

Galería Ehrhardt Flórez

LUIS CLARAMUNT

Luis Claramunt. Sevilla

From September 11th to November 8th 2025

After spending several summers, during the seventies and early eighties, travelling to festivals and conferences on cante jondo (flamenco singing) in the south of the Iberian peninsula, Luis Claramunt (Barcelona, 1951–Zarautz, 2000) settled in Seville in 1985.

The painting he developed there, between 1985 and 1989, represents a pictorial, thematic and compositional turning point between his earlier works from the Barcelona period, more figurative and with greater use of impasto, and all his later paintings, which were much more open and stylised.

Claramunt's close relationship with the cities in which he lived made a mark on every one of his series. The themes and locations of his work are tirelessly embodied in a vast oeuvre including paintings, drawings and self-published books: an imagery that travels a highly personal itinerary whilst also demonstrating the evolution of painting in Spain from the 1970s until the late 1990s.

The exhibition presented here, *Luis Claramunt. Seville*, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, focuses on the work painted in that city in around 1985, bringing together a sizeable group of paintings, watercolours, drawings and diverse archive material.

After an early period in his native city, Barcelona, with his first exhibitions at Taller de Picasso and, thanks to Toni Estrany, in the Dau al Set gallery, and some brief later stints in Madrid, where he exhibited at Galería Buades, Claramunt arrived in Seville where, over time, he exhibited in galleries including La Máquina Española, Juana de Aizpuru and Rafael Ortiz. Numerous testimonies tell of his arrival in the Andalusian capital. The most direct source, however, is Claramunt himself, who recounted his journey to Seville in a report directed by Juan Manuel Bonet, in 1986, for the TVE programme *Tiempos Modernos*, thought to be the only existing audiovisual recording of the painter. For his then-partner, the artist Teresa Lanceta, Seville was the destination on a journey 'of no return'¹. For the critic Quico Rivas, more than a journey it was a 'move'². And for the curator Nuria Enguita it was a 'first stop, encouraged by a favourable environment'³.

'Painting was the only reason to go and to stay: it had become possessive and unpostponable'⁴. That move, like the one a year later, from Seville to Marrakesh, responded not only to an artistic interest but to a fundamental way of understanding the world. 'Like other great travellers'⁵, writes Lanceta, 'the destination he chose was travel itself and in the streets, he found the landscape in which to move through life.' This travelling life, as Ángel González called it, had something of a nomadic air and certain 'set habits.'⁶

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The works shown in this exhibition, particularly the largest ones, were mostly painted in a warehouse that Claramunt rented in Pasaje Mallol, in Seville, after his earlier studio near the Maestranza bullring had become too small to attempt paintings of such size. A year later, in 1986, many of them featured in his exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla. These paintings, which have not been exhibited since, seek to portray the city not just as a landscape, but from another perspective linked more to experience, to the places and people that the painter himself frequented and met. Calle San Luis, Calle Betis, Plaza del Pumarejo, Triana Bridge, the Alameda, the interiors and exteriors of bars, and even other cities, approached with the same intent, such as Basel (which he occasionally visited, inspiring the painting *Los Puentes de Basel* (The Bridges of Basel), included in this display), are the most common places in his painting.

Using a reduced colour palette in each work and often fusing several pictorial planes, Claramunt starts, in these works, from the patch of colour, 'with no prior planning, no direction, and then extracting from it an idea, a sensation, and connecting it to a memory; in short, blending two realities, the first more direct, the fortuitous accident, and the second no less real, provided by free will, memory, unconscious memory.'⁷

Most of the conversations and writing by Claramunt that have been preserved show a tremendously precise and analytical vision in relation to pictorial fact and practice. His published conversations with Kevin Power, from 1986, or another compilation published after his death, with Quico Rivas, including chats from different dates, summarise most of his thoughts on painting. The incorporation of the human figure, the schematic, the urban structure, the rupture of scale or the lack of tonal values, as well as the absence of texture ('at least in the superficial sense of the word')⁸, of chiaroscuro, of symbolism and description, are the main axes of his painting from that period. All of these, in turn, elements that, at the time, he referred to as the 'tensioners' of the work, are still visible in the canvases displayed in the current exhibition. The obsessive sensation that produces dizzying perspectives and oppressive and 'delirious'⁹ landscapes 'becomes, through large strokes, the portrait of a city, where the main compositional concerns were essential in creating an atmosphere (not in the impressionist sense), a space that is as real as possible, using a working system that is very sober and (...) very disciplined.'¹⁰

The paintings focused on questions of perspective, lines and space start from a patch of colour, pre-made and accidental, which he paints without hesitation, *'taking advantage of the errors or doubts as a way to enrich the painting without punishing it'* ¹¹. *'Preserving the strong empathy with human suffering of his earlier work'* ¹², we see in this group of paintings the keen intention to dispense with classical pictorial values in favour of an execution focused on the strictly necessary, striving not to *'simultaneously say many different things that shouldn't be superimposed'* ¹³.

Works such as *Los Tres Reyes* (The Three Kings), *La Taberna* (The Bar), or those that depict a scene halfway between an exterior and an interior, seem to create, with a monochromatic palette, *'a somewhat sad atmosphere'* ¹⁴ that for Claramunt avoids *'loading the painting with elements that might respond to an ethical/moral treatment and not to a purely visual interpretation of reality'* ¹⁵.

Meanwhile, other paintings, *Calle Betis* (Betis Street) or *Bar de alterne* (Brothel), show scenes in which the figurative elements are *'completely subordinate to the resolution of a strictly pictorial space'* ¹⁶. They are 'anchors' for figures and are, in most cases, the final or initial solution for many things. The human silhouettes, the broken, confused figures amid the gestural, or the rhythm of the trees on the Alameda or Plaza del Pumarejo, serve at the same time 'to explain the space, and to fill it.' And this space is defined as 'vital,' in a blend of absence and insinuated presence. The figure, or its posture, or movement, functions as another brush stroke, disproportionate certainly, a brush stroke that 'seeks to situate a presence with nothing else' and which breaks the scale with the intention of providing a balanced solution that allows different points of view to be superimposed.

Finally, we come to some of the paintings that refer in their entirety to the city, *Calle San Luis* (San Luis Street) or *Los puentes de Basel* (Basel Bridges), composed as a *'group of triangles'* or *'almost parallel curves'* ¹⁸ where the streets taper endlessly, and in which the eye rises to travel over the canvas guided by abrupt, disjointed, sharp or dramatic areas.

In terms of colour, the city of Seville also demands a palette that stands out from those used previously and which changes according to the theme or motif painted. There is a reduced colour palette in which the paste or pictorial material is used to resolve different problems. There are paintings of the River Guadalquivir in which the yellowish watercourse and the defiant banks confront one another in a fight between *'weight and lightness, between form and sensation'* ¹⁹; in the rhythms of the trees on Sevillian plazas, we find lively reds, greens and blacks with a richer treatment; on the other hand, on the bridges, the glazing and softness of colour counter the violence of the outline; while on the streets (*'flitting between light and shade'*) ²⁰, bars and perspectives propose a total fusion between figures and landscape, constructed with a lack of tonal values; finally, there are other paintings with no figures at all, almost entirely resolved with line, which are concretion, explanation and synthesis. Nuria Enguita referred to some of them as belonging to a *'process of emptying the space, and reducing the volume and depth of the painting'* ²¹.

All these works are accompanied by a selection of watercolours, drawings, sketches, photographs, city maps and some copies of self-published books that, along with a self-portrait dated 1974 (pre-dating his Seville phase) and some canvases from 1987 (that on the contrary to what has been interpreted until now, prove that the stages in his work weren't so hermetic), form a broad panorama in which to situate and understand at least a part of Luis Claramunt's career. Together, this material confirms that this series of paintings encapsulates the start and the end of something; as Lanceta states: *'in two months – June and July of the scorching Sevillian summer – he made a series of works on the city with which he bid farewell to a mode of making and feeling painting'* ²².

The exhibition is completed by a catalogue and a special publication that sheds light for the first time on a series of photographs by the German photographer Andrea Stappert, taken in Luis Claramunt's studio in Seville in 1988.

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With an entirely independent attitude, working out of step and from the sidelines, Luis Claramunt nevertheless had a great historical awareness as a painter, reflecting lucidly on the meaning of his work in relation to the history that preceded it. As a self-taught painter, his references, reiterated in a great deal of critical writing, emphasise one idea above all others: the concept of painting being its own language, but one that is simultaneously shared. And it is still powerfully revealing that, during those Seville years, Claramunt confessed a somewhat unexpected desire, to *'make disappear any personal calligraphy in the painting and make it seem as though the material has worked on its own.'* *'In short, I'm becoming increasingly interested in making it seem as though the work has painted itself'* ²³, he said. Ángel González has arguably been the most attentive to this detail that proves that what might have been regarded as a marked style obeys precisely the opposite. González attributes it to something of an uncontrolled obsession, automatic and unavoidable, that leads the painter to paint without meaning to. It is akin to deactivating the expressive gesture itself in favour of a matter that goes even further and can be made with no need for the painter's hand. This liberating 'obsession' of suggesting that works paint themselves doubtless feeds that other rumour that circulates about the lack of witnesses who ever saw Claramunt painting. Chatting about the painters that, at some point or other, might have interested, if not necessarily influenced him, from Nonell to Van Gogh, Matisse to Delacroix, from the cave paintings of Altamira to children's book illustrations of adventures and pirates, he claims that all artists *'take from each place the same or similar bad habits to resolve their work'* ²⁴. For that reason, his language, deeply rooted in painting tradition, constitutes an essential model of our recent culture.

QUOTES:

1. Teresa Lanceta (2012) Ciudades vividas. Sevilla. Perspectiva y puente. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
2. Francisco Rivas, texto inédito (Archivo Francisco Rivas).
3. Nuria Enguita (2012) Prólogo. Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
4. Teresa Lanceta (2012) Ciudades vividas. Sevilla. Perspectiva y puente. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
5. Teresa Lanceta (2014). Luis Claramunt, viajero de libros y ciudades. Madrid.
6. Ángel González (2012). La Città Dolente. Aproximación a una improbable escuela gitana de pintura. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
- 7, 8. Luis Claramunt en Kevin Power (1986) Conversaciones con Luis Claramunt. *Sevilla. Luis Claramunt*. Sevilla: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Consejería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía. Exhibition catalogue.
9. Teresa Lanceta (2012) Ciudades vividas. Sevilla. Perspectiva y puente. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Catálogo de la exposición.
- 10, 11. Luis Claramunt en Kevin Power (1986) Conversaciones con Luis Claramunt. *Sevilla. Luis Claramunt*. Sevilla: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Consejería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía. Exhibition catalogue.
12. Teresa Lanceta (2012) Ciudades vividas. Sevilla. Perspectiva y puente. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
- 13, 14, 15, 16. Luis Claramunt en Kevin Power (1986) Conversaciones con Luis Claramunt. *Sevilla. Luis Claramunt*. Sevilla: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Consejería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía. Exhibition catalogue.
- 17, 18, 19, 20. Kevin Power en Kevin Power (1986) Conversaciones con Luis Claramunt. *Sevilla. Luis Claramunt*. Sevilla: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Consejería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía. Exhibition catalogue.
21. Nuria Enguita (2012) Prólogo. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
22. Teresa Lanceta (2012) Ciudades vividas. Sevilla. Perspectiva y puente. *Luis Claramunt. El viaje vertical*. Barcelona: MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. Exhibition catalogue.
- 23, 24. Luis Claramunt en Kevin Power (1986) Conversaciones con Luis Claramunt. *Sevilla. Luis Claramunt*. Sevilla: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Consejería de Cultura, Junta de Andalucía. Exhibition catalogue.

In parallel to this exhibition, you can also visit *Luis Baylón y Luis Claramunt: líneas de sombra* (Luis Baylón and Luis Claramunt: Shadow Lines) in los aficionados space in Madrid (Calle Duque de Alba 15, Esc. Izq, 2-6), from 5 to 8 p.m. on Fridays and from 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. If you want to visit the show another day, please contact: +34 675 129 585.
The official opening will be on Wednesday, September 17th, at 7 p.m. and it will run until November 16th, 2025.