MoMA PRESENTS RETROSPECTIVE SPANNING FOUR DECADES OF FILMS BY ICONOCLASTIC CATALAN DIRECTOR, PERE PORTABELLA

Exhibition Includes U.S. Premiere of The Silence before Bach, September 26

Pere Portabella
September 26–October 6, 2007
The Roy and Niuta Titus 1 and 2 Theaters

NEW YORK, August 23, 2007—The Museum of Modern Art presents a retrospective of the films of veteran Catalan political filmmaker Pere Portabella (b. 1929, Barcelona). Portabella, a director at the forefront of avant-garde Spanish cinema has, over the past 40 years, produced a wide range of narrative and documentary works known for the formal beauty of their composition and complex interrelationship of image and sound, many of them involving symbolic resistance to the 1939–75 regime of General Francisco Franco. The exhibition includes films that have consistently expanded the expressive potential of the medium through his subverting of the notion of genre, particularly for horror films, fantasy films, and thrillers, and have served as allegorical critiques of the right wing Spanish administration. Presented from September 26 to October 6, 2007, in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters, Pere Portabella will feature the director’s first appearance in the United States for the U.S. premiere of his latest film The Silence before Bach (2007) on September 26.

The exhibition is organized by Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and Mark Nash, Professor and Head of the Department Curating Contemporary Art, Royal College of Art, London.

The 14-film series features the avant garde horror films Vampir Cuadecuc (1970) and Umbracle (1972), both starring Christopher Lee; the powerful documentary General Report on Some Interesting Facts for a Public Showing (1976); and The Silence before Bach, which explores the transformation of our experience of the world through music. Throughout his career, Portabella maintained ongoing working relationships with Catalan artists Joan Miró, Carles Santos, and Joan Brossa. Another highlight of this series is a quartet of films chronicling Miró and his works.

“Pere Portabella is an important figure in the development of modern European cinema, who is little known in the States,” says Mr. Kardish. “Our retrospective hopes to bring to the attention of those interested in contemporary culture the achievements of this radical artist who extends the boundaries of cinema. I am pleased that Portabella will introduce the premiere of The Silence before Bach and introduce Vampir Cuadecuc 35 years after MoMA premiered it and Portabella’s passport was cancelled by the Spanish government.”

In conjunction with the retrospective at MoMA, Pere Portabella will make his first U.S. appearances at roundtable discussions with film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, a longtime...
champion of Portabella’s work, and Mark Nash, at New York University, September 27 and 28, 2007, and at the world premiere of The Silence before Bach at MoMA on September 26.

Portabella earned a degree in chemistry before co-founding in 1959, with Francisco Molero, the influential production company Films 59, which was responsible for fiction films implicitly critical of Franco. Among them were Marco Ferreri's El Cochechito (The Wheelchair, 1959), Carlos Saura's feature-length debut Los Golfos (The Hoodlums, 1960), and Luis Buñuel's Viridiana (1961). Portabella had his passport revoked when Luis Buñuel's Viridiana (1961), which he helped to make, embarrassed Spain at the Cannes Film Festival in 1962 and forced Portabella into temporary exile in Italy. Because of the Viridiana furor, the director was not permitted to travel to the United States to introduce MoMA's first screening of a Portabella film, Vampir Cuadecuc (1970), on January 25, 1972. When democracy returned to Spain in 1975, Portabella served as a senator in the Catalan government from 1977–88 and throughout his various careers he continued to make cinema.

Pere Portabella is made possible with the support of the State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad (SEACEX). Films and texts for the exhibition were lent by MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona) and Portabella’s own production company, Films 59. Additional support and programs are provided by two New York University Centers: the King Carlos I of Spain and the Catalan Center. Additional assistance was provided by Anabel Garcíá and Marta Rincón of SEACEX, Marcelo Espósito and Jorge Ribalta of the MACBA, and Mary Anne Newman and Laura Turéégano at NYU.

Images are available at www.moma.org/press

***************PRESS SCREENINGS***************

The Warner Screening Room
The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Building for Education and Research
4 West 54 Street

Wednesday, September 5

10:30 a.m. Die Stille vor Bach (The Silence before Bach, 2007). Directed by Pere Portabella. 102 min.

Thursday, September 6

10:30 a.m. Vampir Cuadecuc (1970). Directed by Pere Portabella. 75 min.
12:00 p.m. Umbracle (1972). Directed by Pere Portabella. 85 min.
PERE PORTABELLA

SCREENING SCHEDULE

[All films directed by Portabella and in Spanish with English subtitles, except where indicated otherwise]

Wednesday, September 26

5:30  Playback. 1970. Spain. Playback documents a Carles Santos recording in which the chorus of the Liceu of Barcelona converts a musical text into a verbal and physical performance. 8 min.

Vampir Cuadecuc. 1970. Spain. With Christopher Lee. Vampir Cuadecuc is a delirious reflection on the codes and conventions of the horror film through the language of structural materialist cinema. Shot on the set of Jesús Franco’s Count Dracula (1970), with a compelling soundtrack by Carles Santos, the film alternates between being a horror film-with intertextual references back to Carl Dreyer’s Vampyr (1932)-and documenting Franco’s filming. This film evinces a distinct authorial style, evidenced through Portabella’s use of high-contrast photography and his blending of documentary and fiction. 75 min.

7:30  Die Stille vor Bach (The Silence before Bach). 2007. Spain. Written by Pere Portabella, Carles Santos, Xavier Albertí. Portabella’s latest film is about the transformation of our experience of the world through music, and explores the dramaturgical relation between music and image. Works by Johann Sebastian Bach, as well as two of Felix Mendelssohn’s sonatas, are performed on original and modern instruments (including a harmonica) in a series of narrative fragments set in environments associated with the music-from long-distance trucks to the Thomasschule Leipzig. An example of cinema redefining the experience of music for a contemporary audience, it recalls Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach (1968) in its structural use of music. In Spanish, German; English subtitles. 102 min. U.S. premiere.

Thursday, September 27
6:00  **Umbracle.** 1972. Spain.
In *Umbracle*, an aleatory horror film that paints a critical image of Francoist Spain, Portabella continues his exploration of the language of experimental cinema and develops his aesthetic of combining documentary with reenactment. He worked with Christopher Lee to produce an "ideal and predetermined cliché[d]" image of an actor: “Lee offered to perform my ideas with pleasure. I even managed to get him to do the hardest thing an actor can do: nothing.” 85 min.

8:30  **Acció Santos.** 1972. Spain.
*Acció Santos* contrasts music performance with intellectual reflection. In the first section, Carles Santos performs Bach at the piano. Then, he listens to the recording while the film falls silent. 12 min.

**Warsaw Bridge.** 1990. Spain.
The idea for *Warsaw Bridge*, a less conceptual film than Acció Santos, started from a line in a newspaper: "The body of a scuba diver was found in a burnt forest." Portabella elaborates narrative fragments from this kernel in a procedure that recalls that of the French nouveau roman. Made as the Cold War was ending, the film critiques the Spanish intelligentsia’s indifference to political and historical change. 85 min.

-----

**Friday, September 28**

Portabella worked closely with fellow Catalan artist Joan Miró on a number of projects.

**Miró 37/Aidez L’Espagne.** 1969. Spain.
Miró 37 juxtaposes documentary footage of the Spanish Civil War with an exhibition of Miró’s work at the College of Architects in Barcelona that aimed to counter his appropriation by the Francoist establishment. 5 min.

In Miró L’Altre, Miró paints a mural outside the exhibition that is turned into a conceptual piece at Portabella’s suggestion—and is then destroyed by cleaning ladies! 15 min.

**Miró Tapis.** 1974. Spain. 22 min.

**Miró La Forja.** 1973. Spain. Miró Tapis and Miró La Forja are direct-sound documentations of the production of Miró works, including the vast tapestry that hung in the vestibule of one of the Twin Towers. 24 min.

Program 66 min.

**Saturday, September 29**

2:00  **Acció Santos.**
*Warsaw Bridge.* See Thursday, September 27, 8:30 *Introduced by Jonathan Demme.*

4:30  **Portabella Films Miró (1969-1974).** See Friday, September 28, 6:15

6:30  **Die Stille vor Bach (The Silence before Bach).** See Wednesday, September 26, 7:30

**Sunday, September 30**

2:30  **Informe general sobre algunas cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública (General Report on Some Interesting Facts for a Public Showing).** 1976. Spain.
Clandestinely shot documentary footage of demonstrations in major cities is interwoven with interviews and discussions between Spanish politicians, union activists, and representatives (many of whom would become key figures in post-1978-constitution Spain). This film documents the creative process by which a constitution and a country come into being through a society asking itself: How could Spain rid itself of its Francoist institutions and become a democratic, socialist country that respects the identities of its component nationalities? 173 min.

Monday, October 1

On the night in 1974 in which the militant anarchist Salvador Puig Antich was executed five former political prisoners, Angel Abad, Jordi Cunill, Lola Ferreira, Narcís Julian and Antonio Marín, gather in a farmhouse to prepare a meal and make a film in which they discuss the problems and issues that long periods in prison raise for them. Portabella uses the simple conventions of cinema to develop his subject, “You can't understand liberation, if you don't begin with yourself.” In Spanish and Catalan, English subtitles. 50 min.

7:30  *No compteu amb el dits (Don’t Count on Your Fingers)*. 1967. Spain.
Made six years after Portabella produced Buñuel's *Viridiana*, Portabella's first film as director takes the anti-narrative form of an experimental commercial consisting of fifteen two-minute sections exploring repression and power. 26 min.

Portabella's first feature length film, a collaboration with the celebrated Catalan poet, Joan Brossa, is a virtually dialogue-less sound film of “super-realist fragments exposing the irrelevance of everyday life.” The title refers to 29 dark years of Franco's reign; the metaphor is an adulterous couple. Although the film originally circulated clandestinely it helped establish Portabella's reputation as a significant film artist. With Lucía Bosé, Mario Cabré. 85 min.

Wednesday, October 3

6:30  *Informe Generale sobre las cuestiones de interés para una proyeccion publica (General Report on Some Interesting Facts for a Public Showing)*. See Sunday, September 30, 2:30

Thursday, October 4

6:00  Portabella Films Miró (1969-1974). See Friday, September 28, 6:15

8:00  *Umbracle*. See Thursday, September 27, 6:00

Friday, October 5

6:15  *Acció Santos. Warsaw Bridge*. See Thursday, September 27, 8:30

8:00  *Die Stille vor Bach (The Silence before Bach)*. See Wednesday, September 26, 7:30

Saturday, October 6

2:00  *El Sopar*. See Monday, October 1, 6:15
3:30  *No competu amb el dits (Don’t Count on Your Fingers).*  
*Nocturno 29.* See Monday, October 1, 7:30

5:30  *Playback.*  
*Vampir Cuadecuc.* See Wednesday, September 26, 5:30

6:00  *Umbracle.* See Thursday, September 27, 6:00