

Mari Chordà. Feminist Landscapes

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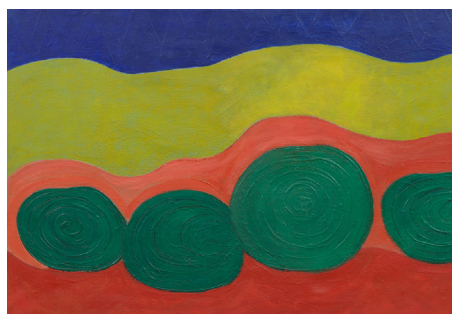
Following the first iteration in Barcelona, this exhibition pays tribute to the artistic career and work of Mari Chordà (b. Amposta, 1942) with a selection of 11 works created between 1962 and 1969. A painter, poet and publisher, Chordà was a pioneer in the visual expression of the female body, female sexuality and the experience of maternity. The artist developed her most characteristic and personal art influenced by the landscape of her native Catalonia as well as the pop aesthetics she discovered during her formative experience in Paris.

Attracted by its vibrant cultural life, Mari Chordà moved to Paris in 1965. She first settled in a beautiful house in Boulogne-Billancourt and later moved to the *pigeonnier* of an old house near Porte de Vanves, which she also used as her studio. She attended a course at the Beaux-Arts de Paris and actively visited museums and galleries all around the city. When she discovered she was pregnant with her daughter, Chordà realised that she wanted to give birth in her hometown of Amposta (Catalonia), where she returned in December 1966. During her time in Paris, her palette shifted dramatically as a result of discovering artists linked to the New Realism and Pop art movements, notably Niki de Saint Phalle.

Chordà first painted depictions of female genitalia in 1964, the year before moving to Paris, while still a student and participating in demonstrations against the Franco regime; at this time, the feminist art revolution associated with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro had barely begun to make waves in the United States and it was completely unheard of in Spain. Her inspiration for the series which she titled the “Vaginals”—represented here by *Líquids (Liquids)* (1966), *Paris 4* (1966) and the *feminal* 1968 painting *Vulva*—arose from a desire to inhabit her own body, to wrestle it back from the patriarchy by exploring tabooed conceptions of femininity and generating new references. Chordà used what she described as a “non-figurative language”—somewhere between abstraction and close-up photography—which allowed her to capture her vision of her body from a physiological perspective



Vulva
(1968)
Wax crayon
on board
48 × 62 cm



Garriga II
(1965)
Oil on canvas
89 × 130 cm

as only she could, from the inside out. The resultant pictures are sensual and suggestive: abstract, undulating anatomical landscapes. Chordà plays with the relationship between form and colour, shifting our perception and engagement with our subconscious as we try to make sense of them.

Hung side by side, two large-scale landscapes in the more traditional sense, *Vola, Vola (Fly, fly)* (1964) and *Garriga II (Scrubland II)* (1965) reveal the importance

of the familiar terrain of her native southern Catalonia for her work: in particular, the River Ebro and the Montsià. In *Garriga II*, for example, we observe how she represents the holm oaks of the Sierra del Montsià as a dense material filled with sgraffito spirals, a motif she repeated. These two works also demonstrate the impact of Chordà's move to Paris in 1965 on her palette. She began to incorporate ever brighter, bolder colours which, she observed, "forced you to stop and look at them." Chordà never considered herself a Pop artist,

however, and actively sought ways to counter what she saw as the inherent voyeurism of many North American Pop artworks—which deliberately represented women in an idealised fashion—sacrificing the alibi of a commercial aesthetic but maintaining its appealing palette and brilliant finish.

This aesthetic finds its apogee in her playful series "Joguets" ("Toys"), represented here by *Colors (Colours)* (1969) and *Ous de felina (Feline eggs)* (1969). These polychrome wood sculpture-paintings are inspired by a game for children with which her daughter Àngela would have played, in which moveable coloured pieces could be slotted into holes in various combinations. In the same way that Fontana's series "La Fine di Dio" or "The End of God" signified the infinite and the inconceivable to him, for her the "Toys" are a ludic questioning of the status of God within the repressed Catholic society of Franco's Spain. She raises the status of these toys to high art, placing her role as mother and creator literally at the centre of her practice and, figuratively, into the hands of her child.

Mari Chordà's subject matter has always tended towards both the political and the personal; for a woman artist working in the 1960-70s, the two were inextricably linked. As Chuz Martínez wrote: "Chordà's interest in form is simply the expression of her passion for life."



Colors
(1969)
Polychrome
wood
99 cm ø

The artist



Mari Chordà (Amposta, 1942) is an artist, poet and feminist activist born shortly after the Civil War ended and General Franco's dictatorial regime took power. She lived in Paris in 1965 and 1966, and now lives and works in Barcelona. She studied at the Escola de Belles

Arts de Barcelona, where she began to experiment with pictorial representations of the female body. She took an active part in feminist movements from the late 1960s onwards. In 1968 she founded the cultural centre "Lo Llar" in her native city. In 1977 she co-founded the legendary Bar-Feminist-Library "laSal" in Barcelona and the first feminist publishing house in Spain: "laSal Edicions de les Dones", where she published the book of poems *Quadern del cos i l'aigua (Notebook of the body and water)* (1978).

Chordà's work is being re-evaluated in the context of a broader engagement with questions of sex and feminism within art. Mayoral has worked closely with her to develop solo exhibitions for 2021-22 in Barcelona and Paris and a

conference that took place at the MACBA in November 2021. Recently her work has also been exhibited at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB) and at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) in 2019, at the Tate Modern (London) in 2015, at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León in 2006, and has had monographic exhibitions like "Llots i torbes" at Lo Pati in Amposta, in 2017. Her work forms part of the permanent collection of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), of the MACBA and the MNAC (Barcelona). She has also published *Locomotora infidel pel passat (Locomotive unfaithful to the past)* (1988) and *Umbilicals (Umbilicals)* (2000).

Mayoral

Founded in 1989, Mayoral is a gallery located in Barcelona and Paris. The gallery articulates an exhibition programme focused on post-war and contemporary art with artists such as Tàpies, Chillida, Millares, Saura, Zóbel, Francés, Guerrero, Rivera and Chordà, as well as key twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as Miró and Picasso. It develops projects that are rigorously curated and grow out of an exhaustive process of research. In recent years Mayoral has presented projects such as "Miró's Studio" and retrospectives dedicated to Millares, Tàpies, Saura and Chordà, as well as dialogues between artists such as Miró/Zao Wou-Ki and Francés/Vieira da Silva. The gallery participates in art fairs such as Art|Basel Miami Beach, Art|Basel Hong Kong, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York and ARCOMadrid.