

AFAL

PHOTOGRAPHY ASSOCIATION 1956/1963

2 March – 18 June 2006

East Cloister

CENTRO ANDALUZ DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO
Monasterio de Santa María de las Cuevas
Avda. de Américo Vespucio nº 2
Isla de la Cartuja. 41071 - SEVILLA

Access

Avda. de Américo Vespucio no 2
Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

Transport

Buses: C1 and C2

Opening times

1 October - 31 March
Tuesdays to Fridays: 10 - 20 h.
Saturdays: 11 - 20 h.

1 April - 30 September
Tuesdays to Fridays: 10 - 21 h.
Saturdays: 11 - 21 h.

Sundays: 10 - 15 h.

Closed: Mondays
Ticket sale until half an hour before the museum closed

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Joan Colom, Gabriel Cualladó, Paco Gómez, Gonzalo Juanes, Ramón Masats, Oriol Maspons, Xavier Miserachs, Paco Ontañón, Carlos Pérez Siquier, Alberto Schommer, Ricard Terré, Julio Ubiña.

Other participants: *Aguirre, Albero, Artero, Batlles, Barqués, Berengo Gardín, Boada, Brea, Bros, Cantero, Cartier-Bresson, Catalá-Roca, Chumy Chúmez, Cubaró, de la Hoz, Juan Dolcet, Doloy, Esquerdo, Robert Frank, Galí, Giacomelli, Jorba Aulés, Klein, Lechuga, Marroyo, Morilla, Muller, Nader, Navarrete, Obregón, Ortiz Echagüe, Perceval, Pla Janini, Pomés, Roldán Augé, Rubio Camín, Segura, Sender, Smurzs, Steinert, Subirá, Tortelli, Vielba, Vilaseca.*



Easter Week in Murcia, 1959. Julio Ubiña.

Afal was an artistic association of some of the best photographers in Spain during the decade of the 50's. They were an extremely heterogeneous set of people with a variety of aesthetic tendencies. However, it was precisely this lack of homogeneity that enriched their association and made the group the sum of their myriad artistic and expressive initiatives. Afal was not born from a previous manifesto nor was its purpose to create a new aesthetic norm. Despite the evident pluralism and diversity of the members of this group, they were all convinced of the need to breathe new life into the grey and dreary panorama of Spanish photography. The purpose of their work was mainly to bear witness to the reality of the time in which they lived, adapting technical demands to artistic expression (instead of the contrary), and searching for a delicate balance between intention and chance.

Afal regarded photography as an autonomous artistic manifestation with its own set of singularities. This belief was evident in its unique perspective that attracted so many photographers. The members of Afal considered photography to be sovereign, an independent field of creative expression with new possibilities that had never previously been exploited or even imagined by other more traditional art forms.

The members of this group shared a predilection for everyday topics, as well as an aesthetic and ethical commitment to reality, which was in vivid contrast to the exoticism and decorativism, which predominated at the time. They dispensed with pre-established stylistic norms. All of this was accomplished through a serious reflection on the social role of the photographer and the place that photography should occupy in society. Instead of individual shots, they favoured the production of "series" or sequences of photographs, which gave their projects more of a narrative slant. Their expositions and publications were created with a view to a direct and immediate interaction with the public because according to Lara Terré Alonso, organizer of this exposition, this type of photographic series is an eloquent testimony to the authenticity of the personal vision of the author.

Certain critics and historians have described Afal as a group of photographers whose work was a reaction to the more artistic and pictorial photography of the academy, which they referred to as *Salonismo* or photography of the exhibition hall. These photographers were thus characterized as rebels whose historical success lay in the fact that they adopted a model contrary to that of the academy.

Although it is true that if the academy and their official definition of photography had not existed, the creation of Afal as a group would not have been justified, it is not only this opposition to tradition that imbued their work with great creative and artistic force. Indeed, the limited vision of traditional photography (e.g. its old-fashioned pictorial perspective, its rigid formalism, the quality of its technique, and its adaptation to certain topics of acknowledged artistic nobility) was merely an extension of the limits on expression, freedom, and truth, which Franco's dictatorship had placed on all dimensions of culture and society in Spain.

Afal, an acronym that stands for *Agrupación Fotográfica Almeriense* [Photographic Association of Almería], was initially a regional association. However, its members succeeded in creating a project that brought photographers from all over Spain in contact with each other. The objective that it finally accomplished was to give photography in Spain a unique artistic identity and an international projection that it had lacked.

The photographic work of this group evidently clashed with the official vision of culture encouraged by Franco's regime, and was closely connected to the subtle, quiet opposition, which during those years, many Spaniards from quite different backgrounds were clandestinely engaged in.

In Art, Afal had its parallel in the El Paso group. Similarly, its members were also very much in consonance with the methods and ideas of film directors such as Juan Antonio Bardem or Luís García Berlanga.

Afal represented a geographic decentralization that was relatively infrequent in cultural initiatives in post-war Spain. According to Laura Terré, this shows the members' desire for unity, and the "national" nature of a project, which successfully avoided the pitfalls of localism. Thanks to the activities of this group, the province of Almería, formerly a cultural backwater, became a reference point for photography in Spain during the second half of the 20th century.

Between 1956 and 1963 Afal published a journal that surprisingly managed to overcome all economic, political, and cultural impediments, and was even able to transcend local and national boundaries. The journal, funded only by its subscribers and advertisers, was able to remain ideologically independent, and thus became a platform for the rebirth of photography in Spain.

Artero's sound literary judgement gave the Afal journal an attractiveness that went far beyond the photographic images that it published. It also included the poetic and literary texts of many well-known writers, who at the time had just begun their literary careers, such as Manuel Alcántara, Antonio Castro Villacañas, and Antonio Alemán Sainz, among others. The journal also published classic literature of the *Generación del 98* (the Machado brothers, Unamuno, Valle Inclán, and Azorín) and the *Generación del 27* (García Lorca), whose work had difficulty in getting past government censorship.

The Afal journal also had an important section on cinema that attracted many readers. Evidence of its high quality and interest are the articles of Ricardo Muñoz Suay, Joaquín de Prada, José María Berzosa and Manuel Michel.

Besides its journal, Afal also organized activities to sponsor and promote the work of its photographers as well as to present the work of photographers from other countries. Its members were invited to participate as representatives of Spanish photography in important international events such as the *Salon Photographique de Charleroi* (Belgium) and the *II Bienal de Fotografia de Pescara* (Italy). Furthermore, Afal was in close contact with the Parisian photography club *Les 30 x 40*, whose photographers gave a joint exposition with Afal in the library of the Spanish embassy in Paris. This exposition was later shown throughout Eastern Europe, and subsequently in Italy.

The central part of the present Afal exposition is the reproduction of the collective expositions of the group. This exposition thus consists of a selection of the work done by group members, such as Joan Colom, Gabriel Cualladó, Francisco Gómez, Gonzalo Juanes, Ramón Masats, Oriol Maspons, Xavier Miserachs, Francisco Ontañón, Carlos Pérez Siquier, Alberto Schommer, Ricard Terré, and Julio Ubiña. Along with their photographs, copies of the Afal journal and its 1958 yearbook can be viewed as well.

The exposition *AFAL Photography Association 1956/1963* also shows the work of many photographers who were in contact with the Afal group at that time. Many of them are still relatively unknown to the general public, at least in their facet as photographers. They include Jesús Aguirre, José María Albero, Ramón Barqués, Antoni Boada, Francisco Brea, José Bros, Leonardo Cantero, Frances Catalá-Roca, Chumy Chúmez, Joan Cubaró, Juan Dolcet, Álvaro Esquerdo, Valentín Galí, Ignaci Marroyo, Manuel Morilla, Alberto Sabadell, José Segura Gavilá, Jorba Aulés, Joaquín Pla Janini, Leopoldo Pomés, Daniel Roldán Augé, Joaquín Rubio Camín, Pere Sender Terés, Gerardo Vielba and Jordi Vilaseca.

Another part of the exhibition is the artistic production of well-known professionals such as Basabe, Ramón Batlles, Isidro Cortina, Henecé, Ángel de la Hoz, Nuño, José Pastor, and Josep Maria Subirá. This includes their publications or the original work itself.

The exposition also aims at contrasting the work of the Afal photographers with those photographers from other countries with whom they were in contact, or whom they simply regarded as referents (i.e. Gianni Berengo Gardin, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Roger Doloy, Robert Frank, Mario Giacomelli, William Klein, Otto Steinert, Renzo Tortelli, as well as the Spanish photographer, José Ortiz Echagüe). Also important is the exposition of *La Ventana*, a Mexican group who had been presented by Afal in 1959.

The presentation of all of this work is contextualized, thanks to the use of various materials and documents (journals, reports, newspapers, etc.) as well as theoretical texts written by Afal photographers and by critics such as Josep Maria Casademont, who helped to shape and characterize the emerging tendencies of photography in Spain.



Untitled, 1954. Leopoldo Pomés.