

PÉREZ SIQUIER

Fundación MAPFRE Collections

Carlos Pérez Siquier (Almería, 1930-2021) is a fundamental figure in the history of Spanish photography, not only for a body of work created over more than six decades, which at times moved ahead of the very narrative he and his contemporaries were constructing, but also for his contribution to the evolution and specialisation of photography as a medium. Pérez Siquier always considered himself a very intuitive photographer, and his vision and commitment to the medium made him a pioneer of avant-garde photography in Spain.

Throughout his life, Carlos Pérez Siquier lived in his native city of Almería. From the province of the same name, a remote and forgotten region until the arrival of tourism in the 1960s, he constructed a free, profoundly modern, committed and poetic body of work, remote from the fashions and conventions imposed by the major photographic centres such as Barcelona and Madrid. He began his career documenting life in the poor Almerian neighborhood of La Chanca before moving on to employ an anthropological and ironic gaze to portray mass tourism on the beaches near the city with sensitivity and humour.

The artist's photographic oeuvre is characterised by a wide variety of themes and aesthetics, through which he experimented with form and visual language to capture the transformations of an entire country from the starting point of the near-at-hand. From his earliest projects in the 1950s, when Spain was slowly emerging from the lethargy of the post-war period, Pérez Siquier stood out for his ability to capture the social and cultural reality of his surroundings. Influenced in his early phase by Italian Neorealism, his first photographic series devoted to the neighbourhood of

La Chanca offers a clear example of his anthropological approach and ability to convey the dignity of the very poor. In a discreet but decided manner, Pérez Siquier established a new standard for documentary photography in Spain.

In 1950, he and José María Artero co-founded the Almerian Photographic Association and later the magazine AFAL, a gathering point for the medium and a driving force of the Spanish photographic avant-garde. AFAL helped consolidate and disseminate the work of an extraordinary generation of photographers at a time when they were starting to be recognised as artists.

In the 1960s, Pérez Siquier was among the pioneers who definitively switched to colour, a decision met with rejection by his colleagues. This allowed him to explore new forms of expression and expand his visual repertoire with the remarkable new approach evident in his series *Informalisms*. In the 1970s, his photographs of sunbathers haphazardly occupying the beaches of Almería following the new boom in tourism were so ahead of their time that it was years before they were recognised by the photographic world, although they eventually became the most popular part of his output. Pérez Siquier's colour photography not only documented a significant social change but also demonstrated his ability to innovate and adapt to new trends, combining his technical precision with a poetic sensibility and subtle humour, in which the influence of Pop Art became increasingly evident in surprising images that play with objects, spatial planes and colours. His last, more intimate series, *Encounters* and *La Briseña*, portray landscapes and interiors that encourage silence and contemplation through a more serene gaze which continues to find the profundity of the exceptional in the apparent simplicity of the everyday.

Eva M. Vives Jiménez

Curator



LA CHANCA 1956-1962

These images represent the start of Carlos Pérez Siquier's photographic commitment to his immediate surroundings: the neighbourhood of La Chanca in the city of Almería. Defined by the artist himself as a "pure reportage", the series *La Chanca* was created over several years of regular visits to the area, where the photographer integrated himself as a respectful and sympathetic observer of everyday life. Far from adopting a paternalistic or sensationalist perspective, Pérez Siquier portrayed the dignity of a marginalised community characterised by underdevelopment, bomb damage and poverty, but also by resilience, joy and shared identity. These black and white photographs, influenced by Italian Neorealism, capture the spontaneity of the people living in the caves and houses of La Chanca, in an urban setting untouched by the tourism and economic boom of the day. The series has become a testament to a forgotten Spain and a lesson in how to approach a depiction of socially underprivileged people without depriving them of their dignity.

LA CHANCA IN COLOUR

1962-1965

After the documentary impact of the black and white series *La Chanca*, Carlos Pérez Siquier embarked on a new project centred on the same neighbourhood, this time from a chromatic perspective that transformed the visual discourse. Rather than a mere continuation, *La Chanca in Colour* is a reinterpretation that abandons the Neorealist tone in order to explore the textures, volumes and architectural surfaces of the urban environment. The images capture the vibrant palette of whitewashed facades, washing hanging on the line and everyday objects and anticipate Pérez Siquier's interest in colour as a narrative tool, which he subsequently developed in series such as *Informalisms* and *The Beach*.



INFORMALISMS 1965

In the series *Informalisms* Carlos Pérez Siquier abandoned the human figure in order to focus on the surfaces of La Chanca's walls. These colour images capture the superimposed layers of paint, posters and textures that the inhabitants had applied to them over time, transforming each wall into a sort of archaeological stratum that preserves collective memory. The choice of colour as an expressive tool locates the artist in a dialogue with the poetics of the pictorial Informalism prevailing in Spanish art in the 1960s. In these photographs the wall is not merely a backdrop; it becomes the protagonist that engages the viewer's gaze. As such, *Informalisms* is a vindication of the object and the urban space as elements charged with meaning, capable of narrating the social and cultural transformation of a Spain in transition.

THE BEACH 1972-1980

With *The Beach*, Carlos Pérez Siquier's photographic language took a radical turn. Shot in colour, the series portrays working-class summer holidays on the Almerian shoreline in the 1970s, at the height of mass tourism. In addition to being an aesthetic tool, here colour becomes a narrative vehicle that enhances the contrast between the traditional and the modern, and between the local and the global. Each photograph is an almost theatrical representation of summer at the beach. The spontaneous gestures and carefree poses, the boldly patterned swimsuits, beach accessories, makeup and suntan oil on bronzed bodies create a collective portrait of a Spain engaged in social transformation and a country that was starting to open up to mass tourism, consumer culture and leisure. Pérez Siquier approached this new landscape being created by Spanish society with a frontal focus based on intuition — with no use of flash, photometer or zoom — through carefully constructed compositions that reinforce the feeling of theatricality and create a visual universe in which humour, critique and tenderness combine. *The Beach* is also a vindication of colour photography as an artistic medium at a time when it was still undervalued in academic circles. With this series Pérez Siquier located himself as the pioneer of a Pop aesthetic that connects with the visual language of international contemporary art.



TRAPS FOR THE UNWARY

1980-1992

Carlos Pérez Siquier culminated his exploration of the urban and social landscape with the series *Traps for the Unwary*. Employing a critical, playful and deeply aesthetic perspective, he moved away from the human figure in order to focus on the objects, symbols and scenarios left behind by consumer society: car sunscreens printed with film stills, giant fairground dolls and facades decorated with kitsch elements, among others. Charged with humour and ambiguity, these images invite us to question apparent reality. Through framing and perspective, the seemingly mundane is transformed into a fantastical or absurd scene. The photographer plays with *trompe l'oeil* and offers us an alternative interpretation of the world around us. In this sense, Pérez Siquier comes close to the sensibility of artists such as Luigi Ghirri, for whom the city is a playground of the imagination. This is the most Pop gaze in the artist's career and one that transforms the vulgar into art and the trivial into symbol.

ENCOUNTERS 2002

The series *Encounters* reflects a mature period in Carlos Pérez Siquier's work, when he moved away from explicit social critique to focus on a more introspective and poetic exploration of his surroundings. Shot in colour and carefully composed, these images capture seemingly inconsequential scenes which are transformed by the artist's gaze into moments of aesthetic revelation that invite us to look with a fresh eye at what usually goes unnoticed.

Encounters is principally set in locations on the Almerian coast, such as Cabo de Gata and Roquetas de Mar, where Pérez Siquier found a geography conducive to visual play and metaphor. Colour, a central feature of his work from the 1960s onwards, here acquires a lyrical dimension, becoming a vehicle for emotion and meaning.



LA BRISEÑA 2015-2017

La Briseña constitutes the poetic epilogue to Carlos Pérez Siquier's career; an intimate and reflective series created in the final years of his life when he had retreated to the interior of his rural home in Benahadux, Almería. Named "La Briseña" after the sea breeze that reaches the door, this place becomes the setting for and subject of a gaze that no longer seeks the social or the urban but rather the essential and the spiritual. The small-format colour images capture everyday objects, different parts of the house and the play of light on whitewashed walls. In the artist's own words, *La Briseña* is "the ideal retreat from which to focus on an austere landscape, of spaces open to the gaze", where photography becomes meditation and legacy.