



***TOUCHING COLOR***  
***THE RENEWAL OF PASTEL***

**Fundación MAPFRE Casa Garriga Nogués**

**October 3rd 2019 to January 5th 2020**


# Fundación **MAPFRE**

**Dates:** October 3rd 2019 to January 5th 2020

**Location:** Sala Fundación MAPFRE Casa Garriga Nogués (Carrer de la Diputació, 250)

**Curator:** Philippe Saunier, museum curator.

**Production:** Fundación MAPFRE

 <http://exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/tocarelcolor>

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Cover image:

Edgar Degas

*Chevaux de courses dans un paysage*, 1894

[Racehorses in a Landscape]

Pastel on paper

Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, on loan at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

CTB.1981.11

## INTRODUCTION

The history of art is not only the narrative of the visual propositions put forth by artists and movements but also the study of the techniques and materials used. This exhibition is centered on one of them: the pastel, a technique that has traditionally been considered superior to drawing but inferior to painting. The exhibition invites viewers to reflect on the position held by this art form within our collective consciousness and to enjoy an approximation into its profound history.

*Touching Color. The Renewal of Pastel* delves into the history of the resurgence of pastel from the decade of 1830 onward - when the term “pastelist” or pastel artist appeared - until the many evolutions it took on during the 20th century. Although pastel as a technique experienced great growth during the 18th century, to the point of becoming an art form in full right, it never managed to fully ascertain its legitimacy versus oil painting, considered as the top discipline. Its intrinsic fragility, its typecasting within the genre of portraiture (at the time much less valued than the representation of great historic events or religious motifs), and its appropriation by part of numerous women artists denied pastel the right to become part of the realm of “grand” paintings. Simultaneously, the frequent use of pastel for drafting often generated confusion placing this art form among the graphic arts. For all these reasons, it is not until the 19th century when pastel, as an art form, begins to slowly regain its autonomy versus painting, consequently reaching its zenith. *Touching Color. The Renewal of Pastel* marks this very moment of renaissance for the technique as the starting point of its discourse focusing on works that justify calling their authors “pastel artists.”

Creators such as Eugène Boudin, Odilon Redon or Edgar Degas, are amongst those who utilize this technique and manage to grant it an innovative status; a new position that is maintained throughout the early 20th century and which applies to a rupture of artistic languages that would give way to the following generation that included artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, María Blanchard or Theo van Doesburg, among others.

The exhibition, produced by Fundación MAPFRE, has been made possible by the support of over seventy lenders who have generously collaborated towards it. Among them: Musée National Picasso (Paris); Musée des Beaux-Arts Jules Chéret (Nice); Centre Pompidou (Paris); Musée des Arts Décoratifs et du Design (Bordeaux); Tate Gallery (London); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid); Kröller-Müller Museum (Otterlo); High Museum of Art (Atlanta); Whitney Museum of American Art (New York); Narodni Muzej [National Museum] (Belgrade); The Israel Museum (Jerusalem), among others. Also, Fundación MAPFRE would like to acknowledge the generous and essential disposition of private collectors who have agreed to loan works of extraordinary quality to the show, some of which will be exhibited for the first time in our country.

## THE EXHIBITION

The Exhibition includes 96 works by 68 artists and is articulated in ten sections focusing on the history of the resurgence of pastel from an international perspective. The show aims to highlight the period's main episodes and most relevant figures, those who allowed pastel to claim its place as an art form in its own right.

### THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AS A MIRROR

When reviewing pastel art during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one finds somewhat of a trend: allusions to the 18<sup>th</sup> century become a true narrative discourse. This can be observed in an artist as late as Jean Héliou (1904 – 1987), whose pastel self-portrait makes a specific reference to a renowned self-portrait by another pastel artist precisely from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779).



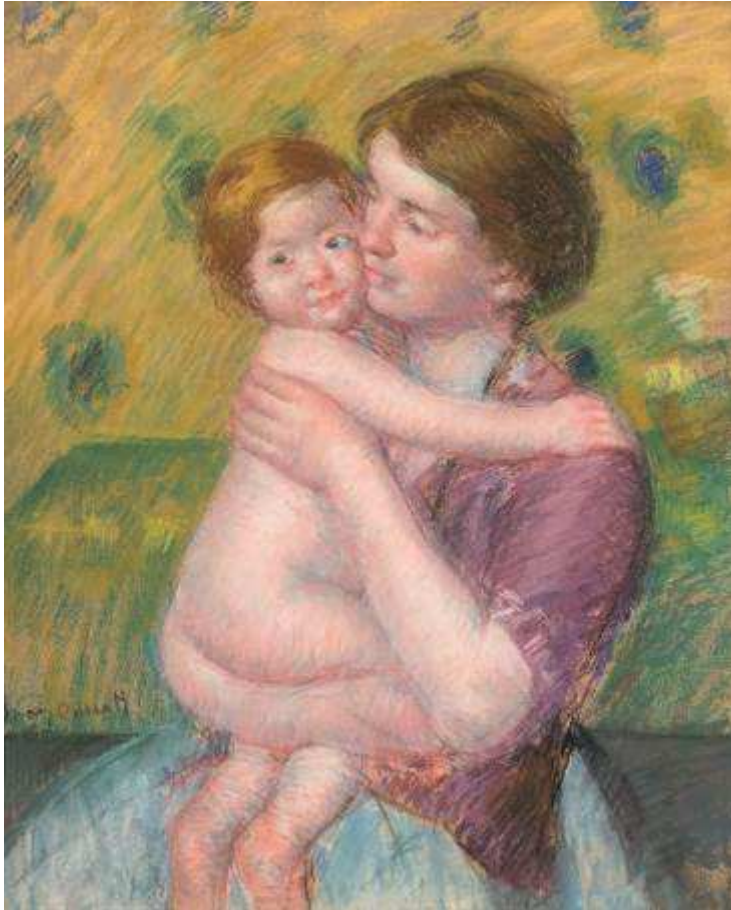
More or less distant in time, these echoes are not only a play on tradition. Viewers must recall that the hierarchy of techniques - a hierarchy that was certainly very real - would place pastel artists under the suspicion of practicing a type of painting that was second tier. By invoking the 18<sup>th</sup> century (a golden age as prominent as any) these artists intended to appropriate part of the legitimacy acquired by their predecessors; predecessors who managed to emancipate the colored bars from their traditional function as tools for drafting while placing them within the realm of painting.

Nevertheless, the homage to the prior century can also obey more aesthetic reasons. 18<sup>th</sup> century pastels with their lightness, charm, elegance and ease, constitute an invitation to free one's self from the conventions and rules imposed by academic programs. This is understood, for example, by Jules Chéret (1836-1932) who electrifies his compositions with an energy that was defined by critics of the time as being a "fanfare of colors" and "flashes of fantasy".

Jules Chéret  
*La Sérénade*, 1912 [The Serenade]  
 Pastel on canvas  
 Musée des Beaux-Arts Jules Chéret, Nice Donation of Baron Vitta, 1925  
 Inv. N.Mba 2189  
 © Ville de Nice Musée des Beaux-Arts Jules Chéret –Photo Muriel ANSSENS

## A FEMININE ART FORM?

In our collective consciousness, pastel is an art form intrinsically and somewhat hastily associated to the work of women artists. In fact, the practice of pastel attracted several female creators from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, with Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757) at the helm, in part because it would be difficult for them to prevail in the dominant disciplines. Instead, pastel would be considered an apt choice as it is a less expensive and complex medium than others considered as “major”.



Without abstaining from the practice of oil painting, many women have exceptional careers as pastel artists: Belgian artist Berthe Art (1857-1934) participated in the founding of the Belgian Circle of Watercolor and Pastel Artists; her compatriot Louise De Hem (1866-1922) achieved a Gold Medal at the 1901 Paris Salon; for her part, American artist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) soon comprehended the value of this medium; her pastels, with their vigorous strokes and audacious colors, modernized the genre of portraiture and the motif of maternity which is recurrent in her oeuvre.

Mary Cassatt  
*Mother and Child*, 1900-1914  
Pastel on paper  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Purchase with funds from the Forward Arts  
Foundation and the Robert D. Fowler Family  
Inv. 2.007.119

During much time, resorting to pastel might have passed as a default choice until a great resurgence of the technique occurred in 1880. Nevertheless, the power of prejudice would force it to remain a refuge for conventional and pleasant themes throughout the entire century, one in which women were granted a role opposite to that of the creator: the model. At the time, depictions of women proliferated in which the leisurely nature of their occupations (as can be seen in *The Woman with the Dog* by Charles Léandre or in *The Black Cat* by Louise De Hem) rival elegant poses and luxurious garments used by the bourgeoisie to emulate an idealized nobility.

## FLEETING IMPRESSIONS: PASTEL LANDSCAPES

For a long time, pastel was almost exclusively an art form dedicated to portraiture and, like in oil painting, those who practiced it approached landscapes with the notion of it being a lesser genre. Nevertheless, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ease of its use encouraged several artists to utilize pastels to capture the appearance of a landscape with only a few strokes. From the decade of 1830 onward, when artists began to acquire the habit of leaving their studios in search for direct contact with nature, pastel landscapes proliferated.



Eugène Boudin  
*Nuages blancs, ciel bleu*, c. 1859 [White Clouds, Blue Sky]  
Pastel on paper  
Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur  
Inv. 899.1.63  
© H. Brauner

Among these landscape artists Camille Flers (1802-1868) is the greatest promoter of the usage of these colored bars. The importance he grants his landscapes is reflected in his decision to exhibit them at the Salon. Precisely a decision opposite to that of Eugène Boudin (1824-1898), or “the King of the Skies” (as Camille Corot called him), who during the 1850’s accumulated pastel studies only to use them for canvases he would in turn save for the Salon.

Meanwhile, pastel landscapes managed to become an accepted genre. From Paul Huet and Eugène Delacroix in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to James McNeill Whistler during the beginning of the decade of 1880 and Albert Marquet around 1900, for whom capturing the physiognomy of an ever-changing sky - on the fly - becomes an almost mandatory exercise. A clear example of this is found in the spectacular *Stormy Sky* by Pierre Prins (1838-1913), whose monumentalism is an indicator of the legitimacy acquired by pastel landscape art.

## **THE SOCIETY OF FRENCH PASTEL ARTISTS: AN ECLECTIC COLLECTIVE**

In 1885 Roger Ballu (1852-1908), Fine Arts Inspector of France, creates the Society of French Pastel Artists, specifically in charge of “displaying, developing and promoting pastel art”. In a certain way, the creation of a structure dedicated to champion pastel art indicates that the technique’s legitimacy is still questionable. In this sense, the first exhibition by the Society in 1885, which includes many masters dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a clear sign: pastel artists, in search of prestige and credibility, are trying to find illustrious predecessors.

The Society, focusing on its members’ talent, did not impose any sort of aesthetic guidelines, thus its exhibitions were characterized by their eclecticism and by the diversity of subjects: the views of towns, for which Jean-Charles Cazin (1841-1901) is renown, sit side by side with the landscapes of Alexandre Nozal (1852-1929), while the serene and classical figures of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) contrast with the much brighter works of Albert Besnard (1849-1934).

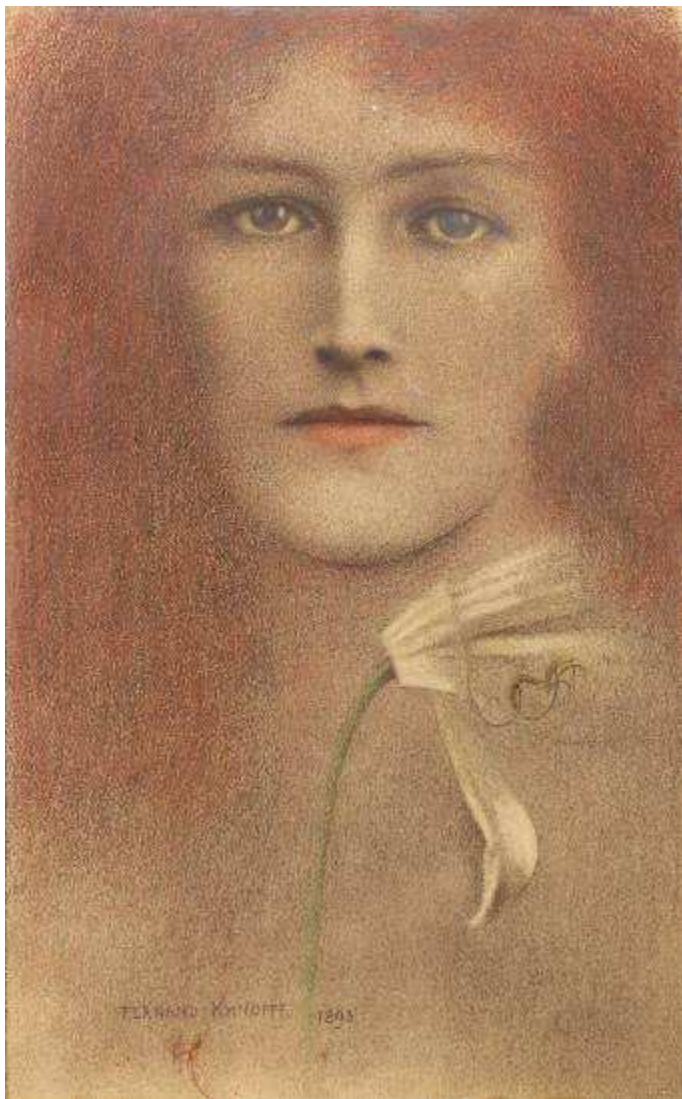
In its thirty years of existence, the Society of French Pastel Artists managed to place this medium in the spotlight. However, this recognition remained somewhat imperfect since, due to the lack of renewal, the Society began to age and isolate itself from truly innovative artists. In fact, it was not in the spirit of modern artists - so open to the unbiased use of different mediums - to adhere to a society that defended one technique above another, and continued to place it in the pedestal of a remote 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION**

The decade of 1880 is marked by the unprecedented rise of pastel, earning a privileged position within the international art scene. After the creation of the Society of Pastel Painters in New York, in 1882, and the Society of French Pastel Artists, in 1885, the United Kingdom in turn founded its own structure: The British Society of Pastel Artists. Two of its pillars, George Clausen (1852-1944) and Sir James Guthrie (1859-1930), among others, advocated not only the latest Parisian developments (for example in *Women Working in a Field*, in which Guthrie clearly credits the Naturalist Movement) but also the work of James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), whose series of Venetian pastels, exhibited in London in 1881, signified a notable event.

Belgium also becomes passionate for the color bars, giving way to generalized exchanges in all directions: ten years after exhibiting at the British Society of Pastel Artists, Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) sends his work *A Violinist* to the annual exhibition at the Munich Secession before displaying it at the newly created National Society of Pastel and Watercolor Artists in 1900 in Brussels.

The embrace of pastel, during the decade of 1890, by part of Polish artists Teodor Axentowicz, Stanisław Wyspiański and Leon Wyczółkowski, and beyond 1900 by part of German secessionists Max Liebermann and Ludwig von Hofmann, Russian Viktor Borísov-Musátov or Italians Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini and Umberto Boccioni, culminates the process of expansion of a medium that had ceased to be a private ground for French artists.



Fernand Khnopff  
*Diffidence*, 1893  
Pencil and pastel on platinum print  
Peter & Renate Nahum



## IMPRESSIONISM, A REBIRTH

This handy material -that allows artists to work swiftly and in the open air- is truly compatible with their aesthetic.

Nevertheless, the Impressionists who were most passionate about pastel have a true predilection for the representation of the human figure. Such is the case with an artist who maintained a tangential relationship with this trend: Giuseppe De Nittis (1846-1884), whose elegant scenes bathed in the light of a sunlit garden or under the gray sky of an autumn park, were widely acclaimed to the point of De Nittis receiving all the honors before the very eyes of his Impressionist friends. Edgar Degas (1834-1917) also explored contemporary life (scenes of theater-café, ballets at the opera, ironers, etc.), but without De Nittis' same success. Hurt, in the deepest possible way, he would respond to his Italian colleague, who had already passed away at the time, with his famous series of female nudes, whose triviality opposes the focus on elegance that granted De Nittis so much praise. This usage of pastel is much more defiant and perfectly illustrates Degas' famous adagio: "Grace is in common things".

On his part, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), whose work is indefectibly linked to the female figure, sometimes used pastel to swiftly execute depictions loaded with charm. Renoir, whose passion for the 18<sup>th</sup> century is notorious, utilizes the medium in a way that recalls the joy of his illustrious precursors who, much like him, used pastel with evident poise.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir  
*L'enfant à la pomme ou Gabrielle, Jean Renoir et une fillette*, 1895-1896  
[Child with an Apple or Gabrielle, Jean Renoir and a Little Girl]  
Pastel on paper  
Collection of Mrs. Leone Cettolin Dauberville  
© Jean-Louis Losi

## INCANDESCENT COLOR

Pastel's growing success during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not due to its increase in legitimacy, the characteristics of the material itself must also be contemplated; its vivid colors possess the great advantage of facilitating enormously intense effects.



Louis Anquetin  
*Jeune femme lisant un journal, 1890* [Young Woman Reading a Newspaper]  
 Pastel on paper  
 Tate, London. Donated by Francis Howard 1922  
 © Tate, London 2019

Among the artists of this generation, the experience of color is granted an almost mystical dimension, and although the lit pastels of Jules Chéret (1836-1932) or Edmond Aman-Jean (1858-1936) do not have this purpose in mind, they do underline the singular and in more than one aspect unmatched virtues of pastel. Aman-Jean's figures, lacking any psychology, are above all else magnificent chromatic dispositions. The incandescence of Louis Anquetin's (1861-1932) work, as in *The Roundabout at Champs-Élysées* or *Young Woman Reading a Newspaper*, force the stylization of contours and the intensity of colors that to a point where they seem to be the transposition of stained glass windows.

On his part, a young Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) is seduced by bohemia, the cabarets, and the decadence of early 1900's Paris. Dancers, variety artists and characters of the night crowd his works of 1901. The taste for spontaneity and for those nocturnal themes is an inheritance, to a great degree, from Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, of whom he would later say: "It was in Paris where I realized what a great painter Toulouse-Lautrec was." Picasso manifests his admiration for the French artist in such works as *End of the Number*, through the application of solid and flat colors and a line that clearly delineates the silhouette of the figure as if powerfully synthesizing it.

## SYMBOLIST ENIGMAS

Drawn by its will for emancipation from flat and accurate reproductions of reality, the generation born around 1860 aspired to capture dreams and imagination. Pastel became a precious aid: this delicate and powdery medium, that emanates an aura of beauty and fragility, allowed artists the ability to contradict the solidity of oil painting by obtaining airy and mysterious effects. While impressionists privileged daytime and well-lit landscapes, Symbolists, on the other hand, appreciated darkened atmospheres, conducive to mystery. In this sense, Belgian artist William Degouve de Nuncques (1867-1935) is emblematic: he produced night-time pastel landscapes, devoid of human presence, in order to better highlight their ghostly and silent character. The use of dark colors, along with his great mastery of pastel blending, allows Degouve de Nuncques to surround these visions from a dream with mystery. This twilight ambience was also appreciated by Émile-René Ménard (1862-1930): in great measure due to the powdery matter of pastel, his landscapes depicting ancient ruins, haloed with gold, possess the charm of a memory about to fade.

With the turn of the century, already innumerable Symbolist artists become sensitive to this medium. Journalist Albert Flament notes in 1899 “[pastel] has become the poetry of painting; while oil based color has continued to be its prose”.



William Degouve de Nuncques  
*Intérieur de forêt*, 1894 [Forest Interior]  
Pastel on paper  
Musée de l'École de Nancy, Nancy  
Inv. L02  
© Nancy, musée de l'École de Nancy. Photo Studio Image

## ODILON REDON: PASTEL TRANSFIGURED

Odilon Redon (1840-1916) is considered as the most inspired pastel artist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: it is he who devotes himself to pastel with most perseverance and conviction and who dedicates unequivocal aesthetic and spiritual considerations, turning it into more than just a simple medium.

After having exclusively dedicated twenty years to charcoal (his famous “Blacks”), Redon resorts to chromatics through pastel at a time during which color is being reaffirmed by several artists as a primary objective, as an autonomous entity: thus, the intensification of color signals a reinforcement of the sensitive dimension of a work of art that must reflect its authors vision and reach a superior state of being. Redon cannot choose better: due to the intensity of its colors, pastels are unmatched in their ability to rouse the imagination and confer the images he obsesses over an unparalleled presence. These possess one particularity: the countless works depicting Christ, Buddha, Visitations, Joan of Arc, haloed Virgins, silhouettes under an arch, stained glass windows, Pegasus and Apollo’s chariots, without forgetting the opulent bouquets made of dreamy flowers, all of which refer to a highly spiritual and syncretic universe. Transcendental aspirations reverberate through his work, and pastels particularly must be understood as true epiphanies.



Odilon Redon  
*La cime*, 1894  
[The Summit]  
Pastel on paper  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam  
Inv. d1051N1996

## THE 20TH CENTURY: FROM SYMBOL TO GESTURE

The use of pastel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> cannot be understood without the mastery of Odilon Redon (1840-1916) nor without the diffuse spirituality of late Symbolism, that stems from parts of the language used by the *Avant-garde*: Joseph Stella (1877-1946), the first Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931), Otto Freundlich (1878-1943) or Joaquim Mir (1873-1940) demonstrate how the transnational language of the turn of the century settles within pastel and foreshadows abstraction.



These creators distanced themselves from the debate over the hierarchy of techniques: pastel was not imbued with greater or lesser nobility, it simply facilitates the enunciation of a particular message. This is the role it takes in the works of the more classical Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), such as *Study of Hands* (1921), or in *The Reaper* by Pablo Gargallo (1881-1934), where he supports skin-like textures and provides sweetness and a chromatic richness that is recovered after cubism.

Pablo Picasso  
*Étude de mains*, Fontainebleau, verano de 1921  
 [Study of Hands, Fontainebleau]  
 Pastel on raw vellum paper  
 Musée National Picasso, Paris. Pablo Picasso Donation, 1979  
 Inv. MP907  
 © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) / Thierry Le Mage  
 © Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2019

In an unbiased way, Joan Miró (1893-1983) also resorts to pastel: decades after the juvenile *Bellver Forest* (1910), he returns to the medium in a fundamental chapter of savage paintings from 1934, countering the elegant pastel portraits of the previous century. While fellow artists, such as Roberto Matta (1911-2002) or André Masson (1896-1987), recall how surrealism found the pastel to be one of the methods by which to transfer the relationship between the hand and the pencil, characteristic of automatic writing, into painting. A link that has its final accent in the work of Hans Hartung (1904-1989), who reactivates pastel as a type of painting where previously rehearsed personal spellings reverts the idea of automatism through the ritual of repetition. Hartung exemplifies the way in which 20<sup>th</sup> century artists *touched color* with iconoclastic and multi-formed gestures of their hands until they were able to expand the frontiers of paste, liberated from prejudice, emancipated from its own history.

# INFORMACIÓN PRÁCTICA

## LOCATION

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[infoexposbcn@fundacionmapfre.org](mailto:infoexposbcn@fundacionmapfre.org)

## TICKET PRICE

General admissions: €3 per person.  
Free entry Mondays from 2 pm to 8 pm

## OPENING TIMES\*:

Mondays from 2 pm to 8 pm.  
Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10 am to 8 pm.  
Sundays/holidays from 11 am to 7 pm.  
\*Last access: 30 minutes before closing time.

## VISITAS GUIADAS

De lunes a jueves: 17:30 h. (catalán) y 18:30 h. (castellano). Precio: 5€

## AUDIOGUÍAS

Audioguías: catalán / castellano / inglés Precio: 3,50€  
Signoguías y Audioguías con audiodescripción de acceso gratuito.