

Ramon Puyol - Artist

Born in Algeciras (Cadiz) in 1907, Ramon Puyol was trained at the San Fernando Fine Arts School. While still in his teens he was attracted to the avant-garde and exhibited at the First Iberian Artists Show of 1925. By then he was beginning to be known as a graphic illustrator, and his work appeared in such magazines as *La Gaceta Literaria*. He received a grant to work abroad in 1926, and he travelled to Rome and Paris and then England. Returning to Madrid in 1929, he ran the graphics section of the Latin American Publishing House. By then he was doing drawing and painting as well as illustration, and his work appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers, including *La Esfera*, *Nuevo Mundo*, *Mundo Grafico*, *Estampa*, and *Cr nica*.

Drawn to politics early in the worldwide depression, he signed the "Manifesto addressed to public opinion and authorities" in 1931, joined the Communist Party, and participated in the First Revolutionary Art Exhibition sponsored by the journal *Octubre* and held in the Madrid Athenaeum in 1933. That same year he designed the theatrical sets for Cesar Falcon's play "Asturias" and travelled to the Soviet Union to work on one of Mayakovsky's theatrical productions. In 1934 he had an individual exhibition at the Madrid Athenaeum and designed the set for Rafael Alberti's "Fermin Galan," which was produced the following year. *Mundo Obrero*, the Communist Party newspaper, also began publishing his cartoons in 1934.

When war broke out he offered his services to the Republic and did a wide range of different kinds of artistic work, from posters, lithographs, pamphlets, and theater sets to editorial cartoons and illustrations for children's books. He served as editor for the drawing section of Cesar Falcon's group *Altavoz del Frente* (Loudspeaker at the Front), which maintained a large wartime publishing program.

Much of his work, including two oil paintings he exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion in Paris in 1937, falls into the general category of expressionist realism. But he was also attracted to surrealism, and in 1936 he created an extraordinarily inventive series of lithographic portraits that focused surrealist techniques on political caricature. Ten of the lithographs were published as a set by *Altavoz del Frente* in Madrid in February of 1937. Unlike anything else anyone did during the war, they were soon issued as full-scale posters, and Puyol became famous. On a cover sheet Puyol dedicated the folder of prints: "To my brother Miguel, murdered by the fascist horde." Later that year, in a statement of principles prefacing another set of prints, he declared that "the rickety theory of art for art's sake has just died. A class art is born." "The toilers of art," he urged, "should find their aesthetic and even their technique in the concrete trajectory of the workers."

When the war ended, a number of Republican artists fled the country, but Puyol was captured and sentenced to death for his art. Eventually the sentence was commuted to thirty years in prison, but in 1942, when Franco needed someone to restore Tiepolo's frescoes in the monastery of San Lorenzo de Escorial, competent craftsmen were hard to find amongst the fascists. So Puyol was called on, and his sentence was commuted again -- this time to six years -- in exchange for the work of restoration. Puyol returned to Madrid, but the imaginative fire of the wartime years was either gone or had no outlet. Eventually he settled in the town of his birth, where he died in 1981.

More information: <http://www.ramon-puyol.es/>