

THE AVANT-GARDE OF POWER. THE POWER OF THE AVANT-GARDE

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Interview with Luis González Robles, Government official with overall responsibility for contemporary art during Franco's regime.

"Can art, for example, represent a danger to the national character? Can it attack the integrity of that particular collective and human condition? I find it difficult to believe that enemy cannons of the aesthetic variety might be turned against a country in order to annihilate it and destroy its characteristic mode of self expression. [...] A way of painting cannot be directed against anyone [...] The qualification "anti-Spanish" cannot be awarded simply because a painter creates in his own way [...] The epithet is even more inappropriate when applied to artists who, in all their works, have shown themselves to be Spanish to the bone; as great rebels, great inventors, great creators".

This paragraph by the critic Eduardo Ducay, writing in the Madrid magazine *Índice de Artes y Letras* (Index of Art and Letters) in 1952, illustrates perfectly a question which, for a number of social, cultural and political reasons, has not been adequately tackled by art critics. We refer to the relationship established between Spanish avant-garde art of the post-war, and the cultural policy of Franco's state. Was there really a close relationship on both sides? Did those in power really, in fact, wish to manage the creative arena to their own advantage? How could such very different social perspectives merge? Ducay points out what seems to be a key fact regarding the state's idea about contemporary art: the practice of art, as conceived by the artists of the time, could not represent any kind of alternative to the established order - that is to say, contemporary art did no damage. Perhaps from there stem the paradoxes and contradictions of those artists who considered themselves to be warriors of criticism yet were at the same time pampered by the state; of which, furthermore, they took full advantage.

Amongst those of the previous regime who were responsible for fine arts, Luis González Robles, Commissioner for Exhibitions of the Dirección General de Bellas Artes from the 1950's to the 1970's, was, without doubt, the most relevant and influential figure in the conception and application of the state's policy in relation to avant-garde art. His senior ministerial responsibilities and his constant contact with the artists of the day make him a key figure through whom to know, at closer quarters, something of the ins-and-outs of a relationship which, at the very least, was never easy. The interview presented here seeks to examine that relationship, the lines of contact with the international artistic situation, and the role which the state considered art should play. The words of González Robles seem to confirm what Ducay wrote forty years ago.

Question - *If you agree, we could begin by talking about the general international post-war situation in which we encounter three basic artistic movements; French informalism, American expressionism, and the social realism which appeared in certain sections of the European left. Apart from these, following the civil war, Spain found itself possessed of various national referents such as Picasso, Miró and Dalí. From your perspective, what perception was there of the overall situation?*

L. González Robles - In the main, very confused. In almost all epochs, the artist's capacity for information has usually been pretty deficient. The artist has always lived in a somewhat isolated environment, and did so above all at that time. There were very few who took a look at what was going on beyond the hill that stood above their village.

Q - *But nevertheless, it's not difficult to see that while Paris exercised a significant physical influence, New York came to represent, above all for non-Catalan groups, an important touch stone.*

LGR - New York was a long way off then. In many ways Paris was much closer. However, I opened quite a number of doors to enable Spanish art to be known in the USA. The thing about Paris at the time was that everything was incredibly normal, very academical and dull, nothing strident, everything amiable, no-one being insulted. In the USA it was something else; there was an extraordinary energy and will, even though we didn't have a great deal of information about what was going on there.

Q - *With reference to the national "geniuses", it seems as though Picasso, apart from being a political referent, was essentially considered as a father figure; you'll remember Dalí's curious talk (1) at the Maria Guerrero Theatre in Madrid...*

LGR - Of course, I was there...I was one of the organisers together with Manolo Fraga and others.

Q - *If that talk seems to outline clearly the conflicting positions of each of those two artists, the figure of Miro is more difficult to place.*

LGR - Well you see, Miro always kept himself on the edge of all that. He didn't mix well with that salad.

Q - *However, the majority of artists and critics - Cirlot, Guasch, etc. - had recourse to Miro as a direct source for their aesthetic, and even political, motives.*

LGR - Cirlot had an incredible amount of information; he was the most informed of anybody, a monster, you understand? But what happened is that no-one of DAU AL SET followed exactly Miró's line of action. Miró himself, in the conversations we had, told me that he was rather annoyed because he saw that no-one really considered him seriously.

And if you look at those artists' articles and commentaries on Miró, they didn't exactly give him a great deal of praise.

Q - But for all that, Catalan artists took up Miró's discourse to a marked degree, as a way of channeling a kind of symbolist practice which, given the difficulties of openly expressing political ideas, could, by means of a certain hermeticism, provide cover for a social meaning.

LGR - As I understand it, Miró was considered to be a world apart. No-body followed his directives. They were in awe of him, but they weren't going to get into any fights on his behalf. I've talked a lot about this with Santos Torroella and Pepe Corredor...something strange was going on; Miró must have been light years ahead of them or the reverse, they were light years behind Miró. Tápies carried on with his little stars, his symbolisms, but it didn't have anything to do with Miró, the same with Tharrats, Cuixart. They held him in esteem, but they didn't, as it were, surrender to him. And I don't think they used Miró for any polemical ends. None of the artists of that time ever proposed creating any kind of political discourse. They didn't do so, and were a long way from even being able to think about it.

Q - Let's talk about the state's cultural policy.

LGR - There never was any. There never was any, nor is there now in Spain, nor will there ever be. Would you tell me honestly if the Generalitat has a cultural policy? Tell me! To create a policy is to develop a stylistic cohesion, and where is that to be found? Does the Reina Sofia have a policy? There's nothing there but an enthusiastic snobism, a backdrop that is amazingly commercial and economic.

Q - Could you explain in more detail what you understand by cultural policy?

LGR - A line which is honest and which has a specific direction. A bit what we tried to do - what I tried to do - in my day. To say "We're going for this, or for that!" A serious and sincere line. You can't run with the hare and the geese at the same time.

Q - While you held ministerial responsibility, did you attempt to set in motion a distinct line of artistic policy?

LGR - No, it wasn't wanted, they didn't want to. And it's made clear by the fact that those who came after me attempted to create a policy that was totally contrary, and which was fully accepted. Such is life.

Q - With respect to possible instructions...

LGR - But I've already told you there never were any! A France, an England, in part Italy, create state policies - though I may not always be in agreement with them as I am with France's - but here, there is none.

Q - When the I Bienal Hispanoamericana, which you organised, was held in 1951, and in which Sánchez Bella, Leopoldo Panero, Lafuente Ferrán collaborated...

LGR - Ainaud de Lasarte, Juan Ramón Masoliver, Santos Torroella...I was simply a co-ordinator, one more.

Q - ...At the inauguration of this show, Joaquín Ruiz Giménez, Minister of Education and Science at the time, read a document (2) which, at first glance, seems to represent an entire declaration of interests concerning the Government's wishes about avant-garde art.

LGR - I don't remember that.

Q - (Reads text)

LGR - Joaquín always enjoyed the pedagogical...But what you're reading contradicts the selection made, the spirit that presided. When he speaks about the Bienal, it was already in Madrid; the selection had already taken place. It would have made sense if he had said it to me in 1947 before I left for South America to research the works to be presented later. Do you see what I mean? Besides, I'm sure he wrote that text while he was having a stroll, and while we were finishing setting up the exhibition, with pictures hanging both in the Biblioteca Nacional and in the palaces at the Retiro. Joaquín always had his ideas, he's always so apostolic!

Q - In your role as principal commissioner for the arts, does the fact that you had a strong relationship with the avant-garde imply that there was a desire for a certain normalisation of the modern in Spain and perhaps abroad?

LGR - Look, the state existed, and continues to exist, on the sidelines of all that. It never had any influence, and it can't influence. If the artists wished to set Spain on a strong international footing, wonderful. But if anyone wants to confuse things and say that there was a political course bound in to all that, they're barking up the wrong tree. Any attempt to bismirch a job like that is complete idiocy. That's all fiction; no-one had that kind of international spirit in those days. Let's not exaggerate. Things were done because they were done and that's all there is to it.

Q - So you mean that you never received any instructions from your superiors in the Government?

LGR - None, for God's sake! Some people like to raise things like that in order to sling mud at tremendous work that got done, to say that I was a marionette, that I was a puppet in I don't know whose hands. Nobody ever gave me orders, nor does, nor ever will. Is that clear? That's the story. Never, they never knew what was going to be sent to a biennial or any other kind of exhibition. Let not your right hand know what your left hand does; that was, really, how I functioned, and it suited me very well. It isn't about whether one had freedom of action. It's not that. That's never been said. Things get done in that way. Others have done things differently, falsely, betraying their conscience and their very coherence. Not me. I did it because I had to do it. And I was never given anything. But there are certain people who have taken it upon themselves to say that I was running errands and all that kind of

thing. People who say to-day that they had nothing to do with all that. Sure, of course, many of to-day's great artists collaborated, took what they could, did well, and got on; and all of them, or almost all of them, accepted my introductions. They'd ring me and say: "I want to meet so-and-so." "No trouble." "I want such-and-such a person to come to my studio"; so they went. And to-day I keep calling on people, and in spite of the years, they keep letting me in.

Q - The coherence you've spoken about, what would you say it's based on?

LGR - On aesthetic lines. As is logical. You cannot walk from here to there slow, slow, quick, quick, slow. No, you have to walk as you would normally.

Q - Only on aesthetic lines? You would support a practice of art which submitted itself exclusively to artistic interests?

LGR - Do you believe that the art of young people to-day of your generation is influenced in any way by what's going on at the moment? No. Do they speak about corruption? Do they speak about what surrounds them now? Do they speak about disorder, intellectual disorder for instance? Do they speak about unease, about disinformation? They don't speak about any of this! To-day also, art refers only to art, but in a very sad way because to-day there are strange influences, especially sales. I've heard that youngsters ask, "And what's selling these days?" And afterwards they go away and paint what they've been told will sell. That's unforgivable.

Q - And didn't they ask that before, in the fifties?

LGR - No-one ever said it to me. And I never saw before what's happening now. Painters followed one line. That's why I told you I'd be a disappointment, because I don't know anything. I don't understand.

Q - I'd like to know whether, during those years, the artists of the avant-garde got in touch with you often, either for artistic or personal reasons.

LGR - Yes, a great many of them, those of El Paso, Dau al set...They asked me about dealers. One of those who never asked for anything was Tharrats. That boy lived on the sidelines of things, as a result of various private circumstances.

Q - Quite a lot of them have said they never had strong contacts with ministerial people.

LGR - [with irony] They all struggled really hard. You know the saying, "Tell me what you brag about and I'll tell you what you're short on". But all that leads nowhere.

Q - An accusation that's been made frequently, and which you must have heard an endless number of times, is that Franco used art and culture in ways that were propagandist.

LGR - That's as idiotic as you can get. If that was so I'd have been covered in medals, which didn't happen. All those of whom you speak, all of them, have their Fine Arts medal. And I have nothing. Why? Because I was a civil servant. Full stop. An anonymous civil servant. It's difficult to believe. I never had a car, I never had a chauffeur and I never got called to the Pardo.

Q - Surely though that wasn't the norm at the time, for posts like yours.

LGR - For instance I never, not once, received a commission, thank God. I'm going to tell you something. One day, Juana Moró said to me in a meeting: "Send me people, and you'll get a good commission" - and I've got witnesses too, two very important artists. I said to her "No-one has ever said that to me. You are the first person who's had the cheek to say that to me". I never set foot in that gallery from then on. I've worked with Metrás, with Gaspar, with Clavé, with loads of people from Barcelona, from Madrid, no-one had ever said that to me before. And when Juana said to me "With every client you send me, you'll get your percentage of so much", "Juana, my dear, I will never again set foot in your gallery". You understand?

Q - One is aware of the great significance of the market, and for the groups created in the fifties it seems furthermore to have represented a trigger. All of them lasted only briefly, before being dispersed in the market. Why was that?

LGR - I've never considered the question. But, look, Spain is a patchwork of many kingdoms. That's all.

Q - Many artists have suggested that there was more support for exhibitions abroad than within the country during that period.

LGR - That's a joke. Whoever says that is lying. Specifically, I never organised an exhibition abroad if I hadn't had it held in Spain first. Genovés, Canogar, Feito, Suárez, Rivera, Saura, all of them I exhibited here before taking them abroad.

Q - Around 1955, Spain was politically fairly isolated from...

LGR - I'd already been to Moscow; privately, as you can imagine, not an official visit. I can tell you, that was an adventure.

Q - At that time Spain established an alliance with the U.S.A. and was accepted as a member of the U.N. In that same year, the exhibition "Modern Art in the U.S.A." was held in Barcelona, organised by the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). As is well known, this was a touring exhibition that was seen throughout Europe. In 1958, "New American Painting", also a touring exhibition, arrived in Madrid. Before then, American painters didn't come to Spain. The measures necessary to bring those exhibitions about, do you know from where they initiated?

LGR - I didn't deal with any of that. It was the Director of Cultural Relations who was responsible for that. I had nothing to do with it. And it was a thing for other departments.

Q - Perhaps you know of some recent studies which have suggested

that those shows were deftly proposed by the American institutions as socio-political mirrors for Europe, with the intention of countering certain left-wing cultural developments.

LGR - I wasn't aware of any of that. I just went to the openings. But you must realize that those kinds of exhibitions didn't influence me. When I did "Art of to-day in America and Spain", for example, I didn't pick many of the artists who were in those exhibitions. No-one ever said to me: "Hey, don't forget to bring so-and-so". It wasn't talked about, or commented on. You'll see that in those American catalogues my name doesn't appear or anything, not like to-day when even the museum attendants at the Reina Sofia get a mention.

Q - Specifically, McCray and the director of the MOMA, Barr...

LGR - I recall that the poor fellow was U.S. representative at the Sao Paulo Biennial. However, Barr never had any influence on anything there. I was running things, together with Matarazo [all-powerful Brazilian industrialist, patron of the Sao Paulo Biennial]. He had brought a very bad selection, nothing of which took any prizes; we won them all for Spain.

Q - As I've said, they thanked the Spanish authorities for their extensive collaboration in the exhibitions of modern Spanish painting that were held in New York in 1960 (4); at the MOMA, the Guggenheim, and the Pierre Matisse gallery. According to texts published by Robert Lubar, Millares seemed very worried because he was really afraid that members of the regime could be manipulating the artists, in order to give the impression of complete freedom when it came to working in Spain.

LGR - These are just comments. It's very human, always wanting to run with the geese and the hounds, and one can't. Don't take any notice of those matters. It upsets me to talk about people who are dead. It makes me very sad.

Q - Part of the critical establishment in America at that time had problems with the exhibitions (5), basically because they said that freedom in art is only possible in a free society.

LGR - That troubled them, yes, but at the same time they liked what they saw.

Q - In what way did you or your department participate in these exhibitions?

LGR - I was a very close friend of d'Hannencourt, Porter McCray; sure my boy. I spoke with them in New York, they came here, we met in Venice and then I talked to them about Tom, Dick and Harry, and that was it. Nothing particular happened. What do you think about this artist or that one? Good or bad. And that was it.

Q - The proximity between certain values of American formalism (universalism, expressionism, explosive abstract, "liberal" open nationalism, extreme individualism and interior freedom) and a number of statements made by the Spanish authorities at the time - such as the previous quotation of the minister Ruiz-Giménez - appears evident. If we are to believe the words of Saura, you yourself were inciting Spaniards to paint replica Pollocks (6).

LGR - I don't remember that. That saddens me. As far as Ruiz Giménez goes, everything that came to the I Bienal in 1951 was the logical consequence of the foreign influences on each of the artists in their different countries, whether Spain, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay. We can't avoid foreign influences, but please don't imagine that they necessarily dictate anything to anyone, as you seem to be insinuating. To-day, just as in the past although not so much, information overwhelms and, no, that can't be avoided.

Q - But in pieces you published, you always championed a radical and vital creative individuality (7).

LGR - What I was referring to is that art must be made by individuals, it must be well done and well put. I mean that artists must have strong and defined stylistic personalities. It's important that artists don't limit themselves solely to a particular line, but that they be themselves.

Q - And the fact of proposing a type of individualistic and very free avant-garde art that, logically, wouldn't be fully understood by those in power, really caused no sparks to fly?

LGR - No-one ever said anything to me. I'm not bothered by politics; that's why everything went well for me.

Q - However, the regime wasn't particularly fond of great modern leaps. It's even been said that, when visiting exhibitions, Franco would laugh at the more daring canvases.

LGR - Who's said that?

Q - Juan Manuel Bonet, for example (8).

LGR - That's rubbish. I remember one scene perfectly, because it was filmed by the NODO. Franco and I were opening an exhibition of artists from the States. Sotomayor [director of the Academy and the Prado Museum at the time] was about ten or fifteen steps behind us, beside the Caudillo's wife and other ministers. I turned to Franco and said to him, "Can I speak freely to you, Excellency?". "Of course!", he said. So then I said to him, "I believe you have an exquisitely academic taste". He stopped and asked me what I meant by that. So then I suggested that perhaps he was somewhat too influenced by Sotomayor's fussy academicism. I remember as well, that I gestured a lot as I said this, moving my arms - which, I afterwards learnt, scandalized those who were with him, since no-body normally moved their arms around when speaking with Franco. When we finished going round the exhibition, and just after seeing Rauschenberg and Rivers, Franco said to me, "This is a really fantastic experience, I'm deeply impressed. It's a reality I didn't know". Franco was overwhelmed. I swear to this on my parents' grave. Nor did Motherwell's painting *Elegy for the Republic*, which I showed them one day, produce any laughter; it's something that some people had warned me about, having problems I

mean, but nothing happened, it was all much simpler than that; what is important is the paintings, whether they are good or not, everything else is just to do with complicating matters. So I'm surprised about what you tell me Bonet said. I can't believe that a man of over fifty speaks such rubbish. Do you see what I mean? It makes me very sad. I'll tell you something else that happened with Juan Genovés. In an exhibition one day, Genovés was showing a painting that made reference to recent political repression in the Complutense University in Madrid. Someone suggested that the presence of this painting wasn't very appropriate. Well, in the end the picture was in the exhibition and it didn't cause any apparent furore.

Q - So would you say that there was an indifference on the part of those in power towards contemporary art?

LGR - But I never talked about such things with them. I never worried about that. No-one, none of the directors with whom I worked gave me orders in that respect. With Joaquín Ruiz-Morales, who was one of the best Fine Arts directors I had - with whom, adapting the saying, I could claim that "on Spanish exhibitions the sun never sets", because we had exhibitions throughout the world - I never had to listen to strange or catch questions, like those you're telling me of. All of that is the work of Bonet, of his feverish mind, his political self-seeking, of wanting an immediate good post so he can continue to live off the Reina Sofía. It's ridiculous. I find such lies repugnant.

Q - Could we continue with the reception of the Spanish artists in the US?

LGR - Yes, well in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, Yale, Boston. San Antonio in Texas, no-body expressed any political reservations whatsoever, everybody was excited by the Spanish art. No-one had any kind of reservation.

Q - If it was so well received in the U.S. of the 1950s, does that imply that the art produced here was, in some ways, in accord with the formalist tendencies of the time? Were you fully aware of this? If so, in what way was it a criteria for you, if indeed it was?

LGR - As far as I was concerned, no. I don't know about the artists.

Q - What personal relationship did you have with artists who were, or claim to have been, markedly left-wing; Oteiza, Genovés, and others?

LGR - I wasn't interested in whether they were reds, homosexuals or whatever. I'm an extremely good friend of Pepe Guinovart; and of many others. I have a rule which says: "Don't interfere with other peoples' lives, and they won't interfere with yours". Oteiza, for instance, the only prize he won in his day I gave to him in San Paulo in 1961. I went round to see him, I took him to Brazil and he won.

Q - But you must have been aware of the political texts which he wrote.

LGR - But I didn't care about that. And, at any rate, when I asked him to write something for the exhibition he didn't write those kinds of things, quite the contrary; and it's not because I told him not to. And when he had to speak at a press conference, Jorge spoke so calmly, without getting into any mess. I remember one day I said to him, "Hey, don't get up too late to-morrow - because he always went to bed really late and got up late too - because to-morrow at 10.00 Tom, Dick and Harry are coming and we've got a press conference in San Paulo state with the television, etc." He spoke, and didn't make any improper remarks. And if afterwards he wrote some of his other ideas, well it went completely unnoticed, no-one was aware of it, no-one called attention to it. There's a group of people who now want to justify themselves, making up stories. For endless years I've been constantly denying various lies. No-one gave me orders, nor said what I had to do, and no-one gave me directives. I mean, the directors didn't even know what we were taking to the biennial exhibitions! And if, once the list of artists going to the biennials was published, they hadn't liked it, they could always have said to me, "Right, Luis, you won't be organising the next biennial exhibition", but that never happened.

Q - Nevertheless - it seems there was a moment at which this relationship broke down. According to Saura (9), following the 1958 Venice Biennial, neither he nor Tapiés, nor Chillida took part again in an official show.

LGR - Saura is a sickly lad, who, well...His physical disability has really affected him. To be honest, I've never made head or tail of him. Once we took thirteen Spanish painters to Paris. The Marquis of Casaragosa, who was the Spanish ambassador at the time, invited us all to lunch. Saura didn't stay for the dessert and told me he had to keep an appointment. He was the only one who left. Afterwards the rest of us went to where the exhibition was being held, to finish setting up. At six o'clock, I'm there with Felto, Diego and others and I say, "Let's go to such-and-such a bar and have a drink". And there, we bump into a Spanish painter who's dead now. Manolo Luque he was called. And he says to me, "Listen, why didn't Saura go to the lunch?". And Rivera says to him, "What do you mean, he didn't go to the lunch? He was sitting next to me". And Luque says "Ah, well he came here to have a cup of coffee at three, and when I asked him about the lunch he said, 'I'm not going to any lunches! In fact, I'm not in the exhibition' - Luque says Saura told him - and that I had turned up with a policeman at Juana Mordó's gallery, and would you believe it, had taken away all of his paintings. We were all staying at the same hotel except for him - he was in his own house - and I said to Manolo Rivera, "He really upsets me, that boy, what a shame; but why does the lad do things like this? Have you got his 'phone number?" "Yes", he says. I ring him, and he promises and swears that he never said any of those things; it was always like that with him.

Q - But is that commentary of Saura's true, nevertheless?

LGR - But, after that he went to Paris with me! What happened is that I never repeated people. When I'd once worked with someone, I liked to choose different people. I'd take them to exhibitions where they won important international prizes, but then I'd leave them to go their own

way. They know that. They all worked with me when they wanted to. I didn't like to overdo it with any one painter; in that way no-one could start saying I was favouring so-and-so.

Q - And all the artists you invited accepted?

LGR - Yes, all of them, or almost all of them.

Q - Why is your name not particularly linked to the avant-garde movements of the 1960s? Arroyo, Crónica, Realidad.

LGR - I had tremendous friends amongst them. But I couldn't always take every-body.

Q - What do you consider to be the fundamental differences between state support of contemporary art in the 1950s and '60s and that given to-day?

LGR - With each day that passes I'm happier about those days and sadder about what's going on now, because I see that nothing at all is being done, because a lot of possibilities are being wasted, because Spain has lost its standing in the world. People outside Spain are always asking me, "But what's happening in Spain, that everything is going so badly?". Sometimes I don't know what to reply. It hurts me, this climate of lost prestige; what is there now? For instance, in Munich when we opened a Guinovart show, people crowded to get in, because they knew that Spanish meant something good. I've been offering 500 pesetas for a long time now to any-one who can show me the word Spain in the international pages of the Venice Biennial. The trouble with the commissioners to-day is that they don't have connections abroad. They wander about without knowing where they are. To-day, every-one wants to make eclectic selections which will satisfy everybody, and when you're trying to satisfy everybody, there's no policy possible. In the fifties and sixties there weren't many galleries in the world that didn't have a Spanish artist. I was led up of sending catalogues and slides all over the world. I'm not lying, I've hung on to everything. I've got an enormous correspondence, and all of it very well ordered. In the Bilbao-Vizcaya Bank I've got various files and boxes, some of which contain letters from Tapiés. Some of the letters are very revealing about the dispute between Tapiés and Cuixart. They also talk of the emotion they felt (Tapiés and his wife) when they read my letters. And a lot of other interesting things.

Q - What opinions do you have about the development of the careers of those artists you helped when they were just beginning?

LGR - Look, there are all sorts, as is true everywhere. What surprises me is the ease with which people change. I remember that at one time every-one was in agreement with me that the Academia was a retrograde establishment, every-one was a fierce enemy of Bellas Artes and now everybody - excuse the phrase - is taking their pants down to become a member. They almost all are by now. Every-one slugged off the Academia, and now I see how they're falling over themselves and doing the impossible in order to deliver their little papers. I won't name names. But it's a great shame. And I don't understand this desire to throw everything overboard and fling mud with such viciousness. The thing is, it's difficult for people to understand that I'm a liberal, given that I'm also an apostolic Catholic and right-wing. Full stop and Amen.

(1). On the 11th November 1951, Dali gave a talk entitled "Picasso and me", at the María Guerrero Theatre, Madrid. He accused Picasso of having tried to "kill the beauty of art with his communist materialism". At the end of the talk a telegram was signed by those present, in support of Picasso for what he represented of the "glory of Spanish painting", over and above divergent ideologies. From Paris, Picasso was to comment with irony, "Dali holds out his hand, but all I see is the Falange".

Spain. Half a Century of Avant-garde Art. 1939-85. Santillana Foundation and Ministry of Culture, Madrid, 2 vv., 1985.

Picasso's reply: A.S. (Anonymous); *Revista*, Barcelona, no.4, May 1952. Cited, *ibid*.

(2). "Only by helping artists to be authentic, by keeping them apart from strange insinuations which might divert them from their true selves, can a veritable artistic policy be conceived. Concerning our specific situation, it seems to us that such assistance for the authentic should follow two routes: on the one hand, stimulate the historic sense, that is, the situating of the artist in the present epoch, avoiding all deceptive formalist traditionalism; on the other hand, strengthen the national feeling, avoiding all false universalism, all provincial admiration for anything that happens outside one's own fatherland, which does not mean - far from it - diverting artists from international artistic currents, but simply trying to be attentive to their national values [...]. This free unfolding of the spirit, which is proposed as a fundamental artistic policy, is an essential weapon in the struggle against materialism [...] the grand heresy of our time. The more that communist states exert themselves in order to press art into their service - creating a tremendous caricature and mystification of true art - the more serious and urgent is our task. If it can be brought about that art serves its rightful master - the spirit - through this fact alone, it becomes an essential ally of all Christian, political striving. [...] This, fundamentally, is the great concern that should orient artistic policy...that for those who serve art it be not a trivial or routine occupation, but a 'serious adventure', a dramatic factor in all that is best and most noble in their existence, in both the individual and collective realms".

Joaquín Ruiz Giménez, Minister of Education and Science; talk "Art and Politics", I Biennial Hispanoamericana de Arte, Madrid, 1951.

(3). "Modern Art in the United States", a touring exhibition organised by MOMA of New York, visited the following European cities: Paris, Zurich, Frankfurt, London, The Hague, Vienna, Belgrade and Barcelona. Presented in 1955 in Barcelona within the III Biennial Hispanoamericana, the show included a broad gathering of American abstract expressionists.

"The New American Painting", similarly organised by MOMA, was presented in Madrid in 1958, as part of a European itinerary comprising: Basel, Milan, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, London and Madrid.

(4). In 1960, in the catalogue of the exhibition "New Spanish Painting

and Sculpture" - seen in various U.S. cities - Porter McCray, director of the Department of Touring Exhibitions of MOMA, New York, commented that the show had been made possible by "the generous hospitality of Spanish institutions and the warm response of the Spanish public to new American art". In 1960 the Pierre Matisse gallery in New York presented the exhibition "Four Spanish Painters", with Millares, Canogar, Saura and Rivera; MOMA, the exhibition "New Spanish Painting and Sculpture" (Canogar, Chillida, Chirino, Cuixart, Farreras, Felto, Millares, Munoz, Oteiza, Rivera, Saura, Serrano, Suárez, Tapiés, Tharrats and Viola) and the Guggenheim Museum "Before Picasso, After Miró".

Porter McCray; 'acknowledgements' *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture*, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York (MOMA), 1960-62 (tour to New York, Washington D.C. and 7 more states).

Quoted by Robert S. Lubar; "Millares and Spanish avant-garde painting in America", *La Balsa de la Medusa*, Madrid, no. 22, 1992.

(5). "Spanish painting of the post-war is in no way an avant-garde movement but a provincial aberration. Let us not forget that it has been restricted by the conditions of the dictatorship. The atmosphere of freedom necessary for the development of a genuine avant-garde movement is lacking. [...] All these efforts at frank self-expression - which are, in reality, a protest against repression - fail, because they are necessarily channelled into culturally acceptable forms".

Natalie Edgar, referring to the various exhibitions of Spanish art being held in New York at the time; "Is there a New Spanish School?", *Art News*, no. 59, New York, September 1960. Quoted in Lubar, *op.cit*.

(6). "The commissioner for exhibitions at that time [referring to the Venice Biennial of 1958] used to encourage the avant-garde artists with patriotic phrases such as: 'I want very large, very abstract, very dramatic and very Spanish paintings'".

Antonio Saura, in S. Amor: "Conversations with Antonio Saura", *El País*, Madrid, 15th January 1978.

(7). "Groups [referring to EL PASO] that demonstrate these young peoples' interest in experimenting, each day with increased desire for artistic excellence, presided over by the 'work well done' which characterises the Spanish artist, and which is reflected in that profound and unusual knowledge of the painter's materials, in the sense of composition and, above all, in a certain personal and original crafting, fruit of their innate - and blessed - individuality".

Luis González Robles; *Spanish Artists in the Sao Paulo Biennial*, Madrid, 1961.

(8). "During the exhibition opening [I Biennial Hispanoamericana, held in Madrid in 1951] Franco reacted to the most modern rooms with laughter. The director of the Prado Museum, the out-dated painter and ex-mayor of the Coruña during the war, Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor, who was on the Board organising the biennial, declared that the avant-garde artists could do with a trip to the psychiatrist".

J.M. Bonet; "From Clan to Zai", *Lápiz*, no. 79, Madrid, 1991.

(9). "All I can say is that from a certain day [reference to Chillida and Tapiés' prizes in the Venice Biennial of 1958], Tapiés, Chillida and I decided not to represent Spain officially again, either in or outside the country".

Antonio Saura; in S. Amor; *op. cit*.

Luis González Robles

Extremely cultivated ('you should have seen Nasser's face when I addressed him in Arabic'), well travelled ('I've been around the world two or three times'), personal friend of innumerable national and international political and cultural figures (Belisario Betancur, Alfred Barr, Eugenio d'Ors, among others), a profound believer ("I am sure that God has always lighted my way, if not my life would not have gone so well"), and with a great, innate, gift of persuasion, Luis González Robles (Sevilla, 1916) began his cultural trajectory with Catholic Action in Seville. He continued in the theatre, in his organising and directing of various plays. In Madrid in 1942 he formed and directed the "Teatro de Cámara". Through this group he formed personal relationships with important cultural figures of the time, such as Luca de Tena, Marañon, etc. To give an example, as he himself points out he was the first person to present a play by Sartre in Madrid, in 1942.

Luis González Robles' attention turned to painting and sculpture when, in 1950 in connection with the organisation of the first Biennial Hispanoamericana de Arte, he came in contact with Latin American artists; the exhibition opened in Madrid in 1951. He subsequently prepared and directed the next two Hispanoamerican biennial exhibitions, in Havana (1952) and Barcelona (1954).

Shortly afterwards, the Cultural Relations Board of the Minister of Foreign Affairs entrusted him with the selection of Spanish contemporary art exhibits for the Venice, Alexandria, Tokio, Sao Paulo and Lubiana Biennials (27 Grand Prizes were awarded to Spanish artists between 1954 and 1974), as well as with the conception and organisation of a variety of Spanish modern art shows in Europe and America. From then on, González Robles was to become a principal figure in the development of public exhibiting programmes, as well as in the promotion of, and support for, avant-garde art of the time, holding "de facto" ultimate responsibility for modern art under the Franco regime, moving constantly between cultural departments within the Ministries of Education and Science, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the end of the 1950s, he was named Director of the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art (MEAC), for which a new building was constructed in Madrid's University City. He also became Commissioner for Exhibitions of the Dirección General de Bellas Artes, of the Ministry of Education and Science, from where he organised numerous exhibitions on art, design and architecture.

In 1983, he retired from the Commission, in which he had worked uninterruptedly since 1957. Although he rarely performs as commissioner nowadays ("I decided to retire from the ring; 77 is pretty old") González Robles is still involved in various activities, including the production of a collection of monographs on art history to accompany a visual disk.