

## Galería Elba Benítez



### **Francesc Torres**

#### *De colisiones en la autopista de la historia*

September – October 2019

Art speaks beyond art, as any informed art appreciation must acknowledge at this stage. Art is a mirror. Art is a document. Art is the yield of forces and processes and circumstances external to itself, a cork floating on the currents and tides of history. And yet at the same time art also speaks within art — art speaks to art and art speaks of art and above all (viz Ad Reinhardt) art speaks and must speak as art. These diverse ‘definitions’ of art do not negate or contradict or even necessarily compete with each other — to the contrary, in their weave lies art’s enduring and autonomous power. In other words, to the multiple-choice question of “What is art”, the best answer may be “All of the above” — or, perhaps, a simple, defiant and resounding “Yes.”

The slippery question of the definition of art lies at the heart of *De colisiones en la autopista de la historia* (On Collisions Along the Highway of History), Francesc Torres’s exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez, in which he sets out very intentionally to challenge the conventions — involving meaning, context, authorship and ownership — on which our understanding of art is structured. The exhibition centers around a series panel-paintings by Josep Maria Sert from the 1920’s which Torres has utilized as the basis for his own interpretive installation in the gallery, where he presents them in conjunction with a written text of his own — a text that is not auxiliary to but rather an integral part of the exhibition as a whole — in which he ruminates on the nature of art itself, historically and in our own time.

The large-scale panels were originally painted for the Vic Cathedral but damaged during the Spanish Civil War when anti-clerical and iconoclastic anarchist militias burned the cathedral; they were later removed and now form part of the collection of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona), where they have been kept in storage. Conserved by the museum in their unrestored state, the panels today embody a sequence of seemingly inexorable events — “collisions”, in Torres’s terminology in the textual component of the exhibition — involving ideology, power, history and the functions of imagery. At the same time, the charred panels themselves, oscillating between abstraction and figuration, possess a remarkably potent visual and physical presence, despite — or rather because of — their semi-ruined, relic-like state.

By thus appropriating these scarred panels into a polyvalent contemporary art work of which he is the ostensible author, and by further altering the already-altered context in which they are received, Torres inserts both himself and the objects on view (and to some degree even the by-standing viewer) into the charged, ongoing chain of multiple “collisions” that is history itself, arriving at a unique, unclassifiable exhibition of objects and text that is as complex as it is ambiguous, as elusive as it is aesthetically powerful.

George Stolz

A pioneer of installation art in the 1970's and an eminence in the Spanish art world today, Francesc Torres (1948, Barcelona) works with a range of formats — including photography, essays, exhibition curating, film, language-based work, and interventions in public space — while creating research-driven projects that explore themes of memory, power, politics and history. He frequently employs non-art objects as cultural artifacts, incorporating them into installations where their historical charge is exposed and their poetic potential is allowed to emerge, while at the same time deftly parsing their concealed or camouflaged ideological codes.

Torres has had solo exhibitions at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) (2018, 2008); Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) (Barcelona, 2018); the International Center of Photography (New York, 2011); Artium, Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo (Vitoria, 2009); Fundación Telefónica (Madrid, 2000); MIT List Visual Arts Center (Cambridge, 1998); IVAM - Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (Valencia, 1996); the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington D.C., 1992); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, 1991); the Queens Museum (New York, 1988); the Nationalgalerie (Berlin, 1988), the Carnegie Institute (Pittsburgh, 1985); the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, 1981, 1979); the Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona, 1979) and elsewhere. He has participated in numerous group shows around the world and has been selected to participate in La Biennale di Venezia in 2019, 2013 and 1976.

*De colisiones en la autopista de la historia* has been organized in collaboration with the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) and will form part of the Apertura Madrid Gallery Weekend program. It is Francesc Torres's fifth solo show at the Galería Elba Benítez.