

Museu del Cinema
Col·lecció Tomàs Mallol



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Museu del Cinema
Exposició al vestíbul

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PERE PORTABELLA

el gest crític i la resistència poètica

Iniciativa inserida a:



Amb el suport de:



Col·labora:



Museu del Cinema
Col·lecció Tomàs Mallol



Ajuntament de Girona

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Acció Portabella

Pere Portabella: the critical gesture and poetic resistance



Pere Portabella understands cinema, art and politics as inseparable spaces of action and commitment. His cinema is characterised by breaking with traditional narrative forms. Always attentive to innovative movements, he collaborated with people from outside the world of cinema to develop his film projects. His work is dissident and stands at the forefront of modernity, maintaining a conception of language far removed from the usual standards.

Portabella has been a transcendental producer, making possible films such as *Los Golfos* by Carlos Saura, *El Cochecito* by Marco Ferreri, *Viridiana* by Luis Buñuel and *Tren de sombras* by José Luis Guerín. He has also always shown an active political stance, taking part in institutional politics as an elected senator for Girona. He was commissioned to organise the return of Josep Tarradellas and was responsible for staging those events.

In this exhibition, visitors will discover, through material from the filmmaker and his production company Films 59, some aspects of his work as a director. We will also look back at his relationship with Joaquim Jordà, whose work and figure we commemorate with an exhibition (Joaquim Jordà, through the looking glass) to mark the twentieth anniversary of his death. Visitors will also be able to enjoy excerpts from his work and from his first film as a director, *No compteu amb els dits* (1967).

This exhibition aims to help us appreciate anew the unique figure of an unrepeatable filmmaker.

From 16 July 2026 to 11 April 2027.

Exhibition in the lobby of the Museu del Cinema

Free admission

Opening hours:

SUMMER (01/07 to 31/08): Monday to Saturday: 10.00 am to 7.00 pm and Sunday: 10.00 am to 2.00 pm

WINTER (01/09 to 11/04): Tuesday to Saturday: 10.00 am to 6.00 pm and Sunday: 10.00 am to 2.00 pm

This initiative is part of: *Acció Portabella*, an international programme of activities marking the centenary of Pere Portabella

Production: Museu del Cinema

Curator and communication: Jordi Dorca

Coordination: Jordi Pons

Exhibition design: Rafel d'Arquer

Documentation and conservation: Jordi Vidal (Films 59) and Montse Puigdevall (Museu del Cinema)

Audiovisual production: Jordi Vidal

Exhibits: Pere Portabella documentary collection held at the Filmoteca de Catalunya

Cameras on display: Museu del Cinema

Audiovisual material courtesy of: Films 59

Acknowledgements: The Portabella family, Jordi Vidal (Films 59), Jordi Balló and the Xarxa Territorial de Museus de les Comarques de Girona

Acció Portabella is an initiative of: Ministry of Culture, Generalitat de Catalunya, Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals, Filmoteca de Catalunya and Filmoteca Española

Throughout his life, Pere Portabella has combined filmmaking with an intense dedication to politics. He was born in Figueres in 1927 into a family of conservative views that lived through attacks by uncontrolled groups during the Civil War. To escape danger, his father, Lluís Portabella, first went to Burgos and then to Salamanca, where he worked as a press translator for General Franco's provisional government.

Once the war was over, the family moved to Carrer de Balmes in Barcelona, where Antoni Tàpies was their neighbour. The family's move into the yoghurt manufacturing business secured its financial future, and Portabella grew up in this well-off environment. This influence marked his early years, especially his education at the Escoles Pies de Balmes, a model he despised. Although he began university studies in chemistry in Madrid, he never completed a degree.

The formative years and the Dau al Set group

For Portabella, contact with circles interested in art and literature was essential as a way of accessing other realities. In Madrid he mixed with the painter Antonio Saura and the sculptor Eduardo Chillida, and for a time crossed paths with Antoni Tàpies and Joan Ponç.

In the second half of the 1950s, now in Barcelona, he joined the group behind the magazine *Dau al Set* together with Tàpies, Modest Cuixart and Joan Brossa. This collective championed an artistic stance of a neo-surrealist character. As they lived nearby, they would regularly meet at each other's homes to talk about cinema, art and literature, read poetry, do magic tricks or put on small theatrical performances. Although he initially intended to devote himself to sculpture, Portabella soon abandoned three-dimensional projects to focus on cinema. Even so, his sculptural ideas already foreshadowed the more conceptual aspects of his later work.

Films 59: Production

His first step into cinema was with the photographer Leopoldo Pomés. They tried to shoot a documentary about bullfighting, but abandoned it on realising the images were too aesthetically pleasing and ennobled bullfighting. They later made a second documentary devoted to flamenco, starring La Chunga, in which Portabella was in charge of organising the shoot with technical advice from Carlos Saura. Shortly afterwards, Saura showed him the script for *Los golfos* and Portabella decided to produce it, thus beginning his professional career in the industry.

In Madrid, where he founded the production company Films 59, he found an atmosphere different from that of Barcelona. In Catalonia, a clear dividing line was maintained between the victors of the Civil War and the rest of the creative community; in Madrid, by contrast, relationships were less compartmentalised. Portabella opted for a pragmatic strategy, making use of the narrow legal margins the State allowed, while backing a realist aesthetic linked to progressive positions. This choice of realism brought him closer to critical circles in Madrid, but distanced him from the Barcelona avant-garde. As a producer, he always tried to avoid routine and established formulas.

This determination to swim against the tide is already visible in *Los golfos* (1959), Films 59's first production and Carlos Saura's feature-film debut, which draws on neorealist formulas

and avoids melodrama. His second production was *El cochecito* (1960), directed by Marco Ferreri from a text by Rafael Azcona. Based on the short story "Paralítico", the film attacked the false image of reality being spread by the regime's new policy.

In 1960, Portabella and Saura travelled to Cannes to present *Los golfos* and there met Luis Buñuel. Portabella suggested he return to filming in Spain, where the Aragonese director had not worked since the Republic. Buñuel accepted the offer to direct *Viridiana*, the story of a novice who is morally and sexually transformed on coming into contact with the world. Financing was provided by the Mexican Gustavo Alatríste —husband of the leading actress, Silvia Pinal—, and the production company UNINCI, close to the PCE, also joined the project. *Viridiana* became a landmark work of world cinema. Screened in Cannes without the Spanish authorities having seen a complete copy, it won the Palme d'Or and triggered a major political and religious scandal. The reaction from Madrid and the Vatican was swift: the film was banned in Spain and Films 59 was forced to close, leaving several projects unfinished.

The return to Barcelona

After the production company's collapse, Portabella returned to Barcelona and joined forces with Jacinto Esteva, with whom he produced the short film *Alrededor de las salinas* (1962). Together they planned the project *Lejos de los árboles*, an essay on Spain's atavistic backwardness, but financial difficulties and aesthetic disagreements led Portabella to leave the film, which was not finished until 1970.

A decisive event then took place: the Italian director Francesco Rosi hired him on learning that he had filmed on the subject of bullfighting. On *Il momento della verità*, a film that explored the social dimension of bullfighting, Portabella acted as co-screenwriter and co-author of the dialogue, followed the entire shoot and took part in the editing in Rome.

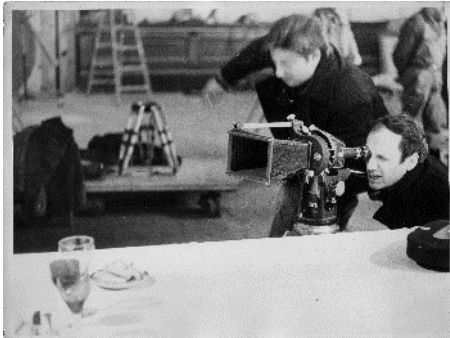
On returning from Italy, he was commissioned to make an hour-long television film about a Spanish figure. After considering Picasso, he chose the bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguín. Together with Joaquín Jordà he wrote the fictional script *Humano, demasiado humano*, which ultimately did not go ahead. The two of them collaborated on a second project, *Guillermina (La viuda alegre)*, about the decline of a woman faced with the indifference of the Catalan upper bourgeoisie. The script included Joan Brossa and Modest Cuixart playing themselves, a hint of the path Portabella was about to take.

This last script closed a chapter. The filmmaker, now determined to direct, felt dissatisfied with the constraints of professional film narrative, which he felt manipulated reality to create a false account. He decided to start from scratch and seek the collaboration of creators outside the routines of the industry to build a feature film rooted in the cultural reality of the moment. It was in this context that he resumed his relationship with Joan Brossa, who had already acted as a kind of anti-narrative mentor at the *Dau al Set* gatherings.

From 1962 onwards, economic changes and the regime's openings aimed at promoting quality cinema for international festivals favoured the emergence of the Nuevo Cine Español and, in Catalonia, of the Barcelona School. Although Portabella initially joined it, he soon distanced himself. In late 1967 he met the pianist Carles Santos at the La Voz de España studios, a key encounter. Portabella produced several of Santos's experimental short films, such as *L'àpat* or *La cadira*, works close to the Fluxus spirit and to conceptual art, exploring the relationship between sound and image, a line of research that would influence all his later cinema. Santos, academically trained but far removed from the conventional musician's

profile, travelled to New York, where he met John Cage and experienced the transition towards minimalism and conceptualism. On his return, he composed the music for *Concert irregular*—based on a text by Brossa—, staged by Portabella. Santos became an indispensable collaborator and one of the defining features of his work.

Beginnings in directing



From his dialogue with Brossa came his first short film as a director, *No compteu amb els dits* (1967), which used the space of advertising spots to explore their language and socioeconomic implications. The film had a major impact; it featured a poster by Antoni Tàpies, cinematography by Luis Cuadrado, Mario Cabré in the lead role and music by Mestres Quadreny performed by Carles Santos.

His first feature film, *Nocturne 29* (1968), developed these formal discoveries further through a fragmentary, mosaic-like structure about the life of a bourgeois woman (Lucía Bosé), reusing the same team of collaborators.

The filming of *Nocturne 29* coincided with a period of intense unrest. In January 1969, faced with university protests, Franco declared a state of emergency. Influenced by these tensions and by the European May '68, Portabella abandoned pragmatic approaches to work outside official structures, a decision that responded both to censorship and to a radical aesthetic choice.

This shift became evident in the tribute to Joan Miró organised by the Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Barcelona in 1969. Portabella made three films for the exhibition: *Aidez l'Espagne* (Miró 37), *Premios nacionales* (which was not shown) and *Miró l'altre*. In the last of these, he captured Miró's conceptual action of painting the ground-floor windows of the building and then publicly erasing the work.

In 1970, Portabella directed one of his fundamental works: *Cuadecuc, vampir*. Taking advantage of the fact that Jesús Franco was filming *Count Dracula* in Alicante and Barcelona, starring Christopher Lee, Portabella filmed alongside him to create an independent essay on the mechanisms of cinematic representation. Shot in high-contrast, grainy reversal 16 mm film, the film moves between document and fiction, accompanied by an abstract soundtrack by Carles Santos made up of industrial noise and distorted classical music. The film immediately received great recognition on the avant-garde circuits of Cannes, New York and London.

This line continued with *Umbracle* (1971), again starring Christopher Lee. The work, complex and fragmentary, incorporated images of workers' demonstrations and police charges as a critical artefact against the normality the regime sought to project. With music by Santos and a script by Brossa, the film was banned by Spanish censorship and could only be seen clandestinely or abroad.

The political interlude

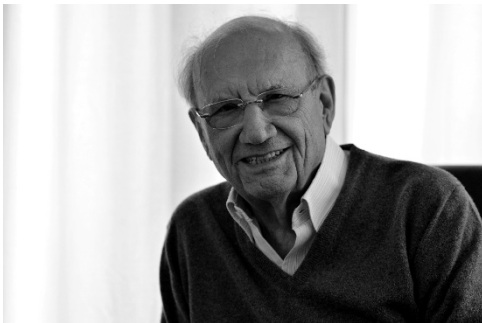


Alongside his artistic work, Portabella intensified his political commitment. In November 1971 he was one of the promoters of the *Assemblea de Catalunya*, a clandestine platform that unified anti-Franco opposition around four pillars: democratic freedoms, amnesty, the restoration of the 1932 Statute of Autonomy and coordination with democratic forces across the rest of Spain. For the filmmaker, politics was the continuation of his artistic work by other

means. This activism cost him arrests and financial penalties.

In 1976, immediately after Franco's death, he made *Informe general sobre algunas cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública*. This feature-length documentary offered an X-ray of the Transition without a voice-over, letting figures such as Felipe González, Santiago Carrillo, Jordi Pujol and Manuel Fraga state their positions directly to the camera. The film questioned the official narrative of a peaceful, exemplary process, accompanied by an almost invisible musical presence by Carles Santos so as to leave the spotlight entirely on the spoken word. After *Informe general*, Portabella took a break from filmmaking of more than ten years to devote himself to institutional activity. In 1977 he was elected senator in the first democratic elections, standing for the *Entesa dels Catalans*, and in 1980 he became a member of the Parliament of Catalonia, a seat he held until 1984. During this period he focused on parliamentary work, the rebuilding of the Generalitat and the design of the country's new cultural policies.

Return to directing



His return to feature filmmaking came in 1989 with *Pont de Varsòvia*, a reflection on the memory of contemporary Europe and the intellectual's responsibility towards history. The film, written in collaboration with Carles Hac Mor and shot by Tomàs Pladevall, combined classical excerpts with contributions from Carles Santos.

From the 1990s onwards, his career received wide international recognition through cycles and retrospectives at contemporary art museums around the world. In 2001, the Generalitat de Catalunya awarded him the National Film Prize. From the presidency of Films 59, refounded as a support platform, he continued to promote projects by new creators committed to formal risk-taking.

In 2007 he released *Die Stille vor Bach*, a poetic exploration of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and its relevance in today's Europe, far removed from the codes of the traditional *biopic*. The film was presented at the Venice Film Festival to excellent critical acclaim.

Finally, in 2015 he directed *Informe general II. El nuevo rapto de Europa*, in which he revisited the investigative method of the 1976 film to analyse Spain's social, political and cultural situation in the wake of the economic crisis.

In 2008, following this same line of formal refinement, he shot the short film *Mudanza*. In this work, filmed at the Huerta de San Vicente —the house-museum of Federico García Lorca in Granada—, Portabella records the complete clearing of the house, its furniture and the poet's personal belongings. The film becomes a conceptual gesture on absence, historical memory and the weight of the past, conveyed through silence and a stripped-back architectural space.

Pere Portabella's career is defined by a strict formal and civic coherence spanning more than fifty years. His figure remains a testament to culture's ability to intervene critically in reality, always acting against the grain of trends and the market.

Joaquim Jordà–Pere Portabella: a relationship of unfinished projects

Jimena. The failed attempt to make an “anti-Cid” film

In 1961, the director Marco Ferreri proposed a new project. At the time, the producer Samuel Bronston had created a kind of small Hollywood in Las Rozas (Madrid), where *El Cid*, starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren, had been filmed. Ferreri's idea was to create an “anti-Cid” that would contrast with that major American production. Mario Camus, Francisco Regueiro and Joaquim Jordà wrote the script for this alternative proposal, titled *Jimena*, which Regueiro himself was to direct.



Pere Portabella, who had just produced *El cochecito* (1960) by Ferreri, joined the initiative. The film was to have a technical and artistic crew made up of students from the EOC (Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía). However, the project was rejected by Francoist censorship and was never made. Portabella sold the rights to UNINCI, the third production company involved, close to the Communist Party, which likewise could not get it off the ground.

That same process coincided with the *Viridiana* scandal at the Cannes Film Festival and with the end of UNINCI. After winning the Palme d'Or representing Spain, the Vatican branded the film sacrilegious and blasphemous. The Franco regime's response was swift: it dismissed the director general of cinema, banned the film and ordered the negative destroyed. As punishment, the dictatorship blocked any licence or financial aid to the production company. Choked by the administration and with no legal room to operate, UNINCI had to close in 1962.

Humano demasiado humano... and Guillermina

In 1964, the Italian director Francesco Rosi —famous for *Salvatore Giuliano*, a film about the origins of the mafia— wanted to move ahead with a new project: *Il momento della verità*, which would explore the social dimension of bullfighting. Rosi asked Portabella to work as co-

screenwriter, but in the end he also took part in the shoot, the editing and the post-production.

On returning from Italy, Portabella had the idea of making a film about a great figure. He was torn between Picasso and Luis Miguel Dominguín, and eventually settled on the bullfighter. For the script he worked with Joaquim Jordà, placing the figure within a light fictional frame. As Portabella himself recalled: "when he read it, Luis Miguel told me I was a cynic —coming from him, that was a compliment— and the project fell through".

Although this idea did not go ahead, Jordà and Portabella still worked on a second project, *Guillermína* (*La viuda alegre*), the story of a woman's downfall —which could be subtitled "from Pedralbes to the Ramblas"— amid the indifference of her own social class, the Catalan upper bourgeoisie. The most striking feature of the script was that, at one point, Joan Brossa and Modest Cuixart appeared playing themselves, a presence that seemed to foreshadow what was to come shortly afterwards.

As the producer Elías Querejeta gave no indication of the script's viability, while awaiting his response they decided to work on another project. In the end, Querejeta did not make use of the Dominguín text either.

The script for *Guillermína* marked the end of a period of collaboration. Portabella, increasingly keen to move into directing, felt disappointed with Jordà's way of working, whom he accused of sticking too closely to the conventions of professional screenwriting. Jordà recalled it this way: "the months when I wrote these two scripts I spent almost living at Portabella's house, which was wonderful — perhaps the most welcoming person I have ever met".

The collective origins of *No compteu amb els dits* and *Dante no es únicament severo*

In 1966, Ricardo Bofill, Jacint Esteva, Pere Portabella, Carles Durán and Gonzalo Suárez devised a joint project: each would shoot a short film on 16 mm which, once blown up to 35 mm, would form part of an atypical feature film.

Gonzalo Suárez began work on his piece, *El horrible ser nunca visto*, but lack of budget made it impossible to add sound, and the short was never actually screened.

Of the four short films originally planned, in the end only two were made: those by Jacint Esteva and Joaquim Jordà. Ricardo Bofill's was dropped because the filmmaker had opted for a square format, incompatible with the rest of the films.

Personal disagreements also arose between Esteva and Portabella following the decision of Annie Settimo —at the time Esteva's partner and mother of his two children— to go and live with Portabella, a development that broke off the relationship between the two men. Although Jordà tried to keep Portabella involved in the project by proposing the feature film as a sum of independent pieces, his participation ultimately did not go ahead. His piece ended up being shot outside the joint project and was given the title *No compteu amb els dits*.

This was Pere Portabella's first short film as a director. Born out of his collaboration with Joan Brossa, the project sought to break away from the rigid rules of the traditional industry. To achieve this, they drew inspiration from the format of the era's advertising spots (the so-

called *filmets*), stringing together a series of micro-stories that offered a critical view of the language of consumerism.

The project stood out for its visual originality and for bringing together an exceptional team of collaborators: Antoni Tàpies designed the poster, Luis Cuadrado handled the cinematography, and Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny composed the music, performed by the young pianist Carles Santos. The versatile Mario Cabré was its lead.

Esteva and Jordà shot their respective short films completely independently of one another. Once filming was finished, the two authors found that the pieces had no thematic connection between them, though they considered them complementary.

To justify combining the two pieces into a single feature film, Jordà structured the editing around a narrative thread inspired by *One Thousand and One Nights*. To this end, an opening sequence was shot with models at the Devesa park in Girona, along with the iconic closing eye-operation scene, conceived as an explicit homage to Luis Buñuel.

Dante no es únicamente severo (1967) is the seminal work of this project and became the emblem of a new cinematic movement. It broke radically with traditional realism through fragmentation, abstraction and a search for new narrative codes influenced by structuralism, becoming a faithful reflection of modernity and the aesthetics of the *gauche divine*. The work was grounded in the impossibility of traditional narration and in the fragmentary nature of narrative discourse, ideas close to the theories of French structuralist semiologists such as Roland Barthes.

List of items and documents in the exhibition

Note on provenance: All the items and documents on display, with the exception of the film cameras, come from the Pere Portabella documentary collection held at the Filmoteca de Catalunya.

Documentary material

- Script treatment, script, handwritten shot list and handwritten character descriptions for *Humano, demasiado humano* [1966]
- Script, shot list and script notes for "*Guillermina, la viuda alegre*" [1966]
- Script for "*Cuatro Skechs*" [1966]
- Letter from Jorge Semprún addressed to Pere Portabella (07/07/1966)
- Postcard from Néstor Almendros addressed to Pere Portabella (02/06/1966)
- Script for the film *No compteu amb els dits* (1967)
- Publi-Cinema promotional leaflet for *No compteu amb els dits* (2 copies) [1967]
- Magazine *Positif* on *No compteu amb els dits* (no. 94, April 1968)
- Shooting and promotional photographs from *No compteu amb els dits* (*Films* 59)
- Promotional material: Venice Film Festival press book for *Die Stille vor Bach* [2007] (2 copies: one in English and the other in Spanish) [2008]
- Promotional material for *Die Stille vor Bach* [2007]: Programme sheet from the film's premiere (2 copies) [2008]
- Original script for *Die Stille vor Bach* [2007]

Posters for Pere Portabella's films

- Original poster by Antoni Tàpies for the film *No compteu amb els dits* (1967), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Joan Pere Viladecans for the film *Nocturn 29* (1968), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Joan Ponç for the film *Vampir –Cuadecuc* (1970), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Joan Miró for the film *Umbracle* (1972), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Lola Besses for the film *Informe general sobre unas cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública* (1976), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Daria Esteve for the film *Pont de Varsòvia* (1989), directed by Pere Portabella.
- Original poster by Jordi Vidal for the film *El silenci abans de Bach* (2007), directed by Pere Portabella.

Film equipment and apparatus (Museu del Cinema)

Arnold & Richter (Arriflex) 35 mm film camera Origin: Germany, c. 1950 (Museu del Cinema. Tomàs Mallol Collection). A model similar to the one used in the filming of *No compteu amb els dits* and *Nocturn 29*.

Paillard Bolex H-16 Reflex 16 mm film camera. Origin: Switzerland, 1956 (Museu del Cinema. Jan Baca Pericot donation). A model similar to the one used in the filming of *Vampir - Cuadecuc*.





The Ministries of Culture of the Spanish Government and the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya are jointly preparing the commemoration of the centenary of filmmaker Pere Portabella (Figueres, 1927). This initiative aims to highlight the

director's figure and his legacy among filmmakers, artists and social movements on which his work has had a decisive influence.

The celebration seeks to spread Pere Portabella's vital, political and artistic message, based on the drive for dialogue, courage and the centrality of the avant-garde, as well as his ability to generate complicity, provocation, movement and transformation. It aims to explore cinema's and artistic practice's renewed capacity to take risks through formal radicalism.

In this sense, the initiative seeks to pay public tribute to Pere Portabella in recognition of his enduring relevance, with the aim of making visible how his practices continue to act as a driving force for artistic and political activism. For this reason, it is proposed that the set of activities be titled Acció Portabella, as an expression of this capacity for renewal and for opening up new narratives that recover the essential role of the avant-garde attitude. The force of poetic evocation will resonate throughout all the initiatives.

Pere Portabella himself has expressed his view of this recognition as follows: "We have to do things that are relevant, that have vitality, that allow us to move forward. That is where I feel comfortable."

In this context, a set of linked activities will be developed over the course of 2026 and 2027, the year in which the artist's centenary will be celebrated. The approach envisages each driving centre defining its own strategy, creating an ongoing handover between the various proposals. Portabella will be kept informed of the different initiatives through his close circle, thereby shaping a map of international connections that will be reflected on the centenary website, conceived as a visual space for tracking and linking cultural agents, generations and disciplines.

This initiative involves various key centres of cultural and political activity: art and cultural centres, festivals, film archives, think tanks and foundations for political and social thought, cross-cutting bodies, universities, media outlets and artists' collectives. All of them become vehicles for shaping this collective journey, which the Museu del Cinema is delighted to be part of.