

# The IVAM Library Collection: Avant-garde magazines from the first half of the 20th century

The IVAM Museum of Modern Art opened in the city of Valencia (Spain) in 1989. It soon earned international prestige largely thanks to its exhibition programming over the opening decade. Specializing in modern art, over the years its library has put together an interesting collection of magazines from the European and particularly Spanish avant-garde movements. In this article we discuss the magazines included in the holdings of the IVAM Library.

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## The IVAM

The Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) was created by the Generalitat Valenciana (Valencian Autonomous Government) in 1986 and opened to the public three years later in 1989. It was the first modern art museum in Spain as such, and its exhibition programming throughout the 1990s soon gave it a well-earned international reputation. Vicente Todolí, its initial Artistic Director, was recently appointed Director at the Tate Modern in London.

Besides its primary function of providing documentary support for all the key activities of the museum, the specialized IVAM Library is available to scholars and students of modern art.

The IVAM Library became an associated member of IFLA in 1988 and since 1993 it has taken an active part in the Spanish and Portuguese Art Libraries Meetings. It has an active exchange policy with around 300 institutions and its holdings are frequently requested for loans to other art centres for exhibitions.

The number of documents in the collection is currently in excess of 32,000. The collection itself is divided into various sections: Reference, Theory, History and Art Movements; a substantial section of *catalogues raisonnés*, exhibition catalogues and monographs on artists; group exhibitions, hand catalogues and auction catalogues (Sotheby's and Christie's); dossiers of activities at the IVAM, archives donated by artists or their families; and finally, a newly set up audio-visual section to

cover video art, electronic art, net art, music and experimental cinema. It is no exaggeration to claim that the IVAM Library is currently one of the best Modern Art Libraries in Spain.

As a result of its ongoing acquisition policy over the last sixteen years the Library can now boast an extremely interesting collection of periodicals from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This article will focus on avant-garde publications between World War I and II (1918–1940).

## European inter-war avant-garde movements

The avant-garde movements between the two world wars, approximately between 1918 and 1940, comprise one of the most interesting periods in European history. Their efforts to renew all the various fields of artistic and intellectual life found expression in hundreds of printed works including posters, books and magazines. The profound changes in graphic design brought about by the new constructivist typography, the use of photography and montage, as well as the necessary technological conditions for the mass production of printed material, turned these magazines into authentic documents of the true spirit of the avant-garde, with their pages serving as an experimental ground for exciting new ideas while also providing the basic theoretical support.

It was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the social and technical circumstances came together for the production of mass circulation magazines. When this happened, the very popularity of the media and its propensity for agitation ensured that the magazines were vibrant, not only influencing the evolution of contemporary visual arts by involving the artists, poets, and architects of the moment in writing and laying out the magazines, but also in the actual social content, giving it an activist role that would make it a crucial link in the intellectual development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The influence of Cubism and cinema were crucial in the progress of graphic style with the new typography, collage, photomontage and photographic sequences coming together to create a new visual syntax.

A succession of European avant-garde movements came thick and fast in the wake of Cubism: Futurism in Italy, De Stijl in Holland, Dadaism in Switzerland, Germany and France, Constructivism in the USSR, all trying to shake off what they considered to be the burden of the Western visual tradition while opening up new forms of visual experience more attuned to the needs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Visual artists, musicians, poets and architects were united in their desire to put an end to the old.

A particularly noteworthy feature underpinning the history of the avant-garde movements was their desire to have a bearing on social and political life. In this regard the Russian avant-garde is an especially good example, sheltered as it was under the wing of the Soviet regime only to be later swallowed up by Stalinism. Meanwhile, at the other end of the political spectrum, we had the fascist derivation of Italian Futurism.

### Specific items in our collection

Below we will briefly mention a whole series of magazines belonging to, or in the shadow of, these art movements which are included in the holdings of the IVAM Library.

Edited by the artist Theo van Doesburg, *De Stijl* (1917–1932), the official organ of the eponymous Dutch group, was unquestionably one of the most influential avant-garde magazines in the years following World War I, as were *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Paris 1920–1925) and the constructivist *Wendingen*

(Amsterdam 1918–1940), a superb architecture magazine with many contributing artists including El Lissitzky, who created a composition for issue number 11 in 1921.

From among the dadaist publications which sprung up in the wake of the movement created in Zurich in 1917 were the French magazines *Cannibale* and *Proverbe*, the latter considered the most radical literary expression of Paris Dada, both published in 1920. This same year also saw the publication in Germany of the only issue of the dadaist magazine *Die Schammade*, edited by Max Ernst with collaborations from Francis Picabia, Tristan Tzara and El Lissitzky; the emblematic *Merz* (Hannover 1923–1932), published by the multifaceted artist Kurt Schwitters, combining constructivist and dadaist typography.

The new typography characterizing these modern magazines was particularly focused on the real function of printed material: to improve the communication of information, as exemplified by the German graphic design magazine *Gebrauchsgraphik* (Berlin, Munich, 1924–1928) and the French *Arts et Métiers Graphiques* (Paris, 1927–1939). Incidentally, the invention of the first portable camera, the Leica, was crucial in the development of illustrated weeklies. Photographic magazines quickly became popular in Germany and the Soviet Union, and were soon transformed into a powerful means of political propaganda. This applies both to *AIZ* and *SSSR Na Stroike*.

True professional photographers worked at the German communist weekly *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, *AIZ* (Berlin, Prague, 1925–1936). Around 1930 John Heartfield, who had belonged to the Dada Berlin group, began publishing his radical photomontages in favour of the working class and in opposition to the ruling political powers. In 1933, the year when Hitler was appointed chancellor, the magazine and its workers went into exile in Prague. Heartfield's 237 photomontages combined typography, photography and collage for mass reproduction: at its peak in 1931, *AIZ* printed runs of half a million copies.

Heartfield worked in Moscow during 1931 on the *SSSR Na Stroike* magazine (Moscow 1930–1941), which was also published in French, English and German. The large format (42 cm) proved a magnificent propaganda vehicle for Soviet achievements, and was extremely well put together by the Russian artists involved, including Rodchenko

and Lissitzky, who chose photomontage for page composition coupled with the bare minimum of text. The IVAM Library acquired the French edition, *URSS en construction*.

### The avant-garde movement in Spain

The period of the historical avant-garde was one of the most intense in Spanish culture as a whole. The renewal in all fields of artistic life – literature, architecture, art, cinema – was truly astounding, and the numerous magazines that appeared all over the country echoed the new ideas coming from abroad. The politicization that gave rise to the events leading up to the Civil War, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the proclamation of the second Republic, and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) itself, were reflected in the art world and culture in general, with magazines echoing the radicalization of postures affecting all aspects of Spanish life.

The Spanish magazines labelled avant-garde, either for aesthetic reasons or for their literary content, began to be published around 1918, and could be framed within the first movement in the literary avant-garde, *Ultraísmo*. Others would appear later in the thirties, as organs for professional groups coming from the fields of architecture, art and cinema. The publications appearing in this decade had a clear political bias and it would be true to say that the aesthetic avant-garde gave way to a political avant-garde. However, the end of the Spanish Civil War brought with it the end of the avant-garde movements, with the exception of a few magazines produced in exile.

And so, we can see how, since the end of World War I, many magazines began to appear in Spain with the common denominator of low funding, small print runs and a short life-span. In general, they reflected movements happening elsewhere in Europe, and were characterized by an attempt to exalt the imagination and reinvent language while transmitting a fervour for the modern world and new technology, and generally (with a few exceptions) eschewing political issues. They were the creation mainly of graduates from a bourgeois background who, in a matter of a few years, underwent a radical transformation and who would later produce committed literature during the Civil War. On the other hand, some magazines

turned into educational social cells organizing conferences, exhibitions and cinema clubs, moving away from the isolated nucleus that created exclusivist literature.

It is curious to note how, by 1932, political agitation as expressed in strikes, land reform, and the proclamation of the Catalan Statute, found no echo in these magazines, with the exception of *Nuestro Cinema*. During the Republic, there never was a conception of using all the areas of culture as arms for social transformation. With the appearance of the *Octubre* magazine in 1933 there was finally a change from pure aesthetics to a more engaged aesthetic.

Above, we briefly touched on *Ultraísmo* which, between 1918 and 1925, became the major avant-garde literary movement and in which poets played the lead role. The movement gave rise to magazines like *Grecia*, *Plural*, *Tableros* and *Ultra*.

Indebted to French art nouveau, it wanted to go further, to leave behind the old and accept everything that was new, according to the signers of the 'Ultra' manifesto.

While it is true that there was no *ultraísta* version in the visual arts, certain renowned painters, like Robert and Sonia Delaunay during the years they spent in Madrid, introduced their work in collaboration with *ultraísta* poets and writers.

The *Ultra* magazine (Oviedo 1919–1920), a fortnightly literature broadsheet which ran to five issues, was produced with the contribution of poets and prose writers, Gerardo Diego and Guillermo de Torre among others, and the French writers Blaise Cendrars and Pierre Reverdy.

*Ultra* (Madrid 1921–1922): Poetry-Criticism-Art, which ran to 24 issues, was the major *ultraísta* publication. Particularly worth emphasizing is the triptych format, the full-colour covers, and the graffiti symptomatic of its revolutionary aesthetic, e.g. 'El ultraísmo para los relojes atrasados' and 'Ultra es el reflector estético del bolcheviquismo'.

*Grecia* (Seville-Madrid, 1918–1920) published 50 issues. It started as a *modernista* publication yet soon opened up to Cubism and Dadaism. As an illustrated magazine it was not exceptional although the literary contributions were groundbreaking: the Spanish writers Gerardo Diego, Guillermo de Torre, Salvat-Papasseit, León Felipe, Federico García Lorca, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Ramón del Valle Inclán; the Latin American writers Jorge Luis Borges and Vicente Huidobro;

the French authors Guillaume Apollinaire, Louis Aragon, André Breton, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau; German expressionists; and futurists like Marinetti.

Other *ultraísta* publications were *Proa* (Barcelona, 1921) significantly subtitled 'Fulla de poesia i guerra', *Tableros* (Madrid, 1921–1922) and *Plural* (Madrid 1925).

Noteworthy among the Catalan magazines are *La Mà Trencada* (Barcelona 1924–1925) and *Terramar* (Sitges, 1919–1920), produced by *noucentist* Catalans, with many French collaborators as well as the Dutchman Theo van Doesburg, who we have already mentioned as the editor of *De Stijl*.

The best magazines from the Generation of 1927 were *Litoral* (Malaga 1926–1929) and *Mediodía* (Seville 1926–1933). Poets like Rafael Alberti and Federico García Lorca collaborated with both publications, and among the artists were Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso.

The Canary Islands contributed to the avant-garde with *La Rosa de los Vientos* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1927–1928), which participated both in *Ultraísmo* and the movements belonging to the Generation of 1927.

One of the most important weeklies during these years was *Mirador* (Barcelona, 1929–1937), which was especially influential among younger audiences for whom it was a kind of bible of the new cultural changes. Right from its beginnings it organized a cinema club featuring films by Luis Buñuel, René Clair, Sergei Eisenstein, Georges Hugnet and Man Ray. During the Civil War the magazine joined the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya PSUC.

The architecture magazine *A.C.*, *Actividad Contemporánea* (Barcelona, 1931–1937), was the official organ of GATEPAC (Grupo de Artistas y Técnicos Españoles para el progreso de la Arquitectura Contemporánea). Espousing rationalist architecture, it championed *Modernisme*, especially Antonio Gaudí, reported on European projects, and advocated vernacular architectural forms like Ibicenca, with an article written by the artist and architect Raoul Hausmann who had lived on Ibiza for some time.

There were just two issues of *Arte* (Madrid, 1932–1933), the magazine of the Sociedad de Artistas Ibéricos (SAI), a publication with meticulous photographic and typographical reproductions. Although initially set up in 1925,

the SAI had to wait until 1931 for support from the new republican government, when it became the strategic axis of the cultural policy of the Second Republic.

*Nuestro Cinema* (Paris, 1932–1935), 'Cuadernos Internacionales de valoración cinematográfica', was edited from Paris by Juan Piqueras. Regarded as the best cinematographic magazine from capitalist Europe, it defended Soviet cinema and socialist realism as opposed to bourgeois and commercial cinema. The magazine received contributions from Luis Buñuel, Rafael Alberti, María Teresa León, Josep Renau, René Clair, Fernand Léger, and Sergei Eisenstein. It also had its own cinema club in Madrid, the Studio Nuestro Cinema.

Edited by Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León, *Octubre* (Madrid, 1933–1934) was the official organ of 'revolutionary artists and writers', that is to say of the Communist Party of Spain. Collaborating in the magazine were, among others, the poets Luis Cernuda, Antonio Machado, and the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. It was illustrated by Alberto, Cartier-Bresson, Helios Gómez and Josep Renau. It organized the First Exhibition of Revolutionary Art in the Ateneo in Madrid.

*El Gallo Crisis* (Orihuela, 1934–1935), a progressive Catholic magazine, published contemporary poetry including poems by Miguel Hernández.

*Nueva Cultura* (Valencia 1935–1937) was an intellectually-oriented magazine offering information and criticism. Its issues, one special one on fascism, another dedicated to the 1935 Congress in Paris, and another entitled 'Rusia 1917, España 1934', are particularly significant for their left-wing and radical political orientation. It organized a Cine-Estudio Popular, and published a manifesto in favour of the Frente Popular in 1936. Its editor was the photomontage artist Josep Renau. Besides the regular contributors, there were translations of texts by Cassou, Ehrenburg, Céline, Gide, Gorki, and Maiakowski among others.

While not finding a place within the avant-garde, the originality of the libertarian publications that existed during the years of the Civil War is also worth mentioning. One of the most attractive of these was the feminist publication *Mujeres Libres* (Madrid 1936–1937), the organ of the eponymous organization. Over a total of thirteen issues it espoused the economic, political and social liberation of women struggling against

bourgeois barriers, some of which were even carried over into anarchism.

### **In conclusion**

The IVAM has always paid special attention to the recovery of this type of material, ensuring that the printed word was included in its collections. On many occasions these magazines have been an integral part of its exhibitions, and several of these magazines are considered to be part of the works of art in the museum's collection. It is crucial to conserve and make available to researchers these original documents reflecting the early movements

of what is now known as the historical avant-garde – movements driven by an idea of progress combining utopia and orthodoxy to try and instigate a positive change in human relations.

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