Essence and expression are the two key terms in defining this collection of twentieth-century masterpieces, which its owner, Jaime Botín, has generously deposited at Centro Botín for its permanent display.

These eight works of undisputed visual quality are by renowned, prestigious artists: Francis Bacon, Juan Gris, Francisco Gutiérrez Solana, José Gutiérrez Solana, Henri Matisse, Isidre Nonell, Joaquín Sorolla and Daniel Vázquez Díaz. They were all produced in the early twentieth century at the height of the avant-gardes, a complex and influential moment which defined this collection of twentieth-century masterpieces, which its owner, Jaime Botín, has generously deposited at Centro Botín for its permanent display.

All these works share three common features: the desire and perspective of the group maximum expression through colour and light, the use of literal images as a common means of communication; and, finally, portraiture, the true essence of the expression.

Self Portrait with Injured Eye was painted by Francis Bacon in 1972, a few months after the suicide of his model and lover George Dyer. The painting expresses Bacon’s solitude, bereavement and his deep sorrow following his loss, while at once condensing it into a compact, universal symbol of distressing expression that develops and presents the human figure in an image that, despite the art’s construction in various planes, favours curved lines that soften the contour. Here, Cosío also used glazes and sprinkled the surface of the canvas with white dots to create the characteristic atmosphere of his paintings.

In The Mask Maker, José Gutiérrez Solana painted the portrait of his friend Emeterio Cossío, who was a known costume designer. The artist captures his friend’s personality in a symmetrical composition, with well-balanced spaces. The work comes from his late production and, notwithstanding the overall blackness, it is a colourful painting endowed with an atmosphere of its own.

In Spanish Woman, Henri Matisse recalls his journey to Spain in 1911 to visit the Prado Museum and to see Andalucía, from where he returned to France with luggage full of brocades and mantillas and a powerful new light in his palette, that would be materialised in clean, open colours, which would continue to transform into a light and more subtle, more luminous style.

Portrait of My Mother is one of portraiture’s greatest exponents. Woman in Red was painted in 1931, after the artist settled in Paris, and at 19, he painted her in the beach of Valencia. Especially worth unveiling is the delicate use of light on his restrained palette, rendered with thick brushstrokes and bright highlighting.

Daniel Vázquez Díaz is one of portraiture’s greatest exponents. He painted his Half-figure Body in 1907, at a time when he abandoned his portraits of gypsy women, the main character in his works until then, and started to paint more serene, collected and magnificent portraits of women. He also applied his colour as the sole element used to model the figure, superposing white and blues to contrast with the black hair of his models.

To The Water by Joaquín Sorolla is a work of great sensitivity and refinement which materialises the atmosphere of the beach of Valencia. Especially worth unveiling is the delicate use of light on his restrained palette, rendered with thick brushstrokes and bright highlighting.

María José Salazar
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