“A poet’s hope: to be, like some valley cheese, local, but prized elsewhere.”

1. H. Auden

“Everything was already, everything returns once more, and the gift of recognition is our only guide.”

Osip Mandelstam

“To think that we could have had an ordinary family life with its bickering, broken hearts and divorce suits! There are people in this world so crazy as not to realize that is normal human existence of the kind everybody should aim at. What wouldn’t we have given for such ordinary heartbreaks! . . . He was lucky. Just as he was also lucky not to survive till the next wave of arrests and die in his bed or hospital ward in Chukhloma or some other such place he was allowed to live in. Like the dramas of family life, this was normal and hence could be regarded as happiness. To understand this one had to go through a certain schooling.”

Nadezhda Mandelstam

How might we speak of painting? And how might we speak of the painting of a painter of our time like Alfons Borrell? Paul Valéry once said that we should ask forgiveness for daring to speak of painting. Perhaps he was right. But perhaps, too, we should at least try. At least seek to delineate the framework in which art takes place. In effect, there is something in the gears of phrases – noun, verb, adjective – that is fully incapable of touching upon the subtlety of a colour or a line. Painting is totally unrelated to the restrictions words are held to. Writing inevitably tends to meaning: we are what we can name, the act of writing fixes things. Everything that exists has a name, and words are the tools with which humans colonize reality. We rule, and are ruled by words, not by silences. Only when reality flees, starts to tremble and becomes precarious does a more enlivened form of language appear, a freer language we call poetry. We see poetry as a way of putting words to the test, pulling on the strings of their meaning. The poet is someone who spends time, with these strings, making knots that will never be untied.

Until the 1960s

As with poetry and music, painting is an autonomous, non-utilitarian language. A way that men have found to come into communication with the world and with themselves. Communication becomes communion when whoever has been struck by its effects involves him or herself totally, in an absolute engagement. Line and colour penetrate us, and becoming flesh. Painting is incarnation. It is memory, made of tendons and blood, of a life lived, of the existence of beings and things. We are not looking at a Rembrandt portrait: we feel a breath upon our faces. In a recent essay, Jean Fremont explained this quite precisely: “If one day a god is incarnated in a little baby, we could think that it was real, or a metaphor. Yet at the very least, it is a metaphor, a metaphor that is the foundation of Western art. The artist is made incarnate in what he does, his spirit infused in inanimate matter. This is not how it is for all art – for Islamic art, for the art of the Far East, for Greek sculpture, which all respond to other concerns. But there is no important art after Christianity that is able to avoid this question.” Until the 1960s, we might add to the quote. After that historical point, taking advantage of the drive, ingenuity and disorientation brought on by the avant-gardes of the first third of the 20th century, in the United States first and then everywhere else, “art” became a word used for all kinds of productions. For artefacts, for a society without gods, who no longer have anything to do with the manifestation of the artist’s
spirit. Yet this does not stop them from taking on tangible and effective economic value, in a bubbly market created precisely in a country with no cultural tradition at all. This fact is of great importance in the history of art, as it represents a definitive break. From the American painters called abstract expressionists to our day, there has never been a recognized artist who has not had a correspondingly profitable market value. The artistic value of any form of creation will be exactly the price marked beside it on the wall, coinciding precisely with what someone is willing to pay. Pictorial mass has been converted into monetary mass. This displacement – economic value as a decider of artistic value – thus occurs for the first time in the history of art. In fact, it inaugurates a radically different way of understanding the artistic fact: the way of our time.

Against Inexpression

The way art is understood, in general, both from the past and the supposed art of today, is highly summary and simplified. We live under the yoke of the present and tend to value novelty exclusively. Novelty: the tool invented by the market to take hold of things and multiply itself – and to hypnotize us. This tyranny of the present in the field of the arts has led, amongst other things, to the fact that less and less people are able to think about and understand artworks historically. And when you do not know anything, everything starts to get that much easier, easy as pie. The connections any tradition might be made of will be taken apart. The task of reading and translating painting, of being interested in its study and comparison, has become a retrograde exercise under suspicion. The fiction of cultural journalism has taken its place, diminished interpretation eventually transformed into reality – the only reality.

Any approach to the aesthetic fact must rediscover its lineage, its roots, digging deep into the common ground from where the work of art emerges. It must determine if what we are contemplating the fruit of a fleeting sleight of hand or, in contrast, if it already was part of us without knowing it, as we rediscover ourselves. This is the justification for this text, which pursues a perspective of the overall body of Alfons Borrell’s work. It starts out by speaking of painters who, while apparently unrelated, are in fact quite near. As Octavio Paz once wrote: “Whatever history separates, poetry unites.” Painting, developed over time, does not respond to the sequence of Russian dolls found in the manuals. Reconnecting Borrell’s work with the previous painting current, belonging to his epoch, city and country, separating the wheat from the chaff, shaking them up, bring with it risks. The risk of prolixity. The risk of having to shift from a biting tone to a tender one, without losing rigour. The risk, in sum, of falling into inexpression, which has completely ruined aesthetic reflection.

The Lives of Artists

Velázquez and Vermeer de Delft, two illustrious although different artists – one was a painter for the king, the other painted for nobody – never made their fortune selling their works of art. The status of the artist until the 19th century, until Courbet and Corot, was of a qualified artisan. Painters worked for commissions, from the king or whoever was paying (generally the Church, later the bourgeoisie). For artists, economic success was something as unusual as it might be for a carpenter. There was no idea of greater recognition for their talents, enabling them to possibly earn more. Everything was so much simpler: if they had more work, they earned more, and the opposite was often true. It was rare for them to be able to earn more than the usual rate, so that if they were good they could earn somewhat more, and if not, somewhat less. They worked with their hands and had assistants who painted the less important parts of the painting. There were a few wealthy artists, although their wealth was something different, less visible and comfortable, from we would see today; it was based exclusively on the favours of the powerful and not on commercial speculation with their work. Quite often, furthermore, their patrons made them go here and there, doing things that had nothing to do with painting. This happened with Velázquez; one of the few signed documents we have from the artist is the letter
where he insistently requests the king to pay him what he has been owed for a long time. The greatest painter of the time, portrayer of Phillip V, the king of the largest, most powerful empire on the planet, was barely able to make ends meet. Artists had no social projection, as they did not do exhibitions. Quite often they became ill from their work, from the toxicity of certain pigments and solutions that would slowly poison them. They moved amongst a small circle of people who were rarely known outside of their immediate context. There was no media to support them, and people were only aware of what they had seen or had been explained to them, not what some unknown person had written. Most of the public did not even know how to read. Nobody had ever heard anyone speak of art, never mind museums or artistic reflection. Artists were infinitely more unfortunate that we might imagine today, just like the rest of the population. Three of Rembrandt's children died. If you read about the little we know about the life of Vermeer de Delft, for example, you can get a clearer idea of how things were at that time. When he died in 1675 at the age of 43, buried in debt, he had eight, underage children. His widow ended up giving two paintings to the baker Hendrick van Buyten to pay off a debt of 617 florins. A year later, Catharina Bolnes made an appeal before the authorities, declaring herself unable to pay off her creditors. Her husband's paintings were only then rediscovered, although they only began to appreciate in value two centuries later.

The first commercial activity on a large scale related to painting was seen in Holland, starting in the 1630s. Earlier, Florence, Rome and Venice had promoted the arts like no places would ever do. Still, they did so in a vertical way, in a premodern mode: from Lorenzo de Medici to Botticelli; from Pope Julius II to Michelangelo; from the Duke Girolamo Priuli and the Republic of Venice to Tintoretto. In Amsterdam, the capital of world commerce, a first generation of wealthy merchants began to commission an large number of works. During the 17th century in Holland, five million paintings were produced. The relationship began to be more horizontal: more or less anyone who had money would purchase a landscape or still life, or would have their portrait painted. This was precisely the same ritual we performed until just a few years ago, when we went to have our portraits taken by a photographer: “You see, look, I came out well.” You paid for your portrait, framed it and hung it on a wall at home. And the artist was remunerated. If he did anything out of the ordinary, he would no longer get any commissions and would be financially ruined. This is what happened to Rembrandt, quite possibly the most talented and versatile painter of all time. No other painter knew so much about how to interpret the desires of Amsterdam’s wealthy, thanks to whom he had become rich as well. But something occurred after the death of his beloved wife Saskia, on 14 June, 1642, that led him to stop making concessions. He decided he would remain true to himself until the end. A true artist will never give you want you want: he will give you what you need.

A Vagabond Posterity

Over the years, painters started to slip in status and went from being craftsmen to mere vagabonds. They turned down commissions to paint what they wanted, and society in turn turned its back on them. Cézanne and Van Gogh did what quite possibly Vermeer and Velázquez would have done in their place. Rembrandt’s faithfulness to himself and his art had not disappeared: it stayed alive in others. His ruin, however, ended up being premonitory, as the price artists paid for their freedom meant they would live a marginalized existence. By living any way they could, their legacy would hold up in posterity. This is quite the opposite of artists today. A group of young rascals in Aix-en-Provence spent their time throwing rocks at Cézanne when he came along the path; he would be carrying his easel, the very easel, which when set up in front of reality, that would be the muted witness to the most intense pictorial exploration ever seen. Cézanne made them realize the complexity hidden within what we see. And he did something highly unusual: he stripped away what he had been painting, complicating things terribly. When looking at his work you are obliged to come up for yourself with an entirely new way of looking; your own. In fact, you are forced to go along a similar path as the artist’s. Before the painter from Aix, perhaps the only painter who had dared to require the viewer to engage intellectual discipline of this nature was Piero della Francesca; regardless, after Cézanne would become rather habitual. A Manet painting can be read on many levels, from the most obvious to the most incredible,
and can easily please everyone, since when looking at his work nobody ever feels entirely helpless. This is not what happens with a Mondrian painting. The game is now played all or nothing: the spirit taken to the limit; or some pattern for the drapery. A few years ago, the Musée d’Orsay did a fascinating exhibition where Cézanne paintings were paired with those of his great friend and maestro Camille Pissarro, often of the same motifs. Pissarro was a highly talented painter, at times very good, very sharp. Cézanne learnt from him qualities like rigour and discipline, the will to order in French art: Poussin, Watteau, Chardin, David and, closer to our days, Braque and Balthus. In that exhibition, you understood how Pissarro’s paintings had been done, but that was not the case for Cézanne’s. You are always obliged to reconstruct Cézanne’s paintings, to translate them inside your head, and if you are not a painter there comes a time when you see you are lacking resources, you end up getting bogged down. It is primarily for this reason, for the complexity of the effort viewers are obliged to make, leaving them in an increasing recalcitrant state of exposure, that after Cézanne artists began to move along paths that were more and more solitary. In parallel to this, the appearance of commentators, the cross of art criticism that was growing in strength, became something we could not do without. The direct consequence of Cézanne’s painting is a line: Mondrian. Still, neither a hundred years ago, nor now, is everyone able to go through the intellectual exercise to see the world in a line. In precisely the same way, not all artists are as honest as Cézanne and Mondrian. The simple gaze became a thinking, contemplative gaze. From this moment on, it would become increasingly easier to pull something over on everyone. Picasso, like all painters, was fascinated by Cézanne, but when push came to shove, as sharp as he was, he always had Manet in mind: Manet, the hardworking student of Velázquez and Goya.

Van Gogh’s life can be relived by reading the amazing letters sent to his brother Theo. Where you really feel his pulsating existence, however, is in the gut-wrenching, anxious labyrinth of brushstrokes he used to weave his paintings together, as you examine them closely, with your twitchy nose up against the canvas. Van Gogh turned the paintbrush full of colour into the seismograph of his very interior. He did this thanks to the technical innovation represented by new tubes of oil paint, the same kind of paint we can buy today. Previously, painters (or their assistants) had to grind pigments and suspend them in some sort of binding substance. It was a hard task and made it impossible to have a broad, unlimited range of colours on your palette. Paintings were done in stages, depending on the pigments that had been previously prepared. Painters improvised and redid the colours they did not like, although they would also calculate any steps that had to be taken, there was no way around this. Paintings were hardly ever done in a single session. Van Gogh would be the first artist who did not calculate anything. The act of painting was a struggle and the canvas became a battleground. Drawing, which had always been used to set out fields of colour, would be undermined by the unleashed dynamism of the twitching wrist, of the brush and clawed fingers, and the body painting as well, curled up and in tension. Reality came up against a tough rival in the paintings of Van Gogh. In the middle of the day in July you can be overcome if you cannot find a bit of shade; but if you see that same time of day painted by the Dutch artist, you will be utterly destroyed by heatstroke. In a total daze, you will feel your eyes trembling in their sockets, blinded by so much light. The best painting of the 20th century, from Matisse to Rothko, from Bonnard to De Kooning, would emerge from out of this blinding glare, whether it realised it or not. A burst of freedom at any prince, with its counterpoint in the rigour of Cézanne.

Seeing an exhibition by Van Gogh is an incredibly arousing experience. I recall the state of euphoria I had when I went to see the major exhibition held in Amsterdam in 1990, on the one 100th anniversary of this death. It was not an intellectual experience, but a physical one. To feel like you have been wounded by colour: the persistent sensation of having been possessed by merely contemplating the painting. In precisely the same way that Cézanne’s canvases spiritualize reality, Van Gogh’s enervate it, intensifying and magnifying it. They were pantheistic painters, seeking truth, plenitude, a fulfilled life. They defied God. One would weave together an extraordinary embroidery, a DNA made of short brushstrokes; the other would protest reality with every movement of the brush, brushstrokes like hard punches. These two painters, from France and Holland respectively, were like two sides of the same coin.
A Beginning, Which Was an Ending

In this world of solitude and fervour and sometimes, very occasionally, splendour, European painting developed over a period of six centuries. From 25 March, 1305, when the Scovegni Chapel in Padua was consecrated, to 23 October, 1906, when the painter who had been longsuffering with stone-throwing children, passed away. The 700 square metres of painting done by Giotto in the Italian city were the first case of the full veracity of a drama made manifest. Life in its infinite variety had found for itself an oversensitive notary. The history of the Virgin Mary and the Son of God unfolds before us when we contemplate the three levels of painting on the walls of the Church of Saint Mary of Charity, with an expressiveness that allows us to relive the vicissitudes of existence. With Giotto, painting acquires life, becoming the very expression of what we really are. The spirit, our interior, has become incarnated in form: faces, gesture, shadow. Until 1906, when Cézanne died, painting would explore a thousand variations and ways of incarnating itself, constantly reinventing itself. The following year, in 1907, Picasso would secretly paint Les Demoiselles d’Avignon under the effects of African art, unsurely, perhaps aware of the repercussion of what he had so wildly come up with. From that point on, speed would start to matter more and more, everything got that much faster. In a way that was as irreversible as it was unexpected, painting would begin to get even cruder and harsher. It physically got thinner. Weakened, exhausted by the hurried succession of trends, movements, schools and styles, art would choose to no longer express the interiority of man, as it shot even higher, turned into a value as inarguable as it was voluble: it sought to change the world by emulating it, putting itself on the same plane. All we have to do is read the exhortations of the Futurists and Surrealists to realise what an unintelligible chimera had made them feel so ashamed. Your hair stands on end when you see the naïve photomontages of Rodchenko – in service to the criminals who were seeking to redeem man – and then read in The Kolyma Tales by Varlam Shalamov of how Osip Mandelstam died in the Gulag, which begins like this: “The poet was dying. His hands, swollen from hunger with their white bloodless fingers. . .” The death and destruction of millions of individual victims in a century drenched in blood and art that had become (as if in a flash) a proclamation.

In a hurry, visual art unconsciously abandoned the seductive serpentines of the abstract aesthetic that had just been conquered. This was inevitable. It paid a steep price for doing so: assimilated by design and the rise of advertising, it was reduced, emptied into pure formalism in its efforts. With its finely tuned geometries, the gesture of freedom from plasticity ran out immediately, over the years turning into a game of wild ideas that we still do not know how to put an end to. We have seen a directionless disturbance, simplistic and loud, that has grown spectacularly in the past seventy years, totally disorienting us. Visual art was not alone: in the century of Auschwitz, everyone, with the aid of technology and ideology, sought to change everything. In his precise essay on the failure of the avant-gardes, Eric Hobsbawm, with his typically British restraint, succinctly summed up the mess that twentieth century art had gotten itself into, leading to its decay. As the English historian recalled, “The ‘modernity’ lay in the changing times, not in the arts which tried to express them.” In other words: the conviction that art should change every single day is as absurd as it is erroneous. T.S. Eliot once wrote: “What we call the beginning is often the end.” Perhaps it is true that when it seemed everything was just beginning, it was its decadence that was really getting underway. It is not clear how art could be the exception to the huge mess that the world and life itself got themselves into in the 20th century. As it was the weakest and most brittle aspect, art was the first thing to topple. Only the market and the State have remained, apparently, untouched, turned in our day (as we shall see further on) into the primary guarantors of contemporary art. There was no turning back: today’s art had nothing at all to do with the willpower driving forth Giotto, Rembrandt or Pissarro.

No Longer Necessary to Paint the Thing

In the late part of the 19th century and the earliest years of the 20th, artists shifted from being vagabonds to bohemians, the step just before becoming millionaires (in a few cases), though mostly just aspiring to be. This
is the exact place we are now, where everyone, and not only artists, wants nothing else but to be rich. A world that revolves exclusively around money. Picasso became a bohemian in 1895 Barcelona, where he was warmly welcomed into Els Quatre Gats, the establishment run by Mr Pere Romeu. It was there where he met Hermenegild Anglada Camarasa, who he made an ink caricature of. Anglada Camarasa, who was living in Paris at the time, forged for himself a resounding success in the years leading up to the First World War, and Picasso would copy him. As a republican and mason, Anglada would go into exile after the Spanish Civil War to France, returning to Spain in 1948, settling in the port of Pollença, on the island of Mallorca. It was there where a young Alfons Borrell, an aspiring painter, came to meet up with him regularly while doing military service at the hydroplane base. It was around the year 1950, and Anglada came across as someone from another era altogether, smoking on the café patios and greeting the ladies, like a residual feature from times gone by – though with time to help younger artists who had been “bitten by the painting bug”, as he said one day to the younger painter from Sabadell who had dared to approach him. Between telling stories about the young Picasso – “Gimeno, hide your drawings, if that kid from Málaga sees them he'll copy them and you won’t sell any more” – and visits to his studio, the future abstract painter underwent the initiating ritual of meeting a great artist while still young. A lasting experience, no doubt. In fact, Borrell must be one of the last living artists to have known Anglada Camarasa; he was someone the senior painter would open his studio to during the final years of his life. The final painting Anglada Camarasa did was of the bluffs at Formentor, in 1953. Only a few seascapes remain from those two years Borrell spent on Mallorca, small format paintings that bear witness to his struggle (otherwise understandable for any novice) with the shifting shapes of boats pulled up on the sand of the beach. Nevertheless, what truly surprised the young painter was the freedom with which Anglada took on his subject matter, submitting line to colour. Forty years later Borrell would recall him in an interview: “Anglada Camarasa was my first maestro, as it was with him that I discovered that painting is total freedom.” Anglada’s lesson, which Borrell fully assimilated, is the keystone of contemporaneity: we are no longer bound to paint what we see, but the effect it has on our spirit. The painter must freely let himself go. If we were to make an initial approach the work of Alfons Borrell in only a few words, perhaps these are the words that could most appropriately be associated with it: total freedom. Borrell’s expressive freedom was made manifest in the immediacy of its execution, enlivened in his search for the instant. We are referring to the instant the painting appears, incarnating itself in all its plenitude, without manipulations, freely. In fact, this is the paradigm of modern painting, which was initiated (as we have seen earlier) by Van Gogh and Cézanne, Borrell’s great grandparents. From Van Gogh, he took the unleashing of colour. The nervously moving brushstroke, now become a dash, a stain of liquid pigment inundating the canvas. From Cézanne, he took his mysterious will to order, with that underlying geometry that always, unsuspectingly, ends up appearing on the surface of the painting itself. The sudden appearance of a line, of a surface geometry that holds in any colour that might threaten to take it all away. Or it might act as a contrast, as a limitation, saying “enough” or “more”. The artist himself has expressed this with these words: “This obsession I have for order-disorder, which is really a kind of order, is the key to understanding my work.” The work of Alfons Borrell is debated within this ambivalence between full and empty – painted spaces and virgin spaces, balance and imbalance, upheld by the geometric presence. There is always a double play at work: of rigour and completely losing it, of chance and measure. Open and closed.

Sabadell

Alfons Borrell was born in Barcelona in 1931, on Atlàntida Street in the Barceloneta neighbourhood. When he was still quite young his family moved to Blanes, to the Racó Blau, where contact with nature and the untamed life of the villages of the time would leave its indelible mark on him. Then, in 1940, his family moved to Sabadell, where they ran a watch shop where Alfons began to work. It was there, in the city of industrial looms which were never turned off, where he began to paint. Sabadell is a city with an unusual and contradictory side to it, in a way that is much more paradoxical than at
first it might seem. In a certain sense, Sabadell is like the perfect summary of the entire country, of the
ambivalences present in Catalonia as a whole. It exemplifies both its virtues and its defects, its very reality. It
is a wealthy city that is nevertheless dedicated in body and soul to hiding its prosperity. It is ambitious and
daring on an individual level, an enterprising town, we would say in our day, although collectively
introverted and bashful, without manifesting any sort of clear objective. In reality, Sabadell was the first
modern city on the Iberian Peninsula, since it was the first to see the rise of a bourgeoisie and an industrial
class, the sole town (along with Terrassa) that could proudly claim to have had an industrial revolution. There
was the manufacturer’s guild, and the worker’s movement. Banks, and barricades. Very few priests. An
airfield. Theatres. Although oddly, as in many English towns, the wealth acquired did not seek out the sort of
flashy response that you might imagine prosperity would call for. There is something that even today still
surprises us about Sabadell: its rather imprecise lines of distinction when it comes to social class. Rich and
poor, manufacturers and workers, seem to have always lived in amongst each other. The barriers between
them, which in any other city would be clearly laid out, seem never to have been raised in Sabadell. The
Rambla, with its undefined borders, is one of the most mysterious places you could imagine: all the buildings
are the same, well-ordered and dignified, sworn to resist ostentation. Nobody ever wanted to stand out over
and above his or her neighbour. In spite of this, however, as a city and society that is modern, European and
bourgeois, Sabadell was inevitably a place for culture, with its own writers, actors, musicians, painters,
opera singers and comedians. Humour, for example, one of the most highly refined expressions of any culture
and an unequivocal symptom of prosperity and vitality in every sense of the terms, truly thrived in Sabadell
before the war. As the capital of the Vallès area, Sabadell was a world unto itself, so that perhaps, by
understanding its evolution over the past two centuries, we could get a better idea of where we should be
heading to today. Someday someone will come along and write the definitive book about Sabadell, and
everyone will be stunned – everyone from anywhere else, that is. The people of Sabadell will no doubt stay
quiet about it.

In this city of muted prodigies, there were many painters. The list is rather long: Joan Vila Cinca, Josep
Espinalt, Joan Vilatobà, Pere Elies Sindreu, Antoni Vila Arrufat, Joan Vila-Puig, Rafael Durancamps, Lluís
Molins de Mur. All of them belonged to the pictorial tradition, the most difficult of all: a breath of air that has
not been lost, but serves as an example for those who came after, pushing them forwards.

The Fine Arts Academy of Sabadell was founded in 1880, one year before the bank that bears the city’s
name. Its co-founders were Ramon Quer, Joan Figueras and Joan Vila Cinca. The Academy was the
institution the people of Sabadell created to take in all their aesthetic concerns. It is indeed odd that 130 years
ago, when everything was so much harder, since it depended upon popular initiative, which could have easily
been toppled by bad times, institutions like this lively entity were created. Nowadays, in contrast, Sabadell is
unable to set up a modern museum of any importance, with the capacity to make a statement. A large
building, completely new, for an institution that might unite everything the city has been for more than 150
years. A veritable showcase. Nowadays, museums are also showcases that are useful for selling what you
have: your valuable (as something yours and totally unique) cultural, economic and social reality, past,
present and future. It is all the same. Art always goes so much further beyond itself, and its benefits are a
sure-fire currency over the long term. All they have to do is know how to invest, for if they do not reinvest they
become volatile, just like any form of capital. Now that everyone is talking about creativity, it would not be a
bad idea – even if it were merely for Sabadell’s self-respect – to have some sort of recognition for the
valuable initial seed left by our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. This would be exactly the
same creative seed that we recognize in our children. Let’s bring it all together: the work of the past and the
projects of the future, having them multiply, making them work and produce. If we deny tradition (which we
already have), we will always find ourselves going back to square one, unnecessarily wasting our energy,
making ourselves weaker. When you are weakened, you end up getting colonized, and you are consumed.
Nowadays, everyone has industrial parks, it is the easiest and cheapest way to go. What we are missing are
complete generations of artists, people with strong character, with creativity and capacity for initiative.
From Steve Jobs to Wikipedia

What people here do not quite understand is that Mr Steve Jobs (founder and president of Apple, the largest company in the world in terms of stock market capitalization) was basically an artist, a creator, an energizer. A man who did not finish university, who instead of channelling his creative energy into writing an ideal sonnet or playing a perfect piano concerto, focused on inventing a series of flawless devices with great capacity for universal seduction. Seeking perfection itself, the capacity to blow people away and to be universal – features any true artist seeks to infuse their work with. He was a tireless worker for years. When Jobs finished his now-mythical graduation lecture at Stanford University (see it on YouTube), with his mantra “stay hungry, stay foolish”, he perfectly expressed the desire for freedom and madness at all cost that artists have always sought for themselves. Everything goes together. Everything moves along the same stream, and today in an even more radical way. Everything relates to everything else, because everything is intimately and mysteriously related. This is, quite precisely, the way Orientals understand reality: a continuum where everything is integrated and adds to the whole, in permanent renewal. Where flexibility and patience become a form of power. When sometime in the future, the child of today takes on the complexity of studying music or the exactitude of drawing, or has to handle a contract negotiation in another language, he or she will no doubt be ready to rise to the challenge. Why is this? It is because children’s disciplined neurons will be ready for whatever comes their way. They will be supple and orderly at once, accustomed to take on the most complicated challenges. Art will have helped in all this, without realizing it. Today’s culture is also essential if we are going to have better executives. Any sort of effort for the individual, however rare or misled it might seem at the start, will always end up coming back in the form of some benefit to whomever cultivated it, and to all of society in turn, enriching it and making it better. In the end, all told, it is simply a question of demand. On oneself and on those around us. And of making sure you are always on guard, always awake and aware.

In Wikipedia, another kind of device open to the world, in the entry in Catalan on Sabadell, there are three lines on the art museum and the artists in the city. The history of the theatre, founded in 1866, has one line. When it comes to the city’s two financial institutions, all they refer to is the year they were founded. Sports gets 15 lines, and in the section on politics there are fourteen lines, with two illustrations, filling the whole page without having to enlarge them, and carefully detailing the list of two mayors and when they were in office, along with the results of municipal elections. In the English version, all of this is even shorter, except the part on sports, with ten lines, with 13 local athletes presented on a list of the 24 most “famous people from Sabadell.” The list is headed up by Francesc Trabal and Joan Oliver, the only two writers on it; and there is one painter, Xavier Oriach. There is not a single businessperson, scientist or musician. The person just after the writers is a certain Jona Painkiller Real, whose profession is “metal gold”. Just the way it is written, any reader can check. If Oliver and Trabal would come back from the grave, laughing over it as was their custom, they would likely be turned inside out if they read that. Who knows: maybe from wherever they are, they were the ones who made up that list, just for a laugh. Nothing further need be said, we are where we are. This networked encyclopaedia, as everyone knows, is done by the contributions of its users, including the available assets of Painkiller Real. The grandchildren of artists, business people and the founders of cultural and financial institutions are now asleep on the hay; they are charmed by it all, the comfort of being able to make a mark on a piece of paper and vote every four years. They no longer have the will to type out four lines, in homage to what their grandparents did, and they probably do not even know. All they care about is Ikea. To be colonized. Sabadell was a town that had held many winning hands, and step by step it went about losing them, so that nowadays they are lucky if they are dealt any cards at all. As the reader will have noticed, what goes for Sabadell also rings true for Catalonia: they are tightly bound together.
Sixty years ago, one of the signs of cultural vitality in Sabadell was the painting done there, in the 1950s and 1960s. The painting of artists like Duque, Balsach, Angle, Montserrat, Bermúdez, Llorens and Vila. These painters, with Borrell along with them, were heralded by Alexandre Cirici in the journal *Riutort* in 1960 as “this extraordinarily lively and creative constellation from Sabadell.” This magazine, founded by Andreu Castells in 1957, with the active participation of David Graells, would be the focal point for a new generation of artists in the city. The magazine would be published until 1965, and as Joaquim Sala-Sanahuja has pointed out, “the 21 issues are the clearest example of the artistic modernity and especially the modern spirit that emerged in our country.” This was the context that embraced the insecurities and quest for discovery of a young Alfons Borrell, together with Joaquim Montserrat, the youngest of the group. Just after returning from military service in Mallorca, after his eye-opening contact with Anglada Camarasa, he began to abandon figuration in the studio on the boulevard (the *Passeig*), exactly where the Borrell watch shop was. It was the year 1953. We should not underestimate the importance of that moment. They were bound together in a confluence of like-minded souls, distinguished by their youth and desire to revitalize the painting done by older generations. A warm, receptive atmosphere was encouraged by their mutual rapport, which favoured their work in spite of many difficulties. Perhaps, too, there were negative factors, although facing difficulty when you are young is rarely problematic; quite the contrary, it tends to urge you on. Now then, if it does not push you forward, then you have gotten old. The worse thing that can happen is to be caught by indifference, since indifference can kill you, especially after a certain age. An environment, however harsh – things today are hardly any better – that came from way back: from the Academy of Fine Arts, founded 70 years earlier, which had always worked to encourage visual art in the city. Quite a few children of manufacturing families had grown up surrounded by books and paintings, and by artists from various generations who had travelled to Paris. One of the most recent to settle in Paris was Antoni Angle, where he met the Polish artist Gabriel Morvay and the Russian Jew Vladimir Slepian, an encounter which would be the beginning of the Gallot movement. When in 1956 Borrell and Joaquim Montserrat appealed to the academy for a space to show their work and that of others they admired, the response was favourable, even while those who were then mentoring these painters did not fully value their work. The important thing was that the new gallery became one more step along the path of artistic vitality in the city, and that eased the way for what was just emerging. The Sala d’Art Actual (this was the name officially given it) would play a vital role in decades to come. It was their where anyone in need for a space has found a base; it continues to be the case to our day. It is hard to not be impressed by the detailed list of exhibitions held there from 1957 to 1970, patiently researched and compiled by Neus Hidalgo and Esther Porta, while putting together the essential catalogue of the exhibition *Del Nuagisme a la crisi de l’art informal. Art a Sabadell 1957-1970* [From Nuagisme to the Crisis of Informal Art: Art in Sabadell, 1957-1970]. In 1960, twenty-nine art exhibitions were held in Sabadell, twenty of which were done at the Acadèmia de Belles Arts. Featured amongst the artists who showed in Sabadell were Picasso, J.J. Tharrats and Manuel Duque. For the reader to get an idea of what was going on, we would have to explain that in the following year, in 1961, the young initiators of the project made an enormous effort to do an exhibition with Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni and Alberto Burri. The next season the Academy did a solo show by Henry Moore. They had a lot of drive, but it was not all so rosy. Borrell exhibited in 1958 in the gallery he had helped to create, but everyone had to work at anything they could to get by.

Seen in perspective, it is clear it was an incredibly lively and important moment. Factors feeding into this were how people coincided in time, worked together in good will and the quality of the work of some of those young artists, who perhaps, without really knowing how or why, were doing the same sort of things that were seen in New York, Milan and Paris. It was clear that certain common tendencies were alive in different places. In the previously referred to catalogue there is a highly valuable chronology, “1945-1965”, which was put together by Maria Lluïsa Faxedas, with year-by-year details of avant-garde art practice in Sabadell, New York, Paris and other art centres. Whoever refers to it will realize that if the previous phrase comes across as rather shocking, it is only due to a lack of knowledge about what was really going on.

It is no longer necessary to read our history in function of what others have done, which is the easiest way of going about things. We have got to take risks to do so from our own set of criteria, and our own interests. It is
not necessary to continue to justify what we do by judging ourselves on what is going on elsewhere, as occurs so often with contemporary art. It is time to stop being so provincial, summarized in the acritical veneration of everything that happens elsewhere. The best example of this is the devotion to what is going on elsewhere we occasionally see in Barcelona art institutions. After all, all art is local. Cézanne was a local painter, as were Vermeer before him and later Miró – who for many years was simply the husband of Pilar, that lady from Palma. Everything is born and grows in a specific place, not only painters. Everything that is truly alive has roots, and nothing can thrive in an indeterminate space of the universal, which simply does not exist. The glossy cosmopolitanism of 2011 has simply run out of its capacity for seduction. Everything has become excessively similar, and nothing is what it appeared to be. Only what is profoundly local, today more than ever, as something authentic and rare, can be discovered and made into a point of reference for many others. When the opposite holds true, things do not work: the overriding noise of publicity deoids everything of value. Those young painters from Sabadell were fully contemporary at the exact time and place they needed to be so.

For Borrell, they were crucial years. His painting evolved quickly towards a highly-advanced abstraction, painted darkly in oil, with a thin layer of paint that he would soon eliminate. He made paintings where vaguely geometric forms evolved over darkened and even blackened grounds. This was Borrell in his informalist years. The first abstract painting by Alfons Borrell is from 1955. Manuel Duque, Antoni Angle and Joan Bermúdez all explored similar paths. It was inevitable that they would be influenced reciprocally. The problem, however, was not that; it would come later, after the Gallot group officially broke up.

The Ateneu

Borrell exhibited outside of Sabadell for the first time in 1959. The testing ground was the gallery at the Ateneu Barcelonès, where he showed together with the painter Joan Bermúdez. As he did not have enough work to fill the gallery, the critic who ran it, Àngel Marsà, thought that they could work well together. Marsà himself published a small article on 27 March, where he wrote: “In Borrell’s painting there is a lively lyrical air, a diction that is clear and transparent, while in Bermúdez’s work there is greater dramatic depth.” His short piece ended with this observation: “If it is possible to speak of pure painting, that is, of painting without any ulterior motive of a representational or referential character, the work of these two artists from Sabadell fully corresponds with such a notion.” The Ateneu took out a large advertisement in the Correo Catalán newspaper, reading “Borrell-Bermúdez, two painters from Sabadell”. Above there was the announcement of an exhibit by the photographers Terré, Miserachs and Masats at the Aixelá gallery on Rambla de Catalunya, and even higher up, a smaller advertisement for an exhibition by Serrasanta at Galería Augusta. It was a golden age, when galleries still bothered paying for advertising in the newspapers to attract art lovers to their spaces. On 4 April, 1959, the Art Exhibitions section in the Correo Catalán made reference to 13 shows. There is one photograph of the Borrell and Bermúdez exhibition, where we see the former tense, looking out of place, posing beside his largest piece in the show, a magnificent square canvas where black insinuations cut through the white ground. Writing of the paintings at the Ateneu, the poet Juan Eduardo Cirlot published a long article dedicated to Borrell in the magazine Correo de las Artes: “The paintings that Borrell showed in early 1959 in the gallery of the Ateneo de Barcelona,” said Cirlot, “belong as well to the technique of graphic lines and rubbing, where the structural features are marked by highlighted stains, almost square or rectangular in shape although with imprecise outlines, in black, blue or sepia tones over white grounds. Wandering lines hold together these squares, pulling them from out of their solitude so as to fit them into an almost architectural idea of order.” It is quite surprising to see how early the critic was to pick up on this idea of “an almost architectural idea of order,” which differentiated Borrell’s work from the more sharply defined gesturalism of the other painters from Sabadell. This first exhibition was well-received and gave him important benefits: three rather accurately written reviews in the Barcelona press and the particular attention of the multi-talented Mr Cirlot, a highly personal poet and essay writer. A former collaborator with the Dau al Set
Virtual Exhibition
Alfons Borrell
30/08/2017 - 09/01/2018

group and a friend of Breton, he was aligned with the postulates of surrealism. At that time Cirlot was one of the most attentive critics in the land.

When on the muggy morning of 28 July, 2010, the then-president of the Ateneu Barcelonès, Oriol Bohigas, and the painter Antoni Llena offered the entrance hall of the remodelled auditorium to Borrell to create a large-scale work, the result would effectively close a circle that had begun to be traced a half a century earlier. Borrell returned to the Ateneu. Now he was back, at 79 years old and with that “lyrically clear air and transparent diction” that Marsà had anticipated, although sharper, and with his generous spirit intact. The artist gave the piece to the institution in celebration of its 150th anniversary. The material result, a large-scale painting five metres wide and two and half high, could be read as the ultimate resolution of that other painting the artist had taken his picture beside 50 years before in the same institution.

Alfons Borrell pertains to that breed of painters who are always circling in on the same problem. He is one of those who refuses to seek outside what he knows he can find within himself. Despite any insecurity they may express, they are artists who are surer of themselves than those who rummage around somewhere else to see what they might find to help them make their work. Miró was one of the first of these artists, like Borrell, always digging around in their own language, cultivating the languor of their own gardens. Picasso is the best example of the second kind of artist, always ready to scramble over some unsuspecting victim, feeding off of him to make himself stronger. Some are vegetarians, others are carnivores. The first kind of artist make chamber music, the latter do symphonies. While some are happy to stay with their wives, others change them as often as they can.

1960

In 1960 John Fitzgerald Kennedy won the election, becoming the 35th President of the United States of America, initiating a decade of prosperity, freedom and economic growth, which culminated in the words Neil Armstrong spoke to terrestrial creatures from the Moon on 20 July, 1969. The Americans had gone further than anyone else. Their expansion around the globe was at cruising speed. The world began to spin faster and faster, at the rhythm of swing, of the twist, of rock and roll. Everything began to be more varied, interchangeable and alive. The American blessing had made its way to our country a year earlier with President Eisenhower’s visit to General Franco, legitimizing the regime in the eyes of the world. Spain was invited to the party as well, but had to come in through the back door. From 1960 on, the domain of art would be American: accelerated, commercial, and with a rising social repercussion.

For the artists in Sabadell, however, nobody had to tell them anything. As always, they were ready, perhaps even too much so. The pictorial effervescence of those young artists was starting to come alive, and they had to find a way out. A sharp reality that went along perfectly with the freedom their painting so powerfully called out for. They said it loud and clear to everyone: “We are here!” Gallot was all about that, precisely. Sabadell had gotten too small for them, so the next objective was Barcelona. The journalistic stories of the time are interesting, even with their illustrations, mocking tones and calls to order. They constitute a good ground of material for any attempt to explain today that wildly unanticipated explosion of young artists known as the Grup de Sabadell [The Sabadell Group]. It is really a shame that in 2010, half a century later, in Barcelona no one has even thought about doing a detailed, rigorous reconstruction and interpretation of those years and the visual explorations of those young artists. There would be a lot to say. The excellent exhibition held in 2001 at the Museu de Sabadell, curated by M. Josep Balsach, whose catalogue was cited earlier, should really have made the connections that went beyond the strict context of Sabadell. This new revival would be yet another piece in the effort, inexcusable to date, meant to rethink the immovable hegemony of the scheme running from the Dau al Set to Tàpies to conceptual art that has typified the majority interpretation of Catalan art from the post-war to our day. This scheme is an excessively summary and political way of understanding art in Catalonia in the second half of the 20th century. This simplification has left too many creators out of the
picture. Not even the complexity of Dalí, the pop Dalí of Cadaqués, relegated in our day to Franco-era newsreels, is considered an essential part of Catalan art of the past 60 years. Yet we should not get distracted: the series of visual projects by the Gallot group in Barcelona, including an exhibition at the Galeria Mirador, was the first public proclamation of the artistic vitality of the 1960s in these environs, with its relaxed, uninhibited air. The Gallot group made its first appearance in Barcelona in late 1960, four months after the incidents at the Palau de la Música in the defence of Catalan culture. On 30 November, the first exhibition of Picasso in Barcelona opened at the Sala Gaspar. From out of that same gallery, which had refused to exhibit the work of the Gallot group, the group O’Figura was started, with the participation of the artists Tharrats, Hernández Pijuan, Claret, Subirachs and Vila Casas, the highest-profile Sabadell painter of the time. The theoretical guide of the group was Santos Torroella. The excessive influence of Tàpies, by then become a solitary planet in orbit, began to be noted more widely. Everything was just getting underway in the Barcelona art scene in those years. This meant that the audacity of the Sabadell action painters would have to wait nine years until the first conceptual experiences of young artists like Silvia Gubern, Jordi Gali, Antoni Llena and Àngel Jové would reply to it in the form of video. They were identical attempts as those seen in Sabadell, with their signs of confusion and undoing, clear symptoms of their legitimacy.

The more anarchistic, mocking and libertarian vein of Sabadell from before the war had revived itself in the form of action painting. To summarize this briefly: the actions of Gallot (Manuel Duque, Alfons Borrell, Antoni Angle, Llorenç Balsach, Joan BERMÚDEZ, Josep Llorens, Lluís Vila and Joaquim Montserrat) took place in Barcelona from 21 to 26 September, 1960, in the context of the Mercè (Our Lady of Mercy) city festival. On the first day, at 11 am, the painter Antoni Angle let ten hens go free at Plaça d’Urquinaona. With their feet covered in oil paint, they scampered over a group of canvases laid out on the ground, as a stupefied crowd looked on. These pieces, together with the work painted gesturally by Joaquim Montserrat on Casp Street, and the work done by the painter Joan BERMÚDEZ in the centre of Plaça de Catalunya, would all be brought together two days later in the exhibition Pintura de acción Gallot [Gallot Action Painting] at the Galeria Mirador, on 12 Casp Street. The exhibition was rounded off by work from painters Lluís Vila, Alfons Borrell and Josep Llorens, all done in their respective studios. Five days later things really got interesting. A roll of white paper. Seventy-five metres of paper laid out on the ground at Barcelona’s Plaça de Catalunya, with the eight members of the group, helped by Gabriel Morvay and Vladimir Slepian, attacking the virgin surface in the action painting mode they were working in: wild gesturalism, total freedom, painting without inhibitions. All their work was directly influenced by Jackson Pollock, who had died four years earlier, and who was also featured in the small publication made for the Galeria Mirador exhibition. The newspapers reported on the event and exhibition, with even La Vanguardia publishing a note. The tone of the reports was in general lively and ironic, since it was, in fact, the town festival. A camera recorded the action. The photographs of that event testify to a large presence of public, with a certain playful atmosphere on the part of some viewers and other members of the crowd clearly surprised. The newspaper Sabadell, published by the Falange – the fascist party founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera – was not quite so clear about what had gone on, and called for an official response. On 4 October, on page three, it published an interview-interrogation asking the young Sabadell artists to clarify their position before the public opinion of their city, to explain what their intentions were. The replies were drafted as a group. To the first question, “What is Gallot?”, they replied as follows: “It is the name of an action painting group comprised of eight painters who began working in Sabadell . . . The name was chosen from amongst six terms that have no significance whatsoever for sensibility, social meaning, the academy and the bourgeoisie. That is, its meaning had to do with the brutality of instincts and the simplicity of not being in possession of anything we know nothing about.” The entire interview has this inquisitorial tone on the part of the journalist posing the questions, and totally free responses, sometimes absurd, sometimes answering back. The final question was “Why did you do a public action?” Response: “It was a propagandistic act and a joke we were forced to do to connect present-day society with the current moment in painting, understood as belonging to all humanity, which on 4 October, 1957, experienced the launching of Sputnik.” The chief editor of the newspaper was clearly not fully convinced, and two days later an overly zealous writer by the name of Luis Papell published a short article entitled “A Dangerous Game”, a piece that is in fact a rather hardnosed admonition that ends with these words: “What we do understand is
that this dangerous game contributes to the creation of a climate of disorientation amongst those who beyond the borders of our city do not know us well, and all citizens who are conscious of our responsibility must oppose ourselves to this.” The next day the artists celebrated their success with a supper at Barcelona’s Hotel Colón, with 150 dinner guests joining them. The little slap in the back from the authorities had not affected them much. The supper was given the name “Cena Conmemorativa del nacimiento de Gallot” [Commemorative Supper for the Birth of Gallot], despite being its closing event. The meal began with Consomé Enrique IV seguit de supremas de dorada a la naranja [Henry V consomé followed by sea bream supreme with orange sauce] while the main course was Pollo cocotte paysana [Cocotte chicken farmer style]. Chocolate truffle cake, coffee, after meal drink and cigar. During the meal, everyone was invited to paint a painting – critics, artists, collectors, and the waiters too. The members of Gallot, for their part, made another painting. In fact, as M. Josep Balsach has pointed out, that final action by Gallot was a happening when no one was yet aware what the term really meant.

The fleeting experience of Gallot would correspond to precisely the same sort of sudden acceleration that began to be seen everywhere, including in the until-then small, minority world of art. Those painters sought to join this world of art as naturally as they could, although from that point on it would become increasingly mutable: multiplicity and abundance, unleashed proximity, the market or lack thereof. This absence would end up being traumatic. The artist who had begun to make moves towards a rudimentary media, would in the following decades end up (himself, and others coming afterwards) devoured by the bulimia of novelty and the anecdote this very media would employ to survive. The extremely quick execution that typified Gallot, with their interchangeable works of art, artists going into the pulsating street to take the public on, only to come up against indifference, the fleeting nature of gesture and its ambivalence – this was a simple absurdity, or else the expression of something much deeper, irrational. All of this, including their end, saying goodbye in the most classical way possible, with a good meal, but then (“surprise, surprise”), after dessert, inviting everyone to become an artist. All this muddle was, at that time, the best metaphor available for how things were evolving at that time, the image of a future that was not too far off. No one at the time could have understood things that way, however, as it was still too soon. Nowadays it is easy to lay out the chronology, while back then it was impossible. There must have been a state of total, absolute confusion. In fact, for years no one has had the remotest idea what to think or say about what went on. Even the artists themselves were not fully conscious of how their high-pitched pace would end up doing away with everything. Even themselves.

From Intimate Necessity to Boredom

Most works of art now hanging in museums were created in adverse conditions. Their creators never shied from the challenge of taking on pain and death. The irreducible strength of their work, their capacity for irradiation, is what emerges at the end of a struggle. That temper, born of "the impulse of intimate necessity that gave life to them", as Rilke said. Yet whoever in our day dares to speak in the realm of the visual arts of the “intimate necessity” that drove the German poet on (a necessary condition) will find, in relation to the art of today, people turning up their noses at them, admonished by the priests of contemporary art. Nowadays the decision-making, administration and, in recent years, even the “production” of art is in the hands of the state and the market. In Europe, most especially, the state has become the principal guarantor of culture. In his books, Marc Fumaroli has scrutinized this phenomenon in detail. This new academy, identical to the academy of the 19th century although much vaster and more complex, comprised of upper ranking bureaucrats, simply sets out do with what its predecessors did and follow the dictates of trend. With art that has turned novelty into its highest expression, state institutions administer the cultural insecurities of an acritical, neophyte and unconcerned audience, virtually incapable of distinguishing between good and bad. An audience that seeks to affirm its difference at any cost, taking its cue from the rising artistic class, while only receptive to the dictates of novelty. A public that consumes this apparently sophisticated form of entertainment that a small mandarin class administers, judges and promotes for their own benefit, and that the market uses as an excuse and
justification before a collecting minority. Elites that find in the extravagance of these novelties the promise of an initiating knowledge, privileged and differentiated, exclusive in nature, in consonance with their social status. For the majority audience, drugged by the imitations of rebellion this supposed art promotes, what is left is the simple role of yea-sayer for the interests of one or another. All of this combines to perverting its capacity for aesthetic contemplation, beating all its sensibility out of it. The indiscriminate spectacle of contemporary art centres and museums opened in the last decade in Spain, for example, responds to this context. We are talking about a land from which beauty and the spirit have long since been expunged. In Barcelona, London or New York, this system has been going on for years. At this time, however, there is a generalized sense that we are immersed in a mad flight forward that can barely be disguised. Administered by powerful figures, always dressed in black, who shamelessly call on the public to believe in them once more: one more avant-garde artist; one new tendency; another curator come to serve up, for the umpteenth time, the same re-heated dish – and all in the name of contemporary art, once again. They are veritably trapped in the present. With their hearts trapped as well. How then, have they come to this? In his book entitled

Sense títol

Painting
Mixed media on canvas

Quoting textual words of his beloved Joan Brossa, "Towards poetry, not only does the language go away". Borrell plays with the verses of Artur Rimbaud and the romantic tones. Paul dels Prats, herds ... once again nature again becomes the undisputed protagonist of the painting piece of Borell. The dyes employed do not hide or hide any mystery beyond painting. Again, the painter uses pure colors, the simplicity is based on the choice of primary or secondary, these have not been roasted, but applied by means of velours and transparencies, overlapping each other, give depth to the painting of Borell. The light, the tones, are the result of the spontaneity of the painter, who understands painting, perhaps as a phenomenon typical of nature.
Music, painting or poetry is not something that goes unnoticed in the work of Borrell. As the artist conceives, they need to get involved with the life and history of each individual and play a very significant role in our temperament. And, next, shades, laughs at the sensual lips. In the bumps or penitent passions. Verses by the poet Arthur Rimband Borrells performs with abstraction and passionate colors. One way to suggest the most direct record. This abstraction takes us into the world of Borrell, full of emotions embodied in his artistic compositions.

The perception in the opening in this piece reminds us of the immensity of the sea. Nature, the central axis of many of Borell's works, is explained through color. A clear example in which color is no longer manifested as an attribute or accident but becomes the category of subject and substance. The romantic tones used evoke a sense of depth and at the same time clarity, again returned to the binomial presence and absence. Works of this nature evoke us in a state where we contemplate an apparently static but full of movement that seems to escape.
Under the umbrellas of opening and overflowing there are works that are defined by a movement of openness towards nature and its resonances. In the work of Alfons Borrell we can find the constant struggle over desire and terror, where they always get together as an element of our existence. Characterized by these attributes, Borrell states that the material exceeds the limits that the fabric and paper impose. It is this way how their works exemplify the pictorial freedom in their immensity.

Alfons Borrell is possibly one of the last examples of painters who let themselves be guided by the intuition of painting in our country. An example of this is pictures like this that do not seek any specific explanation, but anyone can extract their own. The red, blue and black, colors that can evoke very different concepts, opposite poles that unite them with a translucent sea. A sea that becomes a sky that plays with the minucios of a white that remind us of the clarisas of a rainy day. The frankness of the painter teaches us that nothing is true, nothing is definitive.
The course of Borrell’s work continues with the idea of playing with the limits of pictorial elements. The appearance of geometric shapes takes on the ambivalence of presence and absence, breaking with the emptiness of the limits. This manifestation marks a significant constant in the works of Borrell and refers us to the notion of a horizon. Experimenting the boundaries and rectangular shapes, welcome the opposites. The use of collage technique conceals everything that is previously visible before being hidden. It becomes the revelation of a mystery.
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Painting
Mixed media on canvas
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