heavily on Cézanne: the schematic bodies he sets down are reminiscent of the different groups of bathers the Provençal artist had begun to paint thirty-something years before. Even so, the atmosphere of these paintings, if not quite so much the execution, can also be found in Matisse's *La Joie de vivre* (*The Joy of Life*, 1905-1906) [fig. 3], one of his more ambitious paintings in terms of format, although perhaps not one of his most fully achieved works. But it still illustrates perfectly well the same kind of natural Mediterranean hedonism that Sunyer renders tribute to in his later oeuvre.

Of course, the tension between style and theme was common to much of the art then being produced in Europe. Take, for instance, Émile Othon Friesz's *Ideal Landscape* (1910) [fig. 4], where the Cézanne-like landscape is full of semi-nude figures, mostly women, and animals. Despite the logical differences in the personalities of the two artists, the pattern of the work is remarkably similar to the kind of pastorals Sunyer was producing.

*The Lady with the Grey Shawl. Teresa* (1923) [fig. 5] is the next work, in chronological order, of the Sunyer oeuvre at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum<sup>14</sup>. It was included in the same one-man exhibition in Bilbao in 1925,

<sup>13</sup> Díaz-Plaja 1975, pp. 97-131.

<sup>14</sup> Benet 1975, no. 161, p. 95.



5. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*La dona del xal gris. Teresa (The Lady with the Grey Shawl. Teresa)*, 1923  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/2114





6. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)  
*Portrait of a Woman with Leather-lined Collar (Olga)*, 1922-1923  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm  
Almine and Bernard Ruiz-Picasso Foundation for Art  
Temporarily in deposit at the Picasso Museum, Málaga

although instead of receiving it as a gift the Museum bought it in February of that year. The painting has been described, rather exaggeratedly in my view, as a milestone on the way to the “return to order” or the “New Objectivity”<sup>15</sup>. I certainly can’t find any major stylistic changes in this painting with respect to previous ones. What is clear, though, is that any such new objectivity would be different in kind: a serene, Latin objectivity, a long way from the acidly caustic *Neue Sachlichkeit* so characteristic of the contemporary German painting the Nazis loathed for being what they saw as degenerate. Unlike his friend and fellow *noucentisme* pioneer Xavier Nogués, who occasionally liked to play rough, Sunyer in his plenitude would never be caustic, always opting for a consciously assumed idealism.

This particular painting does not appear to have been one of the thirty-plus works Sunyer installed in the room devoted to his work at the 1923 *Exposició d’Art de Barcelona*, a major landmark in the painter’s public life. It seems fair to assume that at that point of the year (the Barcelona exhibition was inaugurated in May) Sunyer hadn’t yet painted it. Otherwise, the artist would surely have presented it at such a big occasion in his career.

A reserved, resolute woman like the one portrayed here is closely related to contemporary female figures by Picasso [fig. 6], Josep de Togores and Pere Pruna. Such figures embodied what was known as neo-Classicism in painting, which clearly has nothing to do with the aesthetic movement of the same name of nearly one hundred years before, although it does have a correlative in music in another neo-Classical style favoured at that time by composers like Igor Stravinsky and Alfredo Casella.

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<sup>15</sup> Barcelona/Madrid 1999, pp. 256-257; Cremona 2003, p. 200.



7. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Fisher Woman*, 1924  
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 60.5 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/2115

Another of the works, *Fisherwoman* (1924) [fig. 7]<sup>16</sup>, was shown at the same one-man exhibition in Bilbao in February 1925, where it was also acquired by the Museum. Shown half-length, seated, the subject has a slightly dreamy look about her. However, the type of woman portrayed in this painting has nothing in common with Symbolist-style reveries, then still more or less recent; the sitter simply contemplates reality with serenity and tranquillity.

Furthermore, the artist completely avoids the anecdotic approach. We only know what the woman does for a living from the title of the painting, as the picture is devoid of any giveaway detail that might suggest she is a fisherwoman<sup>17</sup>. We get a slight glimpse of a cooking utensil and there are four small pieces of fruit on the table she leans on, but nothing associated either with fishing or with popular genre scenes in general. And there's nothing remotely suggestive of the sea, the country or fishing in the woman thus portrayed. With one hand buttressed against her head and her elbow on the table, she could be some kind of allegorical figure of meditation or reflection rather than a fisherwoman. Sunyer is clearly still working to an absolutely *noucentist* conceptual canon.

*Landscape of Pine Trees*, also from 1924 [fig. 8]<sup>18</sup>, which the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum bought directly from the artist in November 1930, is another example of Sunyer's conceptual Mediterraneanism. This beautifully balanced oil painting, still owing a great deal to Cézanne, fed the cult of a particular natural world mythologized in the Catalonia of the *noucentisme* movement. A landscape artist from the previous generation, whether a realist, Modernist or post-Modernist, would have been drawn to portraying nature as wild or leafy or misty, quite likely with pantheistic echoes, and he would have rendered it using realistic or even post-Impressionist techniques. But Sunyer opts for a clean, uncluttered description of a peaceful, perfectly congenial pine forest.

A preliminary drawing [fig. 9], now lost, for this painting is known to have been in the collection of one L. Álvarez, today a largely forgotten figure but who was in his day one of the foremost collectors of Sunyer's works. Francisco Álvarez, who appears to have been connected in some way to the other Álvarez, also possessed a considerable group of the painter's works. There is a photograph of the drawing in the collection of Francesc Serra Dimas (Barcelona, 1877-1967), known in Catalonia as the artists' photographer<sup>19</sup>, and a magnificent source of documents on Catalonian painting of the time and, occasionally, of the epoch immediately preceding it. In this case, however, of the eight works by Sunyer in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, only two have appeared directly in the files of the Serra collection.

When this picture was painted, the cultural movement known as *noucentisme* had just lost its major political support base, after the nullification, to be followed shortly by the complete dissolution, of the *Mancomunitat* (then the region's main structural political institution) of Catalonia, during the dictatorship headed by General Primo de Rivera, in power since September 1923 and it showed itself as a sworn enemy of every single idea of Spain that did not come from a Castilian source, a usual attitude in the already long and sad history of this State.

The work was to provide the seed for a new type of landscape art in Catalonia, with drier, less lush wooded areas rendered with greater economy of line. Landscapes from the region began to display more precise contours and more line than nuance or shading. Perhaps the most sophisticated practitioner of this kind of

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16 Benet 1975, no. 166, p. 97.

17 This is a long way from the *Peixetera* of c.1930, in the Álvarez Collection (Francesc Serra holding 8321A and 8322A). There the woman's occupation is clearly signalled by the basket of fish she sits behind.

18 Benet 1975, no. 443, p. 204.

19 In the same collection there is also a photograph of the completed oil painting, numbered 7199A.



8. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Landscape of Pine Trees*, 1924  
Oil on canvas, 80.7 x 100.2 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/356





9. Photograph of the preliminary drawing for *Landscape of Pine Trees* by Joaquim Sunyer, 1929  
Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona – Fons Serra  
Reg. no. 8325A

landscape in the years after this painting appeared was Jaume Mercadé, a painter—and metalworker—whose style developed from Sunyer’s own.

Following the comings and goings of these paintings in the one-man and group exhibitions that Sunyer took part in during his lifetime is no easy task<sup>20</sup>, particularly as many of the titles give no help in differentiating one work from another sufficiently for us to identify them in the catalogues of shows that, according to the dates, could have included some of these paintings.

*Nude in the Countryside* [fig. 10]<sup>21</sup> is the title of a typical Sunyer work in the *noucentisme* style presented at the 1925 Bilbao one-man exhibition, from where it went, as it were almost before the paint had completely dried, straight into the Museum collection. This one was bought at the exhibition by the Bizkaia Provincial Council. It is one of Sunyer’s best nudes: powerful in its simplicity, it conjures up the same world as the one found in the Bilbao *Pastoral*.

Although Sunyer painted many female nudes, there is very little of the erotic about them. As Rafael Marquina noted:

Sunyer’s art is, indeed, a *nude* art. That’s why he makes the sheer tranquillity of pure chastity so cheering. [...] This painting undoubtedly owes much of its prestige to the pure, chaste nudity he serves up for us<sup>22</sup>.

Even so, this particular nude does not quite exhibit the modesty appreciable in similar figures the painter produced. She is seen whole, with no cover-ups. In others, including *Nude Seated on a Rock* (1919-1920)<sup>23</sup>, *Nude in the Hills* (1920)<sup>24</sup> and *Nude in a Wood* (1923)<sup>25</sup>, all of them seated and portrayed three-quarter length like the one in Bilbao, the women have slyly arranged branches or leaves to cover their sex. However, placing branch or leaf just there seems a bit forced, and may well have been added at the buyer’s request. Here, however, possibly because the painting did not go into a private home before being acquired by a museum, the woman’s pubis is shown unadorned, while at the same time devoid any kind of aggressive sensuality.

20 Although many of the catalogues for these exhibitions proved perfectly easy to locate in libraries, they did not help me to clarify whether the majority of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum works were actually included in them. See Fontbona 1999 and Fontbona 2002.

21 Benet 1975, no. 452, p. 205.

22 Marquina [1924?], p. 22.

23 Benet 1975, no. 410, p. 202.

24 Ibid., no. 417, p. 229.

25 Ibid., no. 157, p. 92.





10. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Nude in the Countryside*, 1925  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/354

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11. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Self Portrait of the Pipe*, 1949  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/352



12. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Nude Woman*, c. 1949-1950  
 Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 60.5 cm  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Inv. no. 82/353



13. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Seated Nude*, 1949  
 Oil on canvas, 80 x 67 cm  
 Private collection

From the post-war period, after Sunyer's appearance before Franco's courts to explain his obviously unenthusiastic attitude towards the new regime<sup>26</sup>, there is a *Self Portrait of the Pipe* (1949) [fig. 11]<sup>27</sup> in the Museum collection, donated by the artist in 1951 on the occasion of a new one-man exhibition in Bilbao in April of that year.

This self-portrait, premiered in public at Sunyer's one-man show at the Galería Syra in Barcelona in 1949 and also exhibited at the retrospective at the National Modern Art Museum in Madrid from February to March 1950, shows the artist as an old man. It is painted in the placid, voluntarily anti-academicist style, with just a hint of the (likewise intended) ingenuousness noted elsewhere: here we find it, for instance, in the rendering of the pipe, which hangs rather awkwardly from his mouth<sup>28</sup>. As art critic Ramón D. Faraldo says in the chapter of a book with a reproduction of this very portrait, "he was just how I thought of him: my great, amiable grandfather in painting"<sup>29</sup>.

As a result of Sunyer's 1951 Bilbao exhibition, the Museum acquired *Naked Woman* (c. 1949-1950) [fig. 12]<sup>30</sup> and *Nude Indoors* (c. 1950) [fig. 14]<sup>31</sup>, from the artist. These are two classic Sunyer figures, in which the *noucentisme* ideal has clearly survived; time has taken nothing from the skill in execution or robbed his work of the vibration of sincerity found in the paintings of his finest phase. The first of these two nudes bears a

26 In the archives of the Court of Political Responsibilities at the Law Courts in Barcelona there is a file on Sunyer dating from after the Spanish Civil War. Court archivist Jaume Riera i Sans very kindly informed me of its existence some years ago.

27 Benet 1975, no. 655, p. 217.

28 Francesc Serra holding, 20439.

29 Faraldo 1953, p. 23. The reproduction of this self-portrait is on page 19.

30 Benet 1975, no. 658, p. 217.





14. Joaquim Sunyer (1874-1956)  
*Nude Indoors*, c. 1950  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 82/355

remarkable likeness to an oil painting Sunyer produced in the same period [fig. 13] and which ended up in the collection of Lluís Plandiura<sup>32</sup>, the man who, before the Spanish Civil War, had created and then sold to the city of Barcelona the great, multi-epoch collection that provided the core of the holdings of today's Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (National Art Museum of Catalonia). We might almost be looking at two different states of the same painting, in which Sunyer has changed the still-life in the background and the print of the clothes the model is set against, with the artist adding some slight retouches<sup>33</sup>, but this was not the case, as the nude in the last Plandiura Collection is a separate painting that went on to form part of another local private collection<sup>34</sup>.

Depending on the perspective, one might think the mature Sunyer had deviated from the mainstream of Western painting. After working within a fairly standard French post-Impressionism, on his return to Catalonia his art seemed to diverge from what we now consider to be the main tendencies of 20th-century European painting. When Sunyer finally came good and gave a recognisable style to the *noucentisme* label Eugeni d'Ors had dreamed up, in Paris two trends seen today as the most representative of the French-led avant-garde had begun to function; I refer of course to the Fauves and the Cubists.

31 Ibid, no. 305, p. 166.

32 Francesc Serra holding, 18443 and 18801.

33 There is no photograph of the Bilbao painting (what would have been the second state of the painting in the Plandiura Collection) in the collection of Francesc Serra. And apart from the ones appearing in the notes to the present article I have not found any photographs in the Serra holding of the other oil paintings by Sunyer in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum.

34 Benet 1975, no. 303, p. 164.

However, things are never quite so cut and dried and the apparent divorce never actually came about, as the Fauvist and Cubist options were by no means exclusive as far as *noucentisme* was concerned. Although Fauves, Cubists and the painters known as *noucentists* in Catalonia formed part of different tendencies, they all came under the umbrella of the modern visual arts, to the point where the artists involved not only were not mutually antagonistic but literally lived together, on occasions sharing galleries and dealers. In the years before the First World War, Sunyer and the sculptor Manolo Hugué, among others we might consider mainstream *noucentists*, settled for a while in Ceret, a village in the French part of Catalonia discovered by Hugué himself. Hugué immediately called on friends from Paris (a roster including Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris, Max Jacob, Herbin, Jean Marchand and Kisling) and from Barcelona, Sunyer himself among them, to go and see the place for themselves.

Although what became known as the first school of Ceret did not actually involve anything like a unity of style, it did enjoy the undoubted unity provided by friendship; in those years, if not in Ceret but certainly in other places nearby in the Roussillon, it was by no means unusual to find, in residence and working, major artists like Aristide Maillol, as much linked to *noucentist* Mediterraneanism as Sunyer himself.

Maillol's direct, simple and monumental classicism always finds a niche in the international handbooks on 20th-century art, although they do tend to ignore the fact that he was part of a much broader artistic movement, well established either side of the Pyrenees, one that had no difficulty whatsoever in encompassing Catalonian *noucentisme*.

These Mediterraneanists, who lived and worked together in Ceret and rubbed shoulders happily with Cubists, would, once Cubism's first wave had played itself out, work in the kind of "neo-Classical" idiom as practised by Picasso and others. Proof of this blissful coexistence between two different tendencies is that, for years, Picasso could create Cubist works while continuing to produce "neo-Classical" pieces, with no apparent stress or strain in his personal or artistic make-up.

There was definitely an underlying political dimension to the continuity, during the Franco years, of *Noucentisme* in Catalonia, forty years after its most decisive moment. At bottom this continuity was a response to the desire of some intellectuals to not break the thread that united society in Catalonia in the Franco era (when the public use of the Catalan language, and of not a few other things besides, was a rather difficult undertaking) with the years of hope when the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya*, urged on by its prematurely deceased president Enric Prat de la Riba, had given coherence to the until then diffuse nationalist political forces and had channelled them into a short-lived but quite successful drive for regeneration.

A thread that was to be broken, at least in public life, by two dictatorships, Primo de Rivera's first and Franco's some years later; however it remained intact in the private sphere, strengthened by the tastes of a significant layer of Catalan society. It flourished again briefly while the *Generalitat* (the Catalan regional government) survived during the Republic, with the inevitable new aesthetic nuances appearing in the natural course of things; even in the darker years of the post-war period it was perpetuated by semi-clandestine platforms like the journal *Ariel* (1946-1951). The personal oeuvre of painters such as Josep Obiols and Sunyer himself, of sculptors like Enric Casanovas and Joan Rebull, of poets such as Josep Maria de Sagarra, Carles Riba and Tomàs Garcés, and of musicians like Eduard Toldrà and even Frederic Mompou, to mention just a few, all helped to ensure the thread remained unbroken. Those in exile, in principle the foremost figures of battered Catalan national feeling, were obviously in no position to take the kind of guiding role in the new phase of development in cultural affairs in Catalonia. This task, logically enough, fell to those who stayed on in the region, in what amounted, in greater or lesser measure, to a sort of internal exile.



Not that the keepers of the old artistic flame had the field to themselves. They had to compete in the post-war period with newer artistic currents, equally antagonistic (apart from occasional exceptions) to the Franco regime. The younger generation bringing new artistic lifeblood were children of the pre-war avant-garde and, like the members of the Dau al 7 group, looked indulgently on the surviving *Noucentists*, while dismissing the neo-*Noucentists* as hopeless hankerers after an irretrievable past. These newcomers would go on to create a new culture, Catalanian to the core, every bit as much as the other but militantly modern and uninterested in rescuing a past that for them had vanished for good.

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