

From Waste to Living Nature in Maruja Mallo: *Mostra Espanha's* Guest Works at MAC/CCB

Spain returns to Lisbon through two works by the Surrealist painter Maruja Mallo. These “Guest Works” will be on display at MAC/CCB from 15 September to 29 November 2026, marking the launch of the ninth edition of the biennial exhibition that brings Spanish culture closer to the Portuguese public.

Basuras (1930) and *Naturaleza viva* (1943) represent two perspectives on the Galician artist's oeuvre, taking us on a journey from the grey suburbs of pre-war Madrid to the fullness of colour of the beaches of Valparaíso, Chile, during her American exile. These two works—which form part of the Colección Centro de Arte Fundación María José Jove—are in perfect harmony not only with the theme of this edition, “Spain in Motion: Diversity and Sustainable Futures,” but also with three of its core pillars: art, culture, oceans, and sustainability; art, ecology, and climate change; and art, culture, borders, and ruralities. As happens every two years, the inauguration of *Mostra Espanha* is marked by a “Guest Work,” but in 2026 the initiative takes on the plural.

Following a major retrospective at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2025, Maruja Mallo now comes to Lisbon. Patricia Molins, the curator of that exhibition, describes the dialogue between the two works as follows:

Basuras belongs to a period marked by personal crisis and political upheaval in Spain, during which the artist and her fellow members of the Generation of '27 (Lorca, Dalí, Buñuel, among others) denounced a country trapped in the past. Naturaleza viva, painted during her exile in Argentina after the Civil War, reveals a new Constructivist formal language for representing reality as a “set of things that responds to materiality and universal consciousness,” in Mallo's words. Created at two decisive moments in the artist's life and career, these paintings show how the animate and the perishable—life itself—acquire an enduring meaning through art.

Meanwhile, the artistic director of MAC/CCB, the Spanish curator Nuria Enguita, highlights Maruja Mallo's contribution to art history:

Maruja Mallo was the great artist of the Spanish avant-garde, always rebellious in the face of imposed conventions, advocating for more open canons. She took part in Madrid's cultural life in the 1920s alongside Salvador Dalí, Federico García Lorca, and María Zambrano, and spent time in Paris in the early 1930s. After a brief return to Madrid, she was forced into exile in Buenos Aires, where she began her American phase alongside other exiled intellectuals. Through her painting,

scenography, and theatricalised poses for the camera, she became interested in popular forms of expression, the relationship between all natural species, cosmic energy, and the devastation of the earth. The presence of the female body, whether direct or as a reference in her Living Natures, is connected to a specific energy, but also to the idea of a “new woman.” Since 1974, her standing has continued to grow, firmly establishing her place in art history.

Maruja Mallo was born in Lugo in 1902 and died in Madrid in 1995. She studied at the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando and attended the Escuela Superior de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado de Madrid. She took an interest in geography in Spain and cosmography in Argentina. A proponent of magical realism, she reconciled the avant-garde with tradition, her heart rooted in folk art. She was closely associated with Surrealism and, in a later phase, developed a profound interest in the fourth dimension; she began to advocate geometric order in works of art, seeking to reconcile the visions of the microcosm and macrocosm. A fervent Republican and a free, independent woman, she was a prominent figure of the Generation of '27, associated with artists, writers, and filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel, María Zambrano, and Salvador Dalí, the latter describing her as “half angel, half shellfish.” Federico García Lorca famously championed her work, stating: “Her paintings are the ones I have seen painted with the most imagination, emotion, and sensuality.”

Mostra Espanha was established in 2009 with the aim of bringing Spanish culture closer to the Portuguese public. In its ninth edition, the festival presents more than 30 proposals, ranging from the visual arts to dance, theatre, music, literature, and cinema, across 21 Portuguese municipalities. Also in Lisbon, the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado will present Joaquín Sorolla’s *Pescadoras valencianas*, on loan from the Museo Sorolla in Madrid, continuing to celebrate the ever-renewing ancestral connection between the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula.