



# Photographic legacy

**Martí Gasull Coral  
and Martí Gasull Avellán**

*“Dedicated to Pilar, Bernat  
and specially Martí, who would be very happy  
to watch this exhibition.”*

Martí Gasull Avellán



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**COVER**

Martí Gasull Coral

*Peace gate*

Barcelona, end of 1940s

**BACK COVER**

Martí Gasull Avellán

*Antoni Tàpies*

1995

**TITLE PAGE**

Martí Gasull Coral

*Sunday stroll*

Barcelona harbor, 1950s



## **PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY**

**MARTÍ GASULL CORAL  
AND MARTÍ GASULL AVELLÁN**

MUSEU DE MONTSERRAT  
MAY 12 - SEPTEMBER 11, 2016



## Two very different photographers, **linked** by time

Photographs by two creators who have the gift to immediately perceive the depth that we, caught up in our daily affairs, are unable to observe. That is an ability only the most creative photographers have—to find artistic content in any situation, even the most unforeseen situations. In their works, Martí Gasull Coral and Martí Gasull Avellán also show us how art has changed over time, from one generation to the next. From the years preceding the Civil War, when avant guard artists were hopeful that art and the world were about to evolve, to the problematic modernity that was shaped amidst the social and artistic difficulties caused by the dictatorship and subsequent democratic recovery. It is worth remembering that, when taking a picture, photographers stop time itself, in an even more evident way that in any other art form.

What exactly do photography creators achieve with their work, which may seem easy but is in fact far from it? They unveil to us, unexpectedly, that which we thought we already knew. Photography emphasises a fact that is not always as recognisable in paintings or sculptures: the fact that the photograph uses reality to shape a different one, even if it may appear to be the same one. Works of art, in every form, are new events that open doors to unknown spaces.

What have Gasull father and Gasull son got in common? In my opinion, they both base their work on the world we deem as real, which is their starting point. But while the works of the one revolve around the city, its spaces, its inhabitants and its objects, the works



Martí Gasull Coral, 1958.

of the other focus on portraits instead. Gasull Coral, inspired by the avant guard photographers that brought about a fresh new outlook on photography, sought the plays of light and shadows in streets, open spaces under autumn skies or the smoke of a locomotive, catching the simplest of realities by surprise: a specific angle of a house, a street lamp, modest settings or children looking at the camera. Beings, things, situations which, unexpectedly, turn into something else in the mind of the observer.

Martí Gasull Avellán's portraits weren't taken in particularly different places, nor do they correspond to characters from any field. He specifically portrayed painters, sculptors and other plastic artists, poets and politicians. Because of the fact that these are well-known characters, they initially feel more realistic. The photographer, nonetheless, found the way to add depth to the outlook on each character, adding the elements of surprise and creativity in the way he captured each subject's most characteristic and unique traits. These photographs are a sample of Catalan art covering a long period of time: from the first generation of the artistic renewal after the Civil War, such as painters Josep Guinovart and Joan Hernández Pijuan, to the next generations, such as Sergi Aguilar, Riera i Aragó or Madola. Alongside said painters and sculptors, there is the art historian Daniel Giralt-Miracle, musicians Xavier Benguerel and Mestres Quadreny, poets J. V. Foix and Joan Brossa, and foreign artists Kounelis and Christo.

This exhibition, which covers two very different periods, brings to light the contrasting marks that each historical period made in the collections of the artists, Martí Gasull Coral and Martí Gasull Avellán. It also emphasises, thanks to the quality of their works, the permanent quality of art and its value as a tool to discover the world, as well as ourselves.

**J. Corredor-Matheos, art critic**

## The **essence of art** in a photograph

**Turning a photograph into a work of art or capturing the imprint of both art and artist in the same picture: that is the essence of this exhibition. Martí Gasull Coral and Martí Gasull Avellán do not blindly chase moments to capture: they wait and seek out the perfect light, frame and movement. And if it is not there, they create it, they provoke it. When they press the shutter, they do so very deliberately, based on the image they've already conjured up in their mind.**

## Martí Gasull Coral (Barcelona, 1919-1994)

As a child, when I visited my grandparents, I was always impressed by the magnificent display cabinet full of trophies and medals bearing the names of endless photography contests. Yet I'd hardly ever seen my grandfather taking a picture. In the 1920s, my great-grandfather, Manel, brought a camera home. His son was soon seduced by the device. A coincidence turned it into a fixation and a profession: a small transcription error when joining the ranks of the army during the Civil War. Where it was supposed to say "accountant and stenographer"—the latter being a skill he carried out at lightning speed—, it said "accountant and photographer". He ended up working for the documentation centre of the Republic at the Castle of Salamús. After his exile in

Argelers (Roussillon) and a long military service in Tangier and the Canary Islands—under the new regime—, he returned to Barcelona to establish himself as a photographer. It was post-war Spain. As a member of the Agrupació fotogràfica de Catalunya (Catalan Photography Association), which he had joined in 1945, he began to create and make art. In the morning, before work, particularly during the last two weeks of October, when the light is quite unique, he would go exploring, with his camera, seeking moments and atmospheres to capture. Later he would go to work as an accountant for the Col·legi de l'Art Major de la Seda (an institution that preserves the heritage of the silk industry) in the Gremi de Velers (Silkmakers' Guild) building. He spent his afternoons in a shared studio on Portal de l'Àngel, where he took portraits and worked as an industrial photographer. In the evenings he would lock himself inside the photo lab that he'd set up in his house—among trays, fixers, emulsions and papers—and shape and soften the pictures he'd taken that morning. It didn't take very long for him to stand out as a creative photographer and build a solid reputation as a laboratory technician. Not only did he develop his own pictures, but also those of other prominent photographers of the time, such as Maspons, Ubiña or Masdú. He was one of the first photographers in Barcelona to develop colour photographs. He did so until 1959. Then, suddenly, he stepped away from that world of creative images and contests. A new project took up all of his time: the creation of an occupational workshop—a pioneering concept at that time—for people with mental disabilities, which he created for one of his sons.

Besides contests and a small sample in a collective exhibition held at the Sala Pícolabis in Barcelona in 1987, my grandfather's works—those of a playful master of light and captured moments—weren't truly rediscovered until recently: an exhibition was held in 2015 at the El Quadern Robat art gallery, followed by this one. Nearly all the photographs that make up the exhibition are originals that he developed himself during the 1940s and 1950s, on baryta paper, emulsified using silver salts and later placed on poster board. Some of them were rediscovered recently in his son Martí's storage room. A shadow, an object, playful uses of sizes and positions, a subtle detail or a clever portrait show that photography can be a form of poetry. As Jordi Solà recently stated in the cultural magazine *Núvol*, referring to the exhibition held in 2015, "discovering the works of a master photographer isn't something that happens every day. This is either a small miracle or the correcting of an injustice". We're still in time to undo the injustice.

## Martí Gasull Avellán (Barcelona, 1944)

My father's laboratory was a dark world governed by strict rules, persistent smells, jerry cans, liquids and boxes of all sizes. Next to a clear, well-lit room, heavy masses of paperwork and short-term guests: paintings, sculptures... art. By the age of four, he already frequented his father's dark room; by the time he was eight he owned his first Kodak; at age ten he tagged behind

his father for creative photography weekends and at age 12 he developed his own photographs. He got his first real camera, a Voigtländer Prominent, at the age of fourteen. One year later he was already involved in photo-journalism and industrial photography. It wasn't until the 70s that he delved into the world of photography specialised in art (of all kinds): sculpture, painting, architecture, museum exhibits... from printed incunabula to large-format works.



**Self-portrait**

Martí Gasull Avellán, 1994.

Turning photography into an art means grasping both the gaze of an observer and the essence of the artist. It involves capturing, in a photograph, what art communicates and observers perceive through their senses and interpret in their mind. Just as sculptors create their art as a whole, photographers must delve into the artist's thoughts, discover their intention and spirit and capture the light, the volumes... That's what my father did —skilfully—, for every artist. Over the years he participated in more than 1,000 books and catalogues for artists, museums, collections, institutions —both public and private— and publications intended for the general public.

The approximately 40 pictures on exhibition were taken between the 1970s and 2014. They belong to the bulk of more than 4,000 negatives that he gave MACBA for safekeeping when he retired. They all portray artists that my father dealt with, knew or even befriended. As he tends to say, they are "The result of the vice of photography". Some of them were caused by unforeseen events: "Once day Guinovart called me and said: 'Martí, I'm in Barcelona and someone has asked me for a photograph. Can I drop by your studio so you can take a quick picture of me?' Sure, I said. We spent three hours experimenting with different pictures". Beyond the gesture and spirit of each artist, the pictures reveal a subtle admiration, friendship and mutual affection, even more so in the case of Perejaume, Brossa, Tàpies, Subirachs, Guinovart, Plensa, Riera i Aragó, Borrell, Vaquero, Capdevila, Giralt-Miracle, Hernández Pijuan, Ràfols-Casamada, Esther Boix, etc. Most of them were taken using a Hasselblad, but for others he used a Nikon or a Linhof 9x12 allowing them to be blown up based on a digital print. Here, today, for just a moment, let's look beyond the picture and perceive its creator's hidden gesture: the artist that dwells inside the photographer.

**Bernat Gasull Roig**



Martí Gasull Coral

***Umbrella for two***

Barcelona, 1950s

Developed in that time, baryta paper





Martí Gasull Coral

*Broken lines*

1950s

Developed in that time, baryta paper

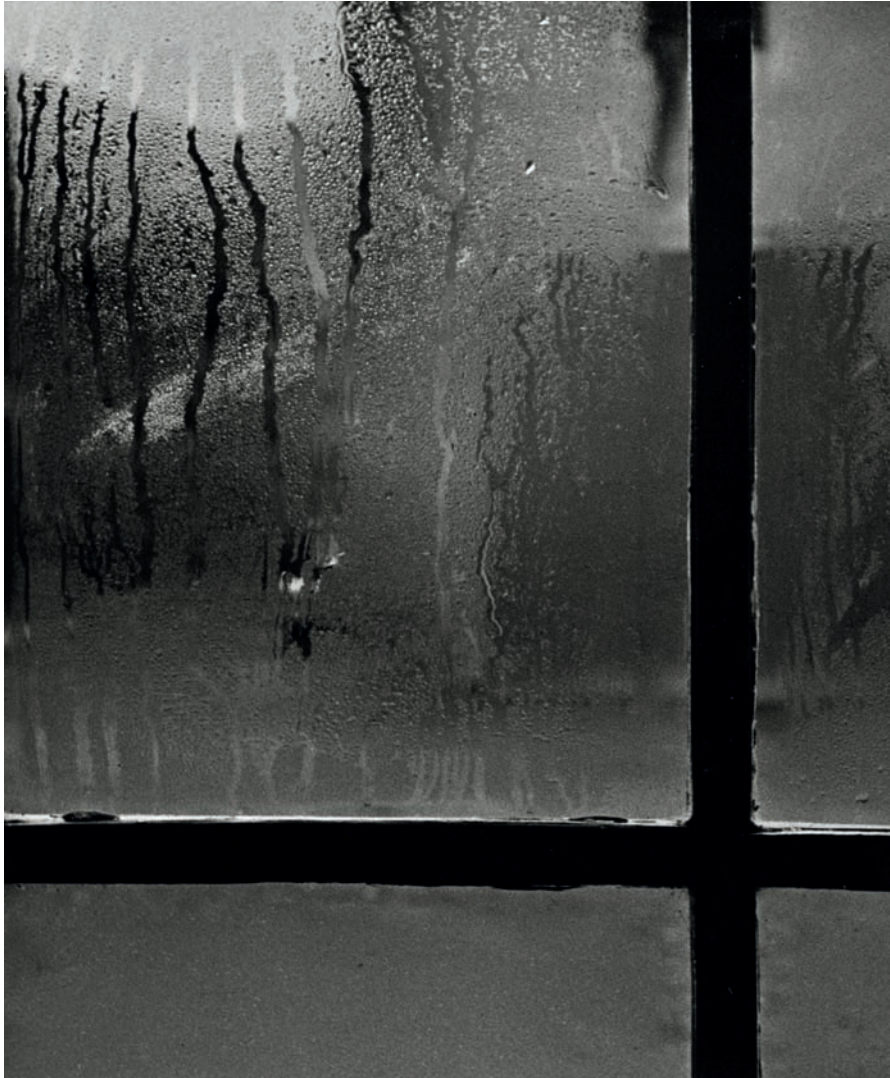


**Martí Gasull Coral**

***Conceptual***

1950s

Developed in that time, baryta paper



Martí Gasull Coral

**Winter tears**

Montesquiu, 1950s

Developed in that time, baryta paper



**Marti Gasull Coral**

***Phantasmagoric, essay on aberration***

1950s

Developed in that time, baryta paper



**Martí Gasull Coral**

***Anxiety***

Montesquiu, 1952

Developed in that time, baryta paper



**Martí Gasull Coral**

***Sympathy***

1950

Developed in that time, baryta paper



**Martí Gasull Coral**

***Transparency in Aiguablava***

Aiguablava, Begur, 1955

Developed in that time, baryta paper



Martí Gasull Coral

*Peace gate*

Barcelona, end of 1940s





Martí Gasull Avellán

*Joan Brossa*

1996



**Martí Gasull Avellán**

***José Corredor-Matheos***

1989



**Martí Gasull Avellán**

***Maria Girona***

1988



**Martí Gasull Avellán**

**Josep Guinovart**

1983



Martí Gasull Avellán

*Joan Hernández Pijuan*

1982



**Martí Gasull Avellán**

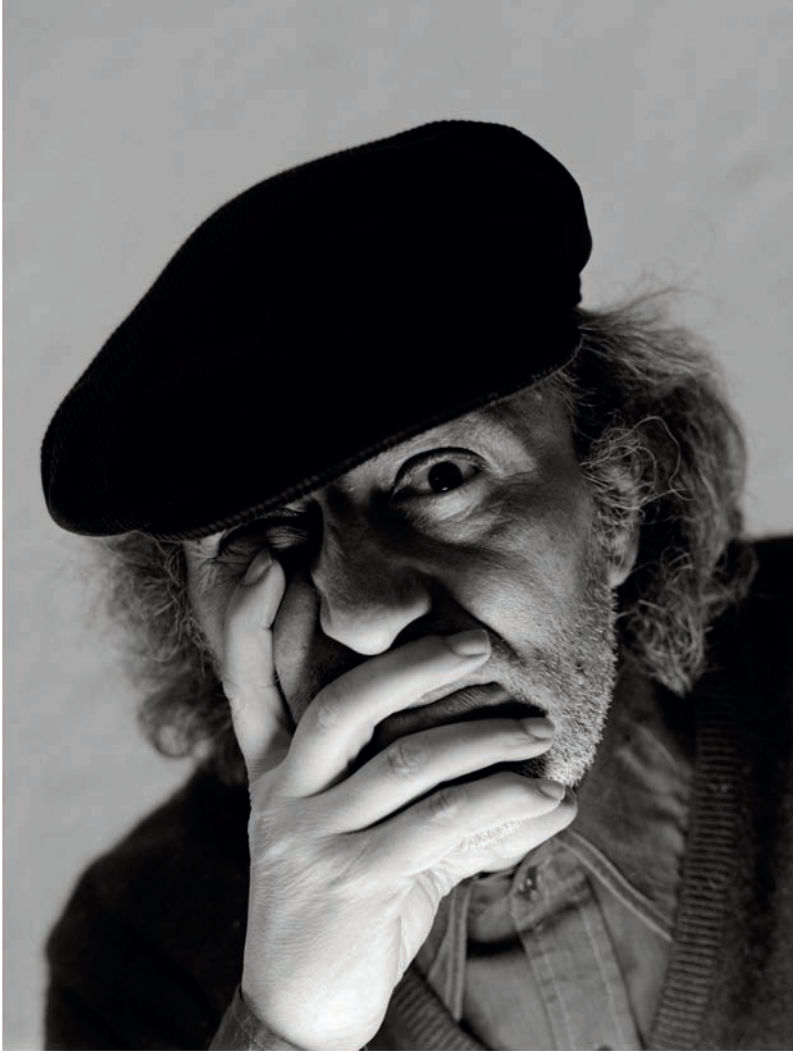
***Joan Miró i Francesc Català-Roca***  
1976



Martí Gasull Avellán

*Jaume Plensa*

2011



Martí Gasull Avellán

*Joan Ponç*

1977





Martí Gasull Avellán

*Albert Ràfols-Casamada*

2002



**Martí Gasull Avellán**

***Antoni Tàpies***

1995

## **Martí Gasull Coral**

Born in Barcelona on 30 May 1919. He studied in the Catalan public school system of the Generalitat from 1931 to 1937 and soon developed an interest in photography. In 1945 he joined the Col·legi de l'Art Major de la Seda, a fine arts college, as an accountant. A member of Agrupació Fotogràfica de Catalunya, a Catalan photography society, he entered a number of photography competitions, while at the same time he opened a photography studio with a partner in a flat in Barcelona's Portal de l'Àngel avenue. At first he worked mainly on producing portraits, and began taking photographs for catalogues at the same time. He set up a small laboratory and studio at his home, where he would work in the evenings and into the night, making prints for other photographers and developing slides for shops such as Casa Arpi, among others. In 1959 he stopped taking part in competitions in order to care for his disabled youngest son full-time, setting up with other families the Taller Sant Jordi, an association to help care for these children. With the help of his eldest son, he continued to work as a professional photographer until 1964, when he started to dedicated more of his time to accountancy as his son worked in creative photography full-time. In the ten years he was most active as a creative photographer, Gasull Coral won more than 150 awards, including First Prize in the Salon-Competition of the Barcelona Engineering School (1951) and Second Prize in the Nector Christmas Awards. He died on 26 February 1994.

## **Martí Gasull Avellán**

Born in Barcelona on 4 April 1944. In 1949 he entered La Salle Comtal, where he studied primary education, a course on trade and five courses of business studies. He was in contact with photography from a very early age through his father, spending time in the laboratory where he assisted in industrial photography work, and above all learning techniques for developing colour film and slides (*ektachrome*) and interpreting light. From 1960, he focussed on social reportage, working in collaboration with several others and his partner, Esteve Llanes. He would later turn to producing high quality work for the industrial and advertising sectors. He discovered the world of art in the 1970s and was deeply impressed by the creativity he found there. He assumed the challenge of interpreting the work of artists, adapting photographic techniques and skills to reflect the arts of different periods, learning from other photographers of the time such as Català-Roca and Ramon Calvet and especially the artists themselves: Tàpies, Subirachs, Guinovart, Aguilar, Plensa, Riera i Aragó, Brossa and many others. This led to him taking hundreds of thousands of photos, nearly all using large format cameras, mainly of works of art, which were published in countless books and catalogues. With the new millennium, Gasull Avellán switched to digital photography, maintaining the collaborations developed over the last 22 years.

