

## JOSEP LLORENS ARTIGAS

(Barcelona, 1892 - Gallifa, 1980)

*I gather the primitive form: the one that gives the lathe. Thus, the forms of my work are similar to those of the primitive ceramics of all countries and all civilizations, and they have only come from my hands. My inventive and personal work is in the glazes and colours: here I am looking for the new.<sup>1</sup>*

Josep Llorens Artigas (Barcelona, 1892 - Gallifa, 1980) was born and raised in Barcelona. After a short period living in Girona, where he worked as a mechanic in the building of the iron bridge over the Onyar River (designed by the Eiffel company), he returned to Barcelona, where he worked as an accountant for a few years.



*Llorens Artigas working at his studio in Juli Verne Street, Barcelona. Photo: Otho Llovd.*

Artigas began his artistic education at the Academia Francesc Galí, -the most modern institution at that time in Barcelona-, continued at Crele Artístic de Sant Luc - where he coincided with Joan Miró, Joan Prats and Antoni Gaudí- and, as soon as it was established, he joined the Escola dels Bells Oficis, which is considered one of the axes of the *noucentist* spirit in Barcelona. It was in this school that Artigas began to focus on ceramics. During this period he was writing as an art critic in *La Veu de Catalunya* and mostly painted, of which few works remain. His inclination towards ceramics continued; the fact that the Bells Oficis school had a vast section devoted exclusively to this technique pushed him to master it. On the other hand, the exhibition of French Art of 1917 invited him to get to know the work of French important ceramists such as Delaherche, Bigot, Chapelet or Lenoble, which had a profound impact on him.

Since 1916 his trips to Paris, where he went to improve his knowledge of the technique, started to become more frequent, turning into long stays in the summer. When he finally moved to the city, in 1924, he had already found a core of friends and colleagues and had joined the avant-garde scene of the time. He often collaborated with artists like Raoul Dufy, Pablo Gargallo, Albert Marquet and Georges Braque. Although Artigas immersed himself in the bohemian life, his high exigency towards his work and research soon became known. His first individual exhibitions took place in 1928. In this year he took part of the *Salon d'Automne*, in Paris, and exhibited individually in Gallery A. M. Reitlinger. In 1935 he married Violette Gardy in Geneva, spent some time in Switzerland and returned to Paris, where he continued to work in his new studio, in Vitry. In 1936 he took part in the Milan Triennale and was awarded with the Diploma of Honour.

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<sup>1</sup> Josep Llorens Artigas, *Libreta "Fòrmules 1920-19"*. En Miralles, F., Llorens Artigas, Catálogo de obra. Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1992.

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Until 1939, while living in Paris, he focused on producing works for solo exhibitions. At the beginning of the war Artigas settles in Ceret, for a while, and in 1941 he moves to Barcelona. He set up his studio in Rue Juli Verne and began to teach Massana ceramics, slowly training a new generation of Catalan ceramists. In 1944 the first ceramics came out of the kiln thanks to the collaboration of Artigas and Miró. Eleven years later, in 1955, the two of them began the project that occupied Artigas' job until 1959. For this purpose they visited the Altamira cave paintings together.

In 1951 his life changed; he bought *El Racó*, an old 18th century farmhouse in Gallifa, close to Barcelona, and left the studio in Carrer Jules Verne. From this house he developed the mentioned long term project with Miró. He built two new ovens: the *Nikósthene*s - in honour of the prolific Athenian ceramist of the classical period, whose signature can be found on hundreds of vessels - and the *Song* - in honour of the Chinese dynasty that reigned in the 10th and 11th centuries, creator of essential and rigorous ceramics.

In 1948 Miró and Llorens exhibited their ceramics in the Maeght gallery, an exhibition that had great media repercussion on the Parisian scene. Until 1956, when they exhibited again in Maeght, the two artists worked together assiduously and at a high rythm of creation, revision and retouching of the pieces.

In 1955 UNESCO commissioned them to decorate its new headquarters in Paris, for which they created two ceramic murals. After this project -which received the international Grand Prize from the Guggenheim Foundation - similar commissions followed, such as the mural of the University of Harvard (1960), the Handels-Hochschule of Saint Gallen (1964), the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1966), Barcelona Airport (1970), Osaka Airport (1970), Cinemateque de Paris (definitively installed in the Museum of Vitoria) and the large group of works in the labyrinth of the Maeght Foundation at Saint Paul de Vence. These demanding projects forced him to reduce his exhibitions, although in 1969 he held solo shows in Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, Brussels, London and New York. In 1973 his wife died which reduced the intensity of Artigas' work. Until her death in 1980 he received numerous awards and prizes.



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