

JOSEFA TOLRÀ 1880 _ 1959
MADGE GILL 1882 _ 1961

THE GUIDED HAND

This exhibition offers a completely new and never-before-seen dialogue between the astonishing works of Josefa Tolrà and Madge Gill. Women linked to esoteric knowledge and the methodology of the creative act guided by automatism during psychic trance: *The guided hand*.

The creativity of the two artists is connected to the utopian spiritualities of the early 20th century in Europe (spiritism, theosophy and anthroposophy) and integrated into social Christianity. Their visionary experience started with communicating with 'beings of light', souls, and would become their life missions, enabling them to help those in need through drawings and predictions. An activity that imbued them with inner peace and emancipation in their dotage. They never marketed or sold their works.

With no artistic or literary education, their creations occupy a space beyond art history. They revived women's wisdom and creativity (drawings, diaries, embroidery), connected to the ancestral and healing function of art (non-commercial production), renounced the idea of authorship (they were but mere mediums), applied esoteric knowledge (astrology, pendulum, magic, aura reading, active meditation) and inspired multiple 21st-century generations to transform the world based on a new wave of feminism.

Both women coincided in mourning and creative processes, drawing and embroidering throughout the night, without patterns or pauses. They used encrypted alphabets and their messages are pacifist, mystical, feminist and scientific. The exhibition begins with the smallest and corporal pieces, postcards and notebooks. Then the big figures of the 'beings of light' accompany us on a journey among profound expressions, fractal architectures, poetic calligrams, cosmic spirals, quantic times, embroidery with ethereal energy and mystical

breath. There is no beginning or end in this eternal and human representation of all that is invisible.

Pilar Bonet Julve

Josefa Tolrà (Cabrils, 1880-1959)

Josefa Tolrà Abril was born on 6 January, under the constellation of Capricorn. She is the most representative Catalan medium and visionary artist from the first half of the 20th century.

From a farming family, she worked at a factory when she was young, where she had the chance to talk to anarchists and spiritualists. Married to Jaume Lladó, she had three children: Joan, Maria and Pere. The youngest son died in 1924 and the eldest in a prison war camp at the end of the Spanish Civil War. These mourning periods sequestered her in a deep well of depression, although she never received clinical care or any medication.

She started drawing in adulthood, guided by spirits: 'I only feel at peace when I am drawing'. Spiritualism and theosophy enabled her to tap into healing transcendence. Josefa perceived auras and communicated with the dead, including the poet Jacint Verdaguer, the scientist Pasteur and mystic Teresa of Avila. She created hundreds of drawings in a few short years, along with illustrating notebooks with poems, novellas and scientific and moral thoughts. Starting from a spiral, her drawing transports us to the ethereal: angelic figures, planetary maps, gardens of Eden, biblical episodes, costumbrist topics and portraits. The artists from the famous *Dau al Set* group, especially Joan Brossa, visited her. She signed her pieces *Fluidic force drawing* along with her signature.

Her daughter Maria would devote herself to caring for and spending time with her mother, contributing to her creative endeavours. Josefa Tolrà was 'disembodied', in spiritualist terms, when she was 79 years old. Her legacy was presented at La Biennale di Venezia 2022 and at present is housed in many international collections and museums.

Madge Gill (London, 1882-1961)

Maude Ethel Eades, better known as Madge Gill, was born on 19 January under the constellation of Capricorn. She is one of the most representative British mediums and visionary artists from the first half of the 20th century.

Illegitimate daughter, her childhood was beset by abandonment. She was shipped off to Canada when she was 14 to work as a labourer. After making her way back to London, she worked at a hospital while living with her Auntie Kate, who introduced her to spiritualism and astrology. Madge married her cousin Thomas Edwin, and she would have three children: Laurie, Reggie and Bob. The loss of Reggie, a victim of Spanish flu, and the later death of Bob, sunk her into a personal crisis that grew worse with the loss of vision in her left eye, which she had to replace with a glass prothesis. She received psychiatric treatment and sequestered herself at home.

In adulthood, at 40 years old, she would take refuge in drawing, embroidery and music, while maintaining a connection to the spiritualist world and subtle beings. Faces of women with lost staring gazes and babies with closed eyes emerged from her drawings on postcards, paper and rolls of calico. Figures were placed among allegorical architectures: ladders, checkerboard floors, caverns facing towards the light, crosses, fractal spaces, sidereal florescence, volcanoes and planets. She signed her works *Myrninerest*, the name of the spirit who guided her hand.

Her son Laurie would devote herself to caring for and spending time with her mother, contributing to her creative endeavours. Madge Gill was 'disembodied', in spiritualist terms, when she was 79 years old. At present, her legacy features in international collections and museums.