

# Josep Renau 1907-1982

## Commitment and Culture

22 April - 22 June 08

An extensive catalogue of the exhibition has been published including articles by renowned specialists in the life and work of Josep Renau.

### Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

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#### Timetable

1 October - 31 March  
Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 20 h.  
Saturday: 11 - 20 h.

1 April - 31 September  
Tuesday to Friday: 10 - 21 h.  
Saturday: 11 - 21 h.

Sunday: 10 - 15 h.  
Closed on Monday  
Holidays: Consult with Centre

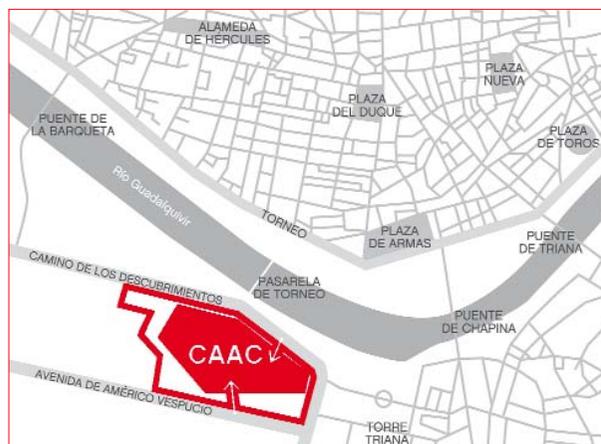
#### Access

Avda. Américo Vespucio nº2  
Camino de los Descubrimientos s/n

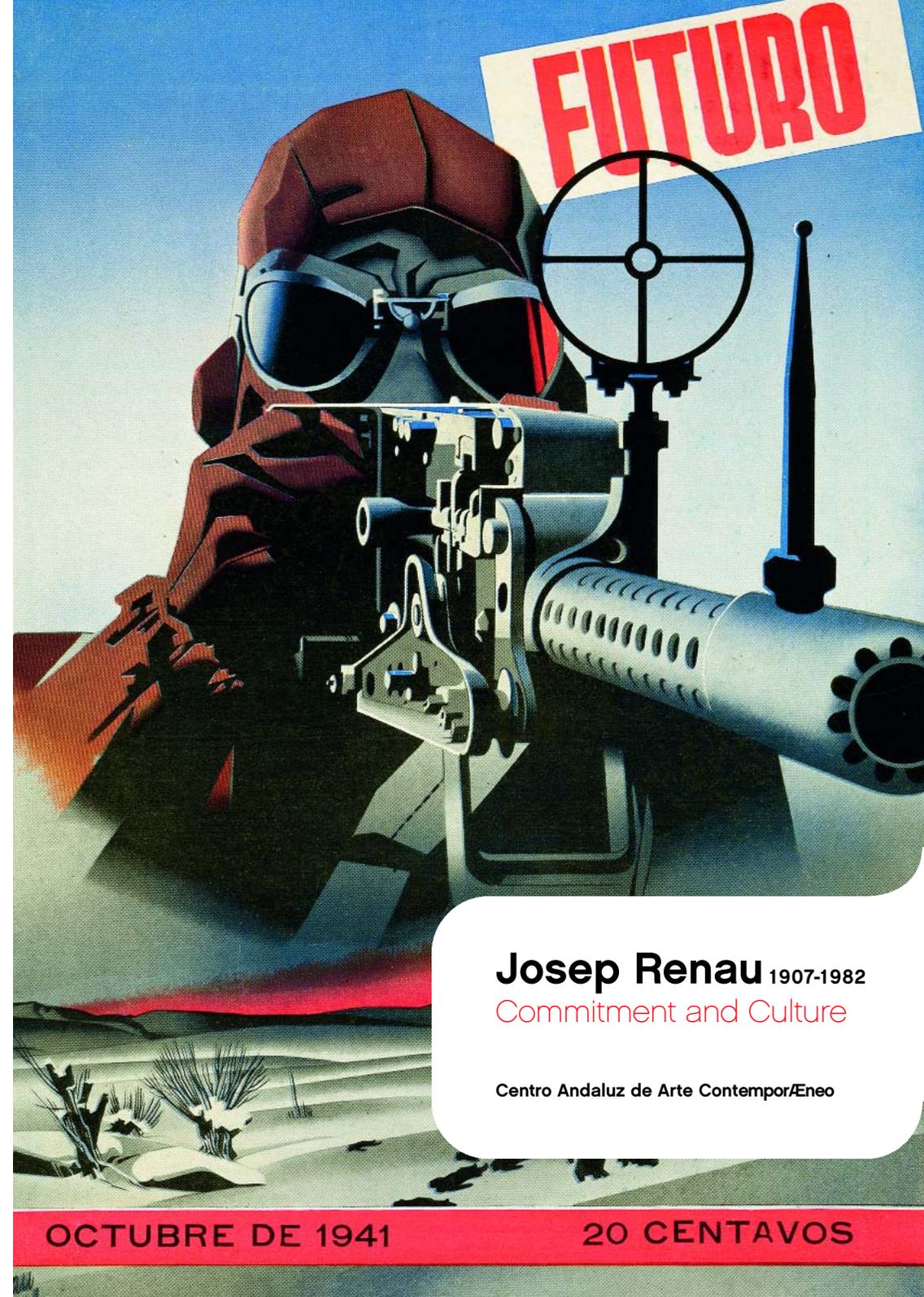
**Transport**  
C1 and C2 buses

**Tickets sales until 30 minutes before closing**

**Library**  
Monday to Friday (except holidays): 9 - 14 h.



Front Cover: Cover page of the Futuro magazine, 1941, 31 x 22,5 cm print



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Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

OCTUBRE DE 1941

20 CENTAVOS

## Josep Renau 1907-1982

### Commitment and Culture

Josep Renau is a key figure in the contemporary history of Spanish culture, both for his contributions to the fields of graphic design, posters and mural painting, and also his role as a political and intellectual agitator. The present exhibition brings together over two hundred works by this prolific, versatile artist (drawings, sketches for murals, paintings, photomontages, posters and graphic illustrations), who invariably saw artistic production as an instrument at the service of social transformation ("*I'm not a Communist painter, just a Communist that paints,*" he once said).

His lifelong intellectual commitment to socialist ideals not only shaped the content of his artistic work, but also led him to undertake direct political responsibilities in a critical historic context. During the Civil War he was appointed Director General for Fine Arts by the Republican government, and it was he who commissioned Picasso to create a painting for the Spanish Pavilion at the International Exhibition of 1937 in Paris (the painter from Malaga made *Guernica*), and he was also responsible for organising the transport of some of the Prado Museum's collection to safety from National bombing raids.

This exhibition is arranged in four main sections - *Times of the Republic: Between Learning and Commitment (1926-1936)*; *Spain at War (1936-1939)*; *Crossing the Ocean: Exile in Mexico (1939-1958)*; and *Images Beyond the Wall: In the German Democratic Republic (1958-1982)*, which offer a chronological record of the work of Renau (Valencia 1907 - Berlin, 1982). On a stylistic level, this work took its inspiration from a variety of sources (Dadaism, the neo-objectivist sensibility of the interwar years, Mexican mural painting, cold-war realist constructivism, advertising design, etc.) and was able to evolve in tune with the spirit of its time.

His first works date from the mid-1920s, when Renau began to make posters and covers for books and magazines that linked with the predominant trend of art déco in graphic design of the period. For these pieces he used the pseudonym Renau Berger, under which he showed for the first time in Madrid in December 1928. He later made his first political photomontages and began to collaborate on several left-wing cultural and ideological platforms. He joined the Communist Party in 1931 - remaining a member until his death - and the following year founded the Union of Proletarian Writers and Artists.

During the years of the Second Republic, he was active as graphic designer and editor in several left-wing publications and, from January 1935 to July 1936, was head of the *Nueva Cultura* review in Valencia, which, according to Manuel Aznar Soler, attempted to organise a sort of "Popular Front of Spanish culture". During this same period, Renau designed four covers for the *Anthology of Conjugal Happiness*, as well as numerous film and advertising posters, including the one he made for *Las Arenas spa*, for which he pioneered the use of the aerograph in Spain and combined art déco with formal elements taken from Russian constructivism.

During the Civil War, Josep Renau tirelessly carried out *agit prop* work in defence of the Spanish Republic, making countless propaganda posters and photomontages, encouraging intense public debates on the meaning of art and the role of the artist in times of crisis, and successively taking on the "political" posts of co-editor of *La Verdad* newspaper, Director General of Fine Arts, and Director of the Graphic Propaganda Office of the General Commissariat of the Army Joint Chiefs of Staff.



The Mexican Revolution Acclaims the Resumption of Relations with the USSR, 1942, 33 x 45.2 cm print

After Franco's victory, Josep Renau took up residence in Mexico, where he began a productive career as mural artist, as well as earning his living at different jobs as illustrator or graphic designer and collaborating on several Spanish exile publications. His most outstanding mural work of this period is *Spain towards America*, a great frieze over four metres high and thirty metres long on which essential

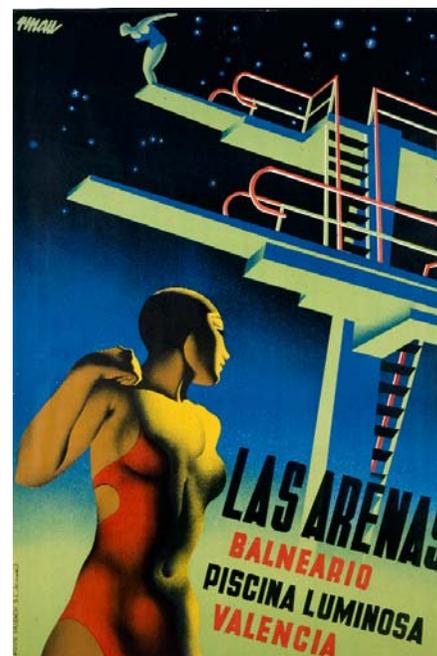


Poster for the film *A Modern Bluebeard*, 1946, 97 x 70.5 cm print

landmarks in the history of Spain are represented allegorically.

It was also in Mexico where he began the *American Way of Life* series; his most ambitious project, beginning with the avant-garde tradition of photomontage and collage and moving on to the artistic strategy of making use of the language of advertising and mass media, in much the way pop art was to do in the 1950s and 1960s. However, Jaime Brihuega -curator of the present exhibition- maintains that, unlike pop art, Renau's aim was always clearly "*to attack the very heart of the ideological, economic and political context out of which the mass media universe was arising.*"

In 1958, Renau left Mexico to live in East Berlin, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. His years there were of intense intellectual and creative activity, including the creation of murals in several cities of the German Democratic Republic, significant publishing and academic work, directing several animated films for television and designing numerous photomontages and posters, such as the series *On Germany*.



Las Arenas, 1932, 100 x 70 cm aerograph