

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA



I Work the Street

Joan Colom, photographs 1957-2010

Press dossier

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I Work the Street

Joan Colom, photographs 1957-2010



From 12 December 2013 to 25 May 2014

Organization and production: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

Curators: David Balsells and Jorge Ribalta

Ignasi Marroyo, *Portrait of Joan Colom*, c. 1960. © Ignasi Marroyo.
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

El Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya has organised a large retrospective show of the work of photographer Joan Colom. For the first time ever, all his work is on view, with many hitherto unseen photos, while at the same time offering an historic interpretation, analysing his relations with other photographers of his generation, and revealing the working methods of a key artist in 20th-century Spanish photography.

I Work the Street. Joan Colom, photographs 1957-2010 is based on a study of the photographer's archives, which he donated to the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in July of 2012. There are more than 500 images on exhibit, many of them not seen before, in a show uncommon for its size, wealth and diversity. This exposition is new in other ways, since apart from his famous work on Barcelona's red light district, called Barrio Chino with its prostitution –limited to a few years at the start of the 1960s– Joan Colom's work continues to be little known. That famous series of images, which form one of the masterpieces of 20th-century photography, is just a small part of his archive, although it is doubtless the nucleus of his entire work.

I Work the Street. Joan Colom, photographs 1957-2010 takes in all of the artist's photographic work. The oldest images are from 1957 and the most recent from 2010.

Included among the works from his first period, 1957 to 1964, centred on the work from the Barrio Chino, are his first photos, his photo essays about the Born market and the Somorrostro neighbourhood, as well as several others that reveal his unsuccessful attempts to turn professional. The exhibit also reveals his links with other photographers of his generation and his involvement with the El Mussol Group, some of whose members also have works in this show. Likewise, there is a careful reconstruction of Colom's 1961 exhibit at the Sala Aixelà, which was titled *La calle* (The Street).

His later work, carried out over the last three decades and most of it unseen before, and which constitutes three-quarters of his archive, will be one of the great innovations of this show. It also presents for the first time a large sample of his most recent work in colour.

Both the exhibit and the very complete monographic publication that the museum is preparing –which will appear the beginning of the year– make it possible to study Colom in his historical context.

In 1999 the Museu Nacional organised the first monographic show in Spain of Colom's work, consisting of the reconstruction of that 1961 exhibit at the Sala Aixelà, with the 50 original photographs. Now the museum presents the photographer's archive, the full inventory and systematic study of which has only just begun.



Joan Colom. *La calle*, around 1960-1961. Donated by the author. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona © Joan Colom

Joan Colom and the New Vanguarda

Colom belongs to a generation of photographers who renewed the language of photography in Spain in the second half the 1950s. The leading photography critic of this generation, Josep Maria Casademont, called this period –which began in 1957 with an emblematic exhibit by Ricard Terré, Xavier Miserachs and Ramon Masats– the New Vanguard. With his dynamic, random and on-going photography, Colom represented both the high point and the end of that movement.

At the start of the 1960s, Joan Colom began to take photos in the streets of the Barrio Chino in Barcelona. He had been a photography buff and had taken in part in contests for several years, but now he found a way of shooting his surroundings secretly: he didn't look through the viewfinder but half-hid the camera in his hand and shot from below the waist. He took pictures of children playing or wandering through the streets, of curious characters, and little by little got closer to the prostitution scene.

In 1964, as part of its *Palabra e imagen* (Word and Image) collection, the Lumen publishing house released the book *Izas, rabizas y colipoterras*, with text by Camilo José Cela and a selection of photographs of prostitutes taken by Colom. It was a great success, but as a result he gave up photography: one of the women who appears in the book sued the authors and publisher, and the ensuing conflict about taking candid street photos was traumatic for Colom. He did almost no street photography of life in the Ramblas and the Raval neighbourhood until 1990, when he used more and more colour.

The archive

When Colom donated his archive to the Museu Nacional in July of 2012 it was a decisive and relatively unheard of event in the history of photography in Spain.

The Joan Colom archive consists of negatives, contacts and working and finished copies, of which more than 9,000 are on paper and only a small part, perhaps 1,000, are in black-and-white.



Joan Colom. *Paseo Marítimo*, 1964. Donated by the author. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona © Joan Colom

It also includes 7,300 negatives in slide mounts; 2,400 negatives in the same format cut into strips, and 300 contact sheets.

It is rounded out by two large groupings of prints measuring 40 x 50cm; 200 in black-and-white, from both his first period and his later work, and 800 in colour.

Starting in 1990 he organised his archive chronologically and by subject matter.

The Museu Nacional collection includes everything Colom produced, although it should be noted that in recent years, either through direct purchases from the photographer or by way of auctions, his work can now be found in museums such as the MACBA, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, the Fundació Foto Colectania, the Fundació Forvm per a la Fotografia and the Fondo Fotográfico of the University of Navarra.

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Tickets: 6 €

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday from 10 to 18 hours
(Saturday from 15 hours, free);
Sundays and holidays from 10 to 15 hours

Place: Temporary exhibitions room 1

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