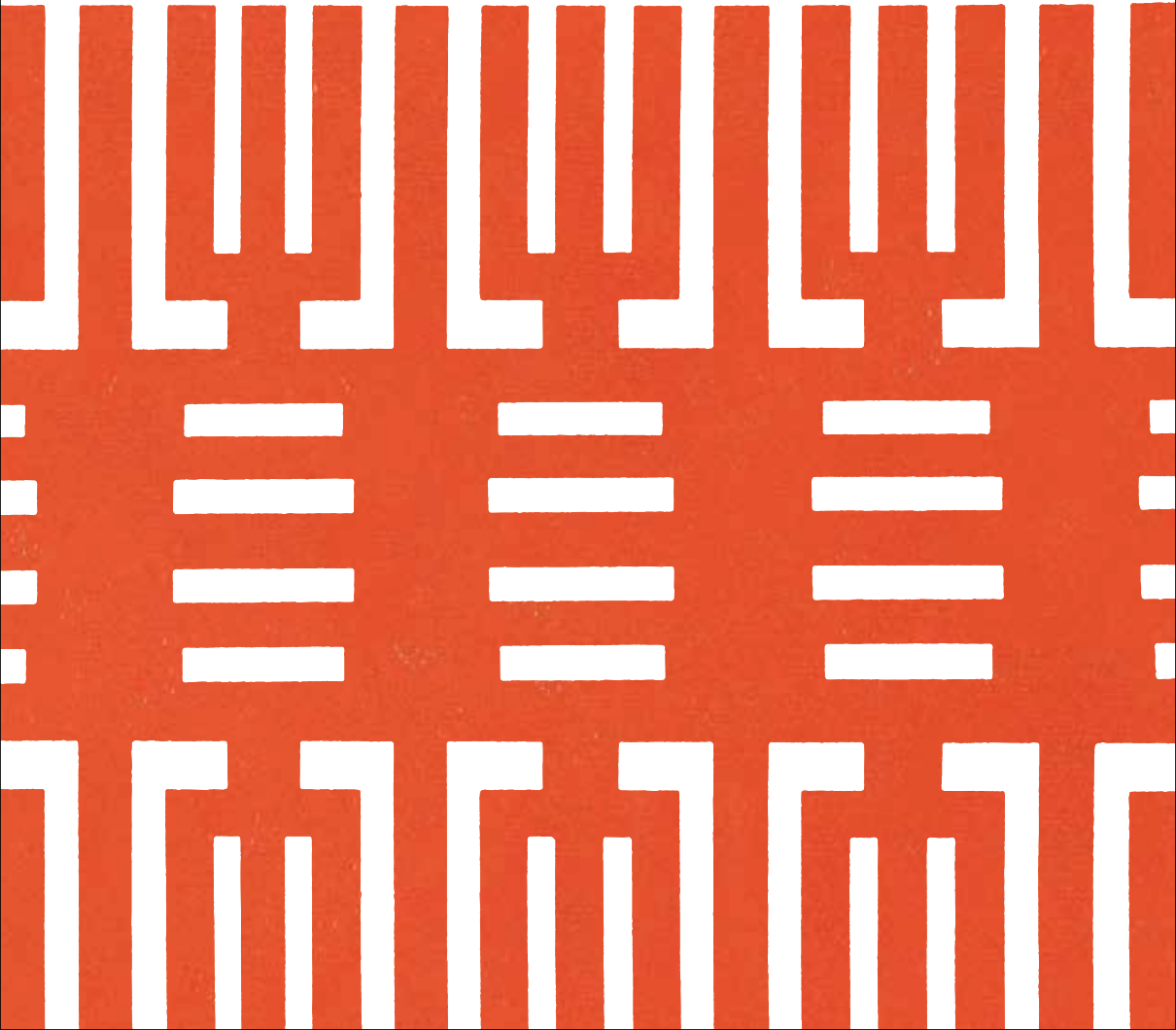


October 6, 2023 — March 10, 2024

BEFORE AMÉRICA

Original Sources in Modern Culture





Chavis Mármol in
the performative action
Neo Tameme in
Mexico City, 2021

With more than six hundred works, *Before América: Original Sources in Modern Culture* presents a long process based on sources dating back to before Europeans christened an entire continent “America”: the reinterpretation, in modern and contemporary culture, of the forms and meanings of ancient Indigenous civilizations and cultures, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego.

The exhibition starts by returning us to the beginning of this process in the late eighteenth century, and follows its development throughout the nineteenth century, focusing on certain scientific expeditions in the American continent, archaeological discoveries, the formation of collections, and the subsequent development of historicist architecture. This process adopted an Americanist identity, which became more pronounced as a result of the reinterpretation of pre-Columbian knowledge and languages—especially in and around schools of arts and crafts—which ended up revolutionizing graphic design, literature, theater, film, music, and fashion.

The exhibition also looks at the artistic projects that reclaimed or invented “ancestral” culture in the mid-twentieth century, a time when new artists ventured into America and explored it, collected their finds, and documented the monuments of the past in photographs and drawings. It then brings us back to the present day, revealing how the Amerindian paradigm around the world does not seem to be running out of steam: it persists in the conscious use of geometry and color, in the critical or ironic quoting of the past, in performance art, Indigenous-based postmodern architectures, intentional kitsch, the refinement of conceptual art, the new artistic behaviors, and the sophisticated revitalization of arts and crafts, now full of new sociopolitical and aesthetic meanings.

The exhibition is divided into four sections, with the works in the galleries complemented by others displayed in the hall, the staircases, the mezzanine, and the lobby of the auditoriums on floor -I of the Fundación Juan March.



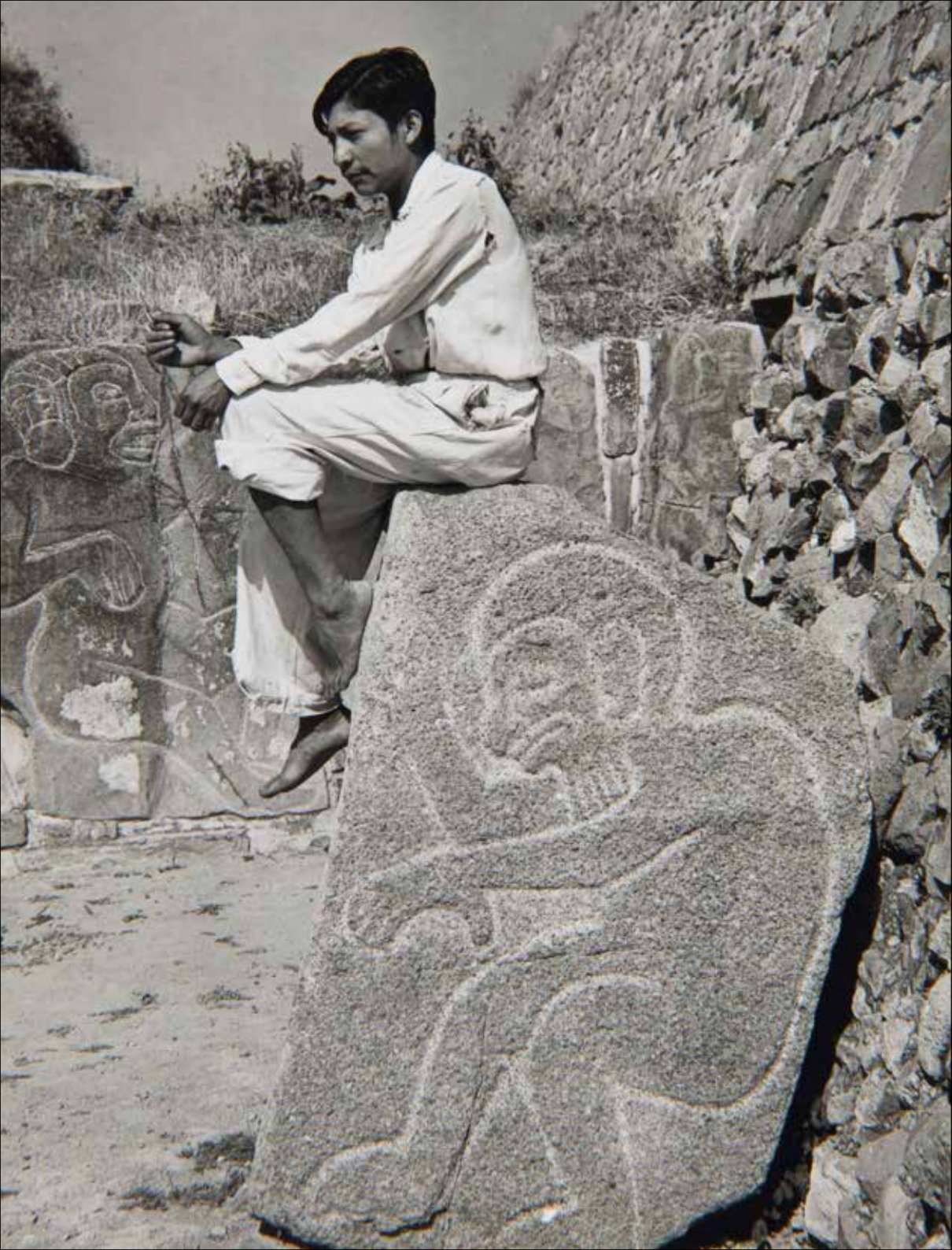
Documentation and Reinterpretation

1790 — 1910

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, European culture was still under the influence of the encyclopedic spirit of the previous century and of the enthusiasm to learn about the unknown. The scientific expeditions of the Age of Enlightenment would be complemented in the nineteenth century by the Romantic sublimation of travel as an experience, and the American continent was found to be fertile soil for its expression. In particular, archaeological exploration and discovery would lay the foundations for a process of documenting—in drawings, prints, and photographs—architectural complexes and objects that predate the “invention of America.” But this process would also lead to the stockpiling of objects, the growth in public and private collections—often the result of looting—and even falsification.

Later, the use of documented architectural repertoires would lead to a gradual appropriation of visual grammars of the past and their structural and ornamental reinterpretation in new constructions. In this way, the pre-Columbian, until then valued almost exclusively within the fields of antiquities, archaeology, and anthropology, became associated with the “fine arts.”

Francisco Agüera y Bustamante, detail of plate 3, in Antonio de León y Gama, *Descripción histórica y cronológica de las dos piedras que ... en la plaza principal de México, se hallaron en ella el año de 1790 ...* (Historical and Chronological Description of Two Stones That ... Were Found in the Plaza of Mexico in 1790 ...), Mexico: Felipe de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1792
Biblioteca Histórica “Marqués de Valdecilla,” Universidad Complutense de Madrid (BH FG 3455)



Reinterpretation and Identity

1910 — 1940

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the return to the “primitive” as a modern paradigm would generate new scenarios in America. A period of introspection, intensified by the centennial celebrations of independence and—after the outbreak of World War I—by the questioning of Europe as the universal standard bearer and canonical reference, strengthened the dimensions of American identities. The desire to create a “new art” for the continent based on forms and languages of the past but combined with a modern gaze would openly manifest itself—establishing and consolidating a specifically American “classical” culture.

Against this backdrop, there was a boom in schools for arts and crafts that, functioning as laboratories of modernity, connected “the artisanal” with the so-called fine arts. This prompted a reinterpretation of pre-Columbian and Indigenous languages in furniture, textiles, theater and film sets, graphic design, and manuals of ornamental art as a transformative effort in education. In combination with the ongoing documentation of archaeological remains, in many cases at the initiative of institutions that housed collections of pre-Columbian art—and often carried out by trained contemporary artists—this would define new territory for the advancement of a local avant-garde.

Detail of “El dios viejo – Los danzantes – Ruinas de Monte Albán. Oaxaca, México”
(The Old God—Dancers—Ruins of Monte Albán. Oaxaca, Mexico), n.d.
Postcard, 5½ × 3½ in. (13.8 × 8.8 cm)
Colección CEDODAL, Buenos Aires



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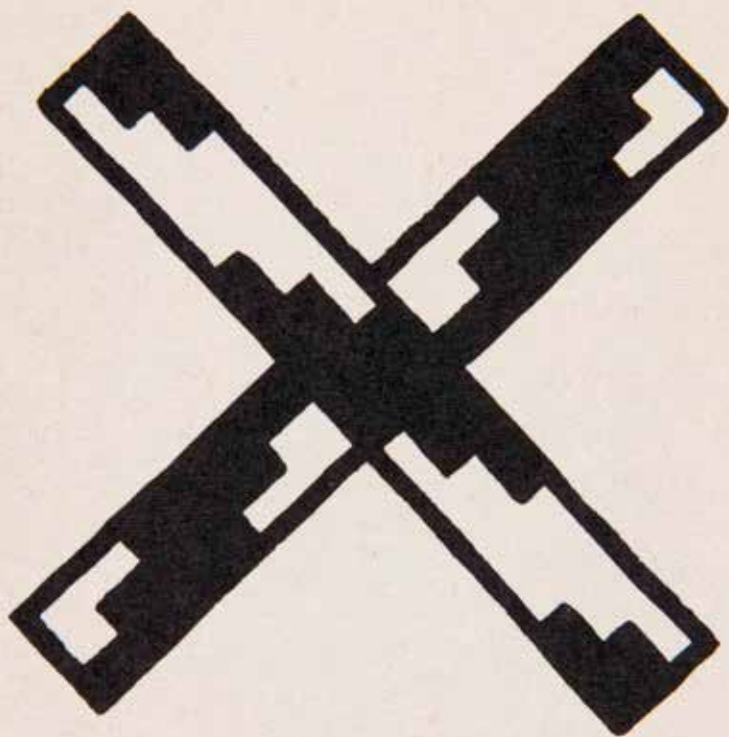
Identity and Invention

1940 — 1970

The mid-twentieth century would witness different forms of symbiosis between pre-Columbian geometric forms and languages of the avant-garde. The artistic and educational work of the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García (1874–1949) is emblematic in this respect. Together with his students at his Taller in Montevideo, Torres García sought to reclaim the symbolic undercurrent of pre-Columbian culture and rediscover the mindset of the creators of the past, transcending the formalism that had characterized many of the artistic proposals of the 1920s.

This time saw a gradual loosening of certain prevailing constraints, such as the strict deference to native aesthetic models, or the adherence to the idea of identity as the ultimate goal. These years were marked by a greater creative freedom in all artistic disciplines. In sculpture, for example, there began a preference for direct stone carving; and in painting, pre-Columbian and Indigenous languages would be assimilated by geometric abstraction and so-called lyrical abstraction, this last with its explorations of color through “ancestralist” poetics. This search for the essential led to the invention of signs and settings with archaic evocations. In the 1950s and above all in the 1960s, with the advent of pop culture, the pre-Columbian past would infiltrate the popular imaginary in the form of posters, comics, album covers, books, and other printed matter.

Graziano Gasparini, detail of *Ollantaytambo, Perú*, ca. 1961
Silver gelatin print, 12¼ × 11¼ in. (31 × 30.3 cm)
Colección CEDODAL, Buenos Aires



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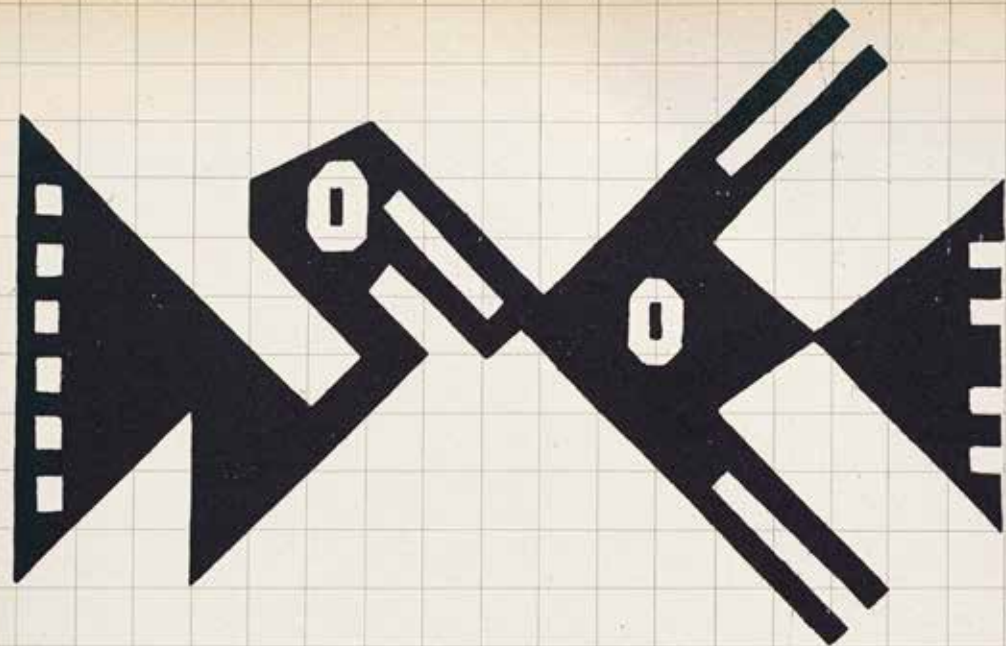
Invention and Conceptualisms

1970 — 2023

The last half century has seen the continuity and transformation of proposals developed in earlier decades, along with new contributions and theoretical projects that highlight the revitalized and enduring force of the Amerindian paradigm. The common denominator in the exhibited works is to be found in the diversity of ideas and aesthetic proposals in painting, sculpture, drawing, graphic work, architecture, film, photography, ceramics, installation, video art, textiles, and other objects. While the references come from a vast geographical area and differ in materials and meanings, found in all of these expressions is the continued existence of geometry, of vibrant color, of ironic citation, of works conceived on a territorial scale, of architecture with postmodern roots, of unbridled kitsch, and of the cultivation of craft.

The end of the exhibition involves returning to the beginning: going back to the time of the expeditions of the nineteenth century, of the amassing of objects, of their diaspora beyond their native borders and of their decontextualization. Such a return is possible thanks to an exhibition design in which ceramics and other contemporary objects share a space with ancient pieces that formed part of that process. Some of the contemporary creations question and denounce those practices, thus reconnecting the exhibition's last message with that expressed at the beginning. Through inventiveness and conceptualist proposals based on pre-Columbian art, today's artists are guaranteeing the future of the past.

Richard Long, detail of *South America* 1972, Düsseldorf: Konrad Fischer, 1973
Book, 5½ × 5½ in. (12.9 × 12.9 cm)
Biblioteca Fundación Juan March, Madrid



An Amerindian Library

1900–1950

Indigenous aesthetics in general, and pre-Columbian aesthetics in particular, decisively permeated the graphic art of the first half of the twentieth century. Books, magazines, posters, prints, photographs, and postcards, together with catalogues and other publications related to the numerous exhibitions of pre-Columbian art—many of which were contextualized within modern narratives—bore the distinctive stamp of ancient American cultures.

Elena Izcue, detail of plate 16, in *El arte peruano en la escuela, I* (Peruvian Art in School, I), Paris: Excelsior, 1925. Pedagogical notebook, 11½ × 8½ in. (28.1 × 21.8 cm)
Private collection, Granada

Before América: The Website

The project that has resulted in this exhibition and catalogue—its three years of work, travel and research, its geographical and temporal breadth and scope, three exhibition venues (Madrid, Cuenca, and Palma), more than six hundred works, and the contributions of some thirty essayists and numerous collaborators on two continents—soon found a very real opportunity to expand into the digital realm, as the new horizon for knowledge and its dissemination.

Thus, the exhibition and this publication is complemented by a knowledge portal accessible through the Fundación Juan March website (www.march.es). This digital repository, which will be updated on an ongoing basis, has been created and organized by Manuela Otero (website coordinator) and Luis Martínez Uribe (Director of the Research Support Library, Fundación Juan March). It reinforces and expands the exhibition with many of the contents and textual and visual resources accumulated in the course of the project, which will be freely available online to all scholars and interested parties.

The contents of the website have been produced with the collaboration of the curators of the exhibition together with Liliana Montoya (curatorial assistant) and José Luis Maire (Research Support Library, Fundación Juan March), who is in charge of the sound recordings section of the exhibition.

The digital repository was conceived not only as an information tool, but above all as a research gateway, presenting and organizing the knowledge and visual resources so as to offer multiple ways of searching and interconnecting all the elements. The portal includes materials that complement the exhibition and the catalogue, as well as its own exclusive contents that need regular updating and are thus more suited to the digital environment than to the printed page.

Access to
Before América



Before América: Original Sources in Modern Culture

From October 6, 2023
to March 10, 2024
Fundación Juan March
Castelló, 77. 28006 Madrid

Opening hours

Monday to Saturday and
public holidays: 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Sundays: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Exhibition closed: December 24,
25, and 31
January 1 and 6

Free guided tours

(except public holidays)

For the general public
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 11 a.m.,
12 p.m., and 1 p.m.
Wednesdays and Fridays: 5 p.m.,
6 p.m., and 7 p.m.
Maximum 15 people, in order
of arrival

For school groups

Mondays: 11 a.m., 12 p.m., and 1 p.m.
Reservations: 91 435 42 40 (ext. 207)
Maximum 15 students

For groups with special needs write to:

visitalamarch@magmacultura.net

Private guided tours

Service for professional guides only
Monday to Friday: 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.
(except at the start times
of the free guided tours)
Reservations required:
march.es/visitasconguiaapropio
Maximum 15 people

CURATORIAL TEAM

Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales

Guest curator

Manuel Fontán del Junco

Director of Museums and Exhibitions,
Fundación Juan March

María Toledo Gutiérrez

Head of Exhibition Project,
Fundación Juan March

Renata Ribeiro dos Santos

Curator of the exhibitions *Pedro
Lasch: Inverse Figurations* (Museo
de Arte Abstracto Español, Cuenca)
and *Chavis Mármol: Neo Tameme*
(Museu Fundación Juan March, Palma)

Liliana Montoya Orúe

Project assistant

EXHIBITION

Organization and Coordination

María Toledo Gutiérrez
Liliana Montoya Orúe

Exhibition Concept

Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales and
Art Department, Fundación
Juan March

Museography

Estudio Pedro Feduchi

Conservation

El Taller, S.C.: Lourdes Rico, Celia
Martínez, Victoria de las Heras;
Laura Suela de la Llave

Graphic Design

Adela Morán

Installation and Signage

SIT Grupo Empresarial

Framing

Decograf

Lighting

Carlos Alzueta

Coordination of Insurance, Transportation, and Installation

Marta Ramírez, Registrar,
Fundación Juan March

Insurance

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Patronal Seguros S.A.; Gallagher; Genser
Insurance; Howden Risk Solutions, S.A.U.;
One Underwriting Agenica de suscripción,
S.L.U.; Willis Fine Art; Willis Towers
Watson France

Transportation

SIT Grupo Empresarial (coordination
from Spain); Autogiro (Uruguay);
Constantine (United Kingdom); Córdoba
Plaza (Mexico); Delmiro Méndez
(Argentina); Lp Art (France); Millenium
(Brazil); N. Leigh (Peru); U.S.Art and
Masterpiece (United States)

Public Relations and Mediation

Fundación Juan March and MagmaCultura

Sound Mural

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Manuela Otero

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Director, Library and Research Support
Center, Fundación Juan March

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