

MUSEU NACIONAL
D'ART DE CATALUNYA

Press release

AERONAUTICS INTERAIOR

FRANCESC TORRES

[FLIGHT]

MUSEU
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CATALUNYA

Organisation and production:
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and
Centre d'Aviació Històrica de la Sénia

An installation by:
Francesc Torres

Dates:
June 18 - September 26,
2021

In cooperation with:



Ajuntament de la Sénia





FRANCESC TORRES

AERONAUTICS INTERIOR [FLIGHT]

This exhibition is an installation by artist Francesc Torres, featuring two aeroplanes that took part in the Spanish Civil War: the Soviet bomber Tupolev SB-2 “Katiuska” and the Soviet fighter Polikarpov I-16 “Mosca”, both present in the Civil War on the Republican side. The devices are exact full-scale replicas, but they are planes that currently do not fly, and in the artist’s own words, “an aeroplane that does not fly is not an aeroplane, it is a work of art.”

In this project, Francesc Torres takes coordinates that he has already explored on other occasions one step further, such as the ambiguity between art and non-art (camouflage paint, non-artistic objects with an “artistic aura”, etc.) and the elimination of the dividing line between the formats of “exhibition”, “work” and “installation”.

Aeronautics Interior (Flight) arose from a visit by the artist to the historic La Sénia Airfield, built by the Government of the Second Republic at the time of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. This airfield played a very prominent role due to its strategic location and its operational capacity, first for the Republic Aviation and then, paradoxically, for the German Condor Legion. The Centre d’Aviació Històrica de la Sénia is located close to the old airfield, where its director, José Ramón Bellaubí Caballer, carries out the epic recreation of these historical aeroplanes.



Francesc Torres explores aspects such as the impact of this war in the sky, or the idea of sacrifice on the defence of an ideology, within the context of war. The artist presents the analogy between the sacrifice of war and the sacrifice for religious faith, playing with iconography taken from the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, a beautiful Gothic retable from the Museu Nacional's collection, by the master painter Pere Serra (14th century), which represents the saint's martyrdom.

This artistic installation forms part of the range of exhibition projects that the Museu Nacional is this

year devoting to the Civil War, and the safeguarding of the artistic heritage in this extreme context.

It is a set of four exhibitions and a public programme coordinated on the same central theme, together with **artist Francesc Torres' installation**, the temporary exhibitions ***The Endless War. Antoni Campañà*** and ***Museum in Danger! Safeguarding the Catalan Artistic Heritage (1936-1939)***, and the new rooms dedicated to the art from this period, expanding the space, and with it, new works and new interpretations.

The programme of in-person and online activities has been designed in collaboration with a large number of entities and groups specialised in this period. They are proposals upon which to reflect, from multiple angles, on the consequences of war, such as the role of art and artists, the destruction and protection of heritage in situations of conflict, propaganda and memory, death, exile and the suffering of the civilian population.





ROOM TEXTS

POLIKARPOV I-16 “Mosca” FIGHTER AIRCRAFT

TECHNICAL DATA:

COUNTRY: USSR

TYPE: FIGHTER

LENGTH: 6 M APPROX.

WIDTH: 9 M APPROX.

HEIGHT: 2.50 M APPROX.

UNLADEN WEIGHT: 1,300 KG APPROX.

MAXIMUM SPEED: 450 KM/H APPROX.

ROOF: 9,000 M APPROX.

CREW: 1 PERSON

ARMS: 2-4 MACHINE GUNS

The Polikarpov I-16 was designed by Nikolai Polikarpov, one of the most important Soviet aeronautical engineers of the first half of the 20th century. It was a modern, fast, agile monoplane, with an armoured cabin that protected the pilot very effectively. However, navigation was complicated during take-off and landing; due to its small wing, these manoeuvres had to be carried out at high speed. During World War II, this small aircraft became somewhat obsolete, thanks to the new generation of German Luftwaffe fighter planes. However, the courage of the Soviet pilots was clearly evident. When they ran out of ammunition, some would use the I-16's propeller as a saw to destroy the rear ailerons, the rudder of the German bombers, to bring them down. The Polikarpov I-16 that occupies the Oval Hall is a life-size motorised replica, made by José Ramón Bellaubí Caballer, captain of the Merchant Navy and director of the Centre d'Aviació Històrica de la Sénia.

TUPOLEV SB-2 “Katiuska” BOMBER

TECHNICAL DATA:

COUNTRY: USSR

TYPE: BOMBER

LENGTH: 12.22 M

WIDTH: 20.12 M

HEIGHT: 4.39 M

UNLADEN WEIGHT: 3,995 KG

MAXIMUM SPEED: 430 KM/H

ROOF: 9,400 M APPROX.

CREW: 3 PERSONS

ARMS: 4 MACHINE GUNS

The Tupolev SB-2, *Skorostnoi Bombardirovshik* (high speed bomber), known in Spain as “Katiuska”, was designed by Andrei Nikolayevich Tupolev. In terms of bomber aircraft, it was a revolutionary plane, having a top speed of 450 km/h, which was faster than other fighter planes of its time. The “Katiuska” was an all-metal aircraft, very light and powerful, that could use these attributes to carry a considerable bombing load, with a crew of only three men. “In the spirit of Russia: good, simple, cheap to construct and maintain, and produced at a rate of knots,” says artist Francesc Torres.

The most famous pilot at the controls of a “Katiuska” was Leocadio Mendiola (Badajoz, 1909 - Barcelona, 1998). Of his many actions in combat, among the most notable was the bombing of the Nazi battleship *Deutschland*, which was seriously damaged and caused many casualties; and the almost suicidal attack on La Sénia Airfield, which had become the most important of the German Condor Legion’s after the Republican retreat. Hanging in the Oval Hall, about to crash, we can see a life-size replica of a “Katiuska” in the process of being built. This was also constructed by José Ramón Bellaubí Caballer, captain of the Merchant Navy and director of the Centre d’Aviació Històrica de la Sénia.

LA SÉNIA AIRFIELD

In mid-1937, with the Civil War already in full swing, the Government of the Second Republic decided, for strategic reasons, to build a military airfield on the outskirts of the town of La Sénia. Ninety hectares of olive groves were expropriated, and the owners were forced to cut down around 9,000 olive trees, seriously affecting the town's economy. Soon, three intersecting runways of hard earth were built, oriented towards the prevailing winds, with a building to house the officers and a bomb shelter for 200 people. Small rural buildings were used on the perimeter of the airfield for auxiliary tasks. There were no hangars for the planes. In September 1937, operational actions began, with three Tupolev SB bomber squadrons and three Polikarpov I-16 fighter squadrons, alongside other aircraft of various origins. A combination of Spanish aviators and Russian pilots (usually in command) made up the squadrons.

The Civil War then swung in favour of the national side and on April 14, 1938, the airfield passed into the hands of the national army, becoming the base of the German Condor Legion and one of the most important Francoist airfields in the country. Aircraft such as the Messerschmitt Bf 109 (in all its versions), Junkers Ju 87 "Stuka" and Heinkel He 111 were kept there, aircraft that later proved decisive during World War II.

The Battle of the Ebro, from July to November 1938, gives unique significance to La Sénia, due to its proximity to the conflict zone. It led to a large number of military personnel, aircraft and war material being housed at the aerodrome.

Partially preserved, it currently contains an interpretation centre in the old Command House, where the bomb shelter is also found. The Centre d'Aviació Històrica de la Sénia exhibits several aeronautical pieces from that time, considered to be of great interest.

VIDEO

The phrase that makes up the title of this video made by Francesc Torres in 2019, "Wise is nature; it makes us die so that life is worth something", is what is transmitted in Morse code through editing, videogram by videogram, the glints of sunlight on the weathervanes of the chimneys of the houses in a small town.



Tupolev SB-2 "Katiushka" in flight

Leocadio Mendiola Núñez (Badajoz, 1909 - Barcelona, 1998). "Katiushka" pilot and commander. He was the only loyal aviator to be awarded the Laureate of Madrid. Due to the vicissitudes of war, he never received it, not even posthumously. The refusal to this day of the various democratic governments, of all ideologies, to resolve the issue, even though Mendiola was recognised as a fully-fledged Spanish soldier with the rank of colonel during the Spanish Transition, speaks for itself. Of his many actions in combat, among the most notable was the bombing of the Nazi battleship *Deutschland*, and the almost suicidal attack on La Sénia Airfield, which had become the most important airfield of the German Condor Legion after the Republicans' withdrawal.



The pilots' barracks. The building remained as barracks under German occupation. To this day, the emblem of Republican Aviation is still displayed on one of its corners. It is currently the interpretation centre of La Sénia Airfield.

On September 10, 1938, the change of command of the J/88 Group took place, which is how the German squadron of La Sénia was known. There were festive celebrations held in its honour, featuring costume parades and parade floats. Here we see some service personnel in fancy dress, perhaps imitating the Moroccan soldiers they had seen fighting in Franco's forces.



Members of the Condor Legion having lunch under an olive tree at the airfield, not far from their planes. For these young men, the war in Spain was somewhere between a warrior adventure and an exotic holiday in the Mediterranean, according to what many photographs show.



Women from La Sénia hired by the German commanders to take care of cleaning, cooking and to provide domestic help for the base personnel.



The entrance to the brothel; a building known as “Les Coves de Martí”, a stately home situated next to the airfield. On the esplanade, to the right of the image in the foreground, you can see a petrol can similar to the ones used in this installation.



Francisco Gómez, the “Katiuska” pilot, lying dead alongside his machine gunner in the last Republican bombardment of La Sénia Airfield on December 16, 1938. In the attack, seven parked German planes were destroyed, the runways were damaged and the building that housed the brothel was also ruined.

CIVIL WAR

MUSEU NACIONAL
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RELATED ACTIVITIES

CONVERSATION — IN PERSON AND ONLINE

Aeronautics Interior (Flight)

Tuesday, July 6, at 6pm

Oval Hall and online

With prior registration on the Museum's website

Conversation between **Francesc Torres**, creator of the installation, and **Juanjo Lahuerta**, professor of art history at the Barcelona School of Architecture

Moderator: Lluís Alabern, head of mediation and museography at the Museum

GUIDED TOUR — ONLINE

Spaces and narratives of the Civil War

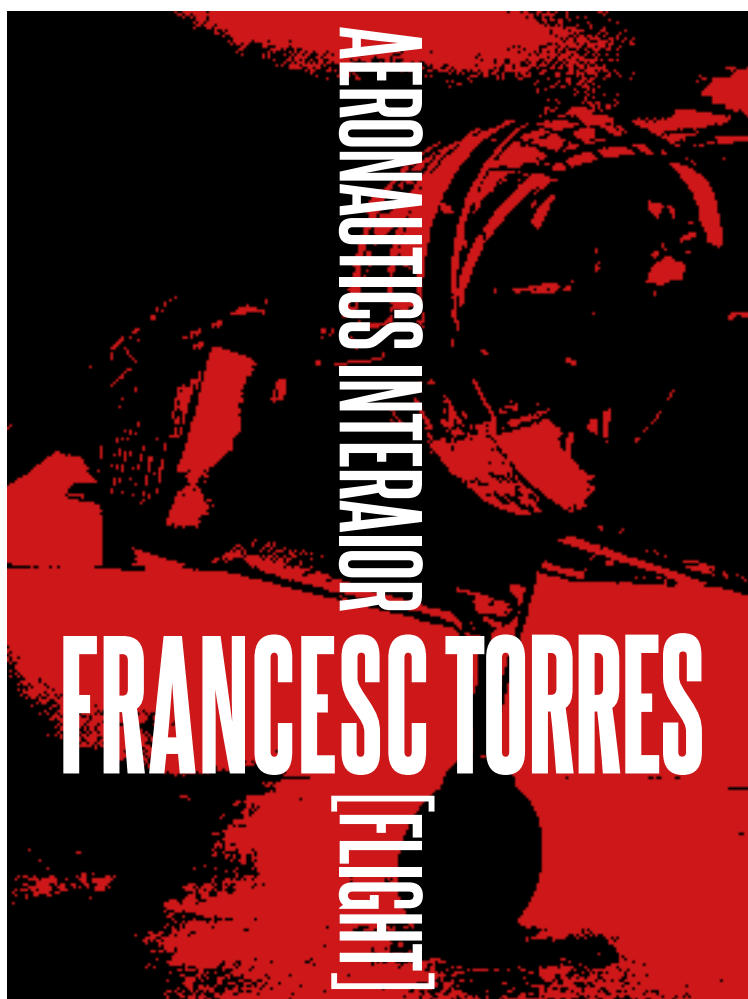
With prior registration on the Museum's website

A tour of the museums and interpretation centres throughout the country that explain the Civil War

Wednesday, September 22, at 6.45pm

Aerial warfare and the defence of the territory from the Centre d'Interpretació de l'Aviació Republicana i la Guerra Aèria (Santa Margarida i els Monjos), by **Ramon Arnabat**, professor of contemporary history at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili and member of the ISOCAC research group.

The complete programme can be found on the museum's website



Organisation and production: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and Centre d'Aviació Històrica de la Sénia

Artist and curator: Francesc Torres

Direction: Pepe Serra

Technical direction: José Ramón Bellaubí

Designer / Graphic design: Lluís Pera / Lali Almonacid

Project coordination: Lluís Alabern / Pilar Vila

Supervision and technical control: Xavier Abelló

Design and technical direction of hoisting:
S4E, Solutions for Engineering

Dates: From June 18 – September 26, 2021

Ticket price: 2 euros

Space: Oval Hall



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