

Picasso Series

Photographs by Joaquim Gomis

Curator: Martina Millà

In partnership with the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya

From 19 September 2023 to 4 February 2024

Foyer and restaurant of the Fundació Joan Miró

Press release

The Fundació Joan Miró presents the photography exhibition *Picasso Series*

Barcelona, 19 September 2023. *Picasso Series* is an exhibition of photographs that came into being thanks to the re-examination of an album of the same title by Joaquim Gomis (1902–1991), and it is being held in the same year as the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973).

The exhibition aims to ascertain whether it was Gomis's intention to produce a *fotoscop* (photobook) of Picasso's Barcelona. Gomis, an amateur photographer and the first president of the Fundació Joan Miró, began to publish *fotoscops* in 1952 and continued to do so over the following twenty years with the support of his friend Joan Prats (1891–1970). His photobooks cover a wide range of themes and, at the time they were published, were an innovation in publishing and widely appreciated in the Barcelona scene.

The Gomis Fonds, held in the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, contains the photographic material on which these publications were based, as well as portfolios with projects for *fotoscops* that were never released. Among them is a collection of photographs taken towards the end of August in 1968 known as the 'Picasso Album' or the 'Picasso Series' that documents a stroll Gomis took through the streets of the Ribera neighbourhood where Picasso lived, studied, worked and socialised.

Picasso arrived in Barcelona with his parents in 1895 and lived in the city during his teenage years and early adulthood, a time that coincided with the new major urban developments around Ciutat Vella. One of these was Ciutadella Park, planned and designed to host the 1888 World's Fair and an urban project full of ambition to

modernise the city. But Picasso also lived through times of crisis, the Spanish-American War followed by Spain's loss of its empire in 1898.



Joaquim Gomis. Arcade of Casa Xifré, in Barcelona. 1968
Joaquim Gomis Fonds, on long-term loan to the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya.
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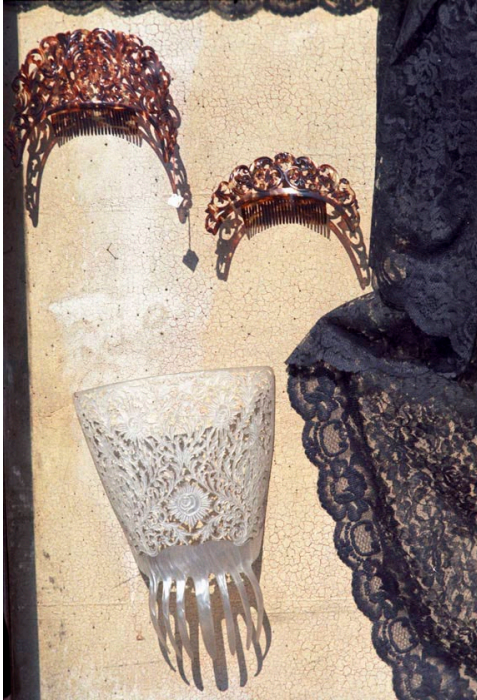
During his walk, Gomis photographed places such as the Pla de Palau square, the Llotja de Mar and Porxos d'en Xifré buildings, the Fossar de les Moreres, a memorial square built on a former cemetery, and Carrer d'Avinyó. He also took shots of illustrations of works by Picasso and postcards of the Barcelona frequented by the artist. A good example of this is the menu at Els Quatre Gats beerhall-cum-restaurant, which Gomis juxtaposes with a bibelot that appears to be looking at the menu and an AGFA photographic film box. These elements create a still life in which the support of the photograph and the depiction of the photographed items co-exist in a single image that even includes an avatar of the observer, an alter ego of Gomis himself.

It should come as no surprise that Gomis's walk through Picasso's Barcelona in August 1968 coincided with a key year in the history of the Museu Picasso on Carrer Montcada and with the start of the architectural project for the CEAC (Centre for Contemporary Art Studies), which Gomis led with Joan Miró, Josep Lluís Sert and Joan Prats.

In the summer of 1968, a year of protests and upheaval, Gomis visited streets we associate with the artist who painted *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). In view of the material that resulted from Gomis's walk, it seems evident that he embarked on his route with a very clear goal. All the signs are that he followed a list of iconic places connected with Picasso's stay in the city. Using the same *modus operandi* of his published photobooks, the **Picasso Series** thus grew into an exhaustive reportage on streets, façades and interior and exterior spaces of buildings in which Gomis alternated overviews with photos of details.

However, the Gomis Fonds contains photographs from other years when he also took pictures of places in Barcelona that Picasso frequented. We find snapshots from the Gomis family album, from the early twentieth century and others from the forties, taken by Joaquim Gomis himself. In the postwar photographs, it seems as if time had stood

still in Barcelona since the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. In fact, we find in the Gomis Fonds scenes which, due to the harshness of the living conditions depicted, call to mind themes from Picasso's Blue Period, which coincided with his final years in Barcelona and his transition towards life in Paris. A photograph of the empty tracks at Estació del Nord railway station suggests the journeys made by local artists to Madrid and Paris, both meccas of art in the first half of the twentieth century, and at the same time it points to a desolate emotional landscape suspended in time.



Joaquim Gomis. Combs and mantilla in a shop on La Rambla. 1969. Joaquim Gomis Fonds, on long-term loan to the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya.
© Joaquim Gomis Estate – Fundació Joan Miró, 2023

Also dating from the forties is a photograph of Carrer Petritxol, the street on which the Sala Parés is located, the gallery where Picasso showed work for the first time in 1901. Shown in the photo is a huge pair of pince-nez spectacles, an advertisement for an optician's shop and an instant reminder of the pince-nez worn by Jaume Sabartés, Picasso's secretary. This surprising visual coincidence makes us wonder how much Gomis must have been aware of it.

The oldest photos in the Gomis Fonds that echo this theme of Picasso, however, date from the opening decades of the twentieth century and belong to the Gomis family albums. These contain photos from 1907, the year Picasso painted *Les Femmes d'Alger*, the years of the First World War and even 1917, an extremely important year for avant-garde art in Barcelona, with the première of *Parade* at the Liceu, performed by the Ballets Russes, attended by both Picasso and Miró.

Among the photos Gomis took in the Foneria Gimeno, when Miró was working there to cast some of his first assemblages in bronze, we also find pictures of the foundry's stores, with a model of Picasso's head sculpted by Pablo Gargallo in 1913 tucked away in a corner alongside the bust of a long-forgotten nineteenth-century dignitary.

Lastly, the exhibition includes a photograph taken in 1969 of the window display of an old shop that sold combs and mantillas, also frozen in time, which calls to mind Picasso's many portraits of women in mantillas and in particular his *Woman with Mantilla*, painted in 1917, the year of his brief return to Barcelona.

The exhibition is on display in the Fundació Joan Miró's foyer and restaurant, where there are other photographs from those years connected with food and drink, all of them related to Picasso's Barcelona.

Joaquim Gomis i Serdañons (Barcelona, 1902-1991), a businessman, patron of the arts, collector and the president of the Fundació Joan Miró between 1972 and 1975, was one of the first Catalan photographers to employ a modern language. Over a period of more than five decades, he produced an extensive, meticulous body of photographic work that was linked to the most advanced artistic approaches of his day. He was a founding member of ADLAN (Friends of New Art, 1932-1936) and of Club 49 (1949-1971), two of the groups that did the most to raise awareness of avant-garde art in Catalonia between 1930 and 1970. His photographic fonds is valuable testimony of the life, work, landscapes and creative processes of Joan Miró, with whom Gomis was close friends.

The collections of photographs by Joaquim Gomis are today held in the Gomis Fonds at the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya and the rights pertaining to them – 70,000 photographs with complementary documentation (letters, press clippings, books and catalogues) – are managed by the Fundació Joan Miró. Following an accord with the Joaquim Gomis Estate and the Government of Catalonia, the foundation has been responsible for managing the Gomis Archive, as well as disseminating the fonds and encouraging the study of his work. To this end, work by Gomis had been displayed since 2012 on a temporary basis in the foundation's foyer, alternating with exhibitions of work by other creators who have engaged in amateur photography.

Images available at: bit.ly/SeriePicassoGomis

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